BUILDING BETTER SCHOOLS NOT PRISONS: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE SURROUNDING SCHOOL SUSPENSION AND EXPULSION PROGRAMS AND THE IMPLICATIONS OF SUCH PROGRAMS ON THE LIVES OF RACIAL AND ETHNIC MINORITY STUDENTS

by

Kwesi Johnson

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
Graduate Department of Humanities, Social Sciences & Social Justice Education
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto

© Copyright by Kwesi Johnson (2012)
Abstract

It has been argued, albeit with some degree of success, that the challenges facing the 21st century Canadian classroom are highly complex. A troubled economy riddled with cutbacks to the education system, ongoing enrolment decline and challenges in embracing a growth in the diversity of students are among the changes that have made classrooms increasingly difficult to navigate. Though the last assertion may be true, disciplinary policies and the tools used to address unwanted student behaviour have remained relatively unchanged within the education system. Using Critical Race Theory, the author examines the implications of school suspension and expulsion programs on students and provides an analysis of current literature on alternative disciplinary methods in public schools. Findings suggest that a mixture of strategies within various disciplinary programs can benefit some students, but more work must be done to address socioeconomic disparities plaguing the majority of students found in these programs.
Acknowledgements

The journey that has taken me from a small hospital in Berbice, Guyana to educational heights many assumed that I would be unable to reach, let along acquire, has been nothing short of exhilarating. Like most journeys, it was not traveled alone or without bumps and detours en route to my destination. My heartfelt thanks go to the professors and department staff that took me in and exposed me to a plethora of educational materials and ideas that reignited my thirst for learning. Most notably are professor George Dei, for taking the time to speak with me as an undergrad searching for the right graduate school, professor Rinaldo Walcott, my second reader, for his ability to demand excellence not through words but through his own desire for professional excellence, and finally professor Paul Olson, my thesis supervisor, for simply believing in me, which in turn, allowed me to believe in my work and self. Other noteworthy supports while at SESE whom I would not dare to leave out include Brandy Jensen and Meredith Lordan for your consistent support and motivational guidance.

In my world outside of academia, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Priya Ramanujam, my editor, mentor and friend, you may never understand the important role that you have been to me over these past years. To my church, Pastor Rob and the Youth council, thank you for allowing me to be a part of something so special, though I could not be around as much as I would have liked. To my community-at-large, colleagues and friends I cannot thank you enough for your ongoing support as well. To the love of my life, Rebekah Tannis, her sister Karen and mother Isola Tannis, the words of encouragement, prayers, meals and your couch that you provided me with during the most challenging of days, made a world of difference for me.

To my rock of support, my family, words cannot begin to describe how grateful I am to have had you in my corner throughout this journey. My Aunt Penny, mother Karen, father Wilberforce, sister Arienne, grandmother Kitty, brother Kwame, and sister-in-law Fabianne, you are all intricately woven into the being that I am and continue to aspire to be. I am forever indebted to you all. You are all a part of my today and my tomorrow. I am but a reflection of all whom have supported me from birth to this moment in my life. In closing, to those mentioned above and to those whom I have neglected to mention, in my acknowledgement, please know that I am who I am and I will be whom I am to be, in part because of your presence in my life.
Table of Contents

Abstract.................................................................................................................................................. ii
Acknowledgements ................................................................................................................................. iii
Table of Contents ................................................................................................................................... iv

Chapter One: The Blue Print
  Introduction ........................................................................................................................................ 1
  Purpose of the Study ............................................................................................................................ 3
  The Theory .......................................................................................................................................... 5
  About The Author ............................................................................................................................. 6
  Research Limitations ........................................................................................................................ 7
  Staring at the Crowd .......................................................................................................................... 7

Chapter Two: A Case for Transformation
  Introduction ......................................................................................................................................... 10
  Equity in Education ........................................................................................................................... 11
  Africentric Learning .......................................................................................................................... 12
  Teacher Effectiveness ....................................................................................................................... 13
  Pedagogical Approaches ................................................................................................................. 14
  Divergent Thinking .......................................................................................................................... 16
  Construction Connections ............................................................................................................... 17
  Chapter Conclusion ......................................................................................................................... 18

Chapter Three: Racism in the Contemporary Canadian Classroom
  Introduction ......................................................................................................................................... 20
  The Origin of Race ............................................................................................................................ 20
  The Struggle Against Racism in the Contemporary Canadian Classroom ....................................... 21
  Upward Mobility for Whom ............................................................................................................ 22
  Racism and the Curriculum .............................................................................................................. 22
  The Race to Erase ............................................................................................................................ 23
  Unity in the Community ................................................................................................................... 25
  Constructing Connections ............................................................................................................... 26
  Chapter Three Conclusion .............................................................................................................. 27

Chapter Four: Violence in Modernity
  Introduction ......................................................................................................................................... 28
  The Landscape ................................................................................................................................. 28
  The Media, Young Offenders and the Politics of Child Blaming ....................................................... 30
  Prison Industrial Complex and Schools ............................................................................................ 34
  A Nuanced View of Gun Violence within the African-American Community .................................. 35
  Bullying .............................................................................................................................................. 36
  Cyber Bullying ................................................................................................................................. 38
  Chapter Four Conclusion ................................................................................................................ 39

Chapter Five: A Search for Solutions
  Introduction ......................................................................................................................................... 40
  Investment in Parenting and Child Development ........................................................................... 41
Chapter Six: Responses to School Violence
- Introduction
- What’s Needed?
- School and Discipline: A Historic Perspective
- Contemporary Approaches
- School Resource Officers
- The Issue of Truancy
- Chapter Five Conclusion

Chapter Seven: What are My Choices? : A Glance at Alternative to Suspension/Expulsion Programs
- Introduction
- Program Possibilities
- Positive Behaviour Supportive Interventions
- An All Hands on Deck Alternative
- The RISE Program
- Chapter Six Conclusion

Chapter Eight: The Analysis and Conclusion
- The Analysis and Conclusion

References
CHAPTER ONE: THE BLUEPRINT

Chapter Introduction

Schools in our present contextual modernity are to humankind like water is to sustaining life. The multiple purposes and incarnations of these institutions span the gamut of physical manifestations and utilization. Some people - especially in the North American context – consider schools to be some of the most sacred spaces that one has the privilege of entering. The visual prominence of these spaces at this juncture in modernity now dominates, among other things, the physical landscape of our society. It has also been argued that schools’ socio-economic, cultural and moral regulation and their ultimate implications on human subject formation has consistently been a terrain of contentious discontent and debate. Debate aside these are the spaces where children are entrusted to strangers with the request to nurture, develop and educate them. It is my contention that no other issues facing the world is, or should be, of paramount importance than those facing the public education sectors. Solutions to problems, for example, will not found in textbooks or policies or even on the World Wide Web. They will be fostered, nurtured and actualized in human ideas and subsequent action.

Institutions of learning are tasked with the distinguished pillar of nurturing these ideas. As teachers and administrators take on this task of educating children with individualized needs, the ongoing issue of student behavioural problems has troubled educators. The above-mentioned debate contentions aside, misbehaviour in school settings is one of major and long standing threat to fostering an environment that allows pupils to flourish in schools are incidents of problematic student behaviours. Label it violence, school violence or bullying, these occurrences disrupt classroom decorum and have the power to transform the school climate as a whole. Discipline, the always present albeit never actualizing aim is often touted in some settings, as an absolute must.

In essence, this thesis seeks to look at what works, what does not and what is promising as it pertains to a selected few of the present day debates facing the kindergarten to grade twelve public school systems in both Canada and the United States. This paper seeks to provide a glance at the methodological approaches of some of the alternatives to suspensions and expulsions. Connections are also forged between the latter subject matter and related topics such
as racism in the contemporary Canadian classroom, a glance at the school reform movement and research on crime reduction initiatives. Traversing from such humble beginnings to our contemporary geo-political landscape I question the use of disciplinary policies and penal-like measures in the name of promoting safety in school. My interest in this topic also stems from my personal experience as a black male student having gone through the Toronto District School Board public school system.

Scholars of past and present point to the issue of punitive centered school disciplinary policies and declare that such policies have ramifications beyond the walls of these institutions. The seemingly consistent presence of acute incidents of violence in school settings has shaken the very foundation of public school systems across North America. These isolated yet disturbing and destructive incidents have in a variety of ways rekindled the flames of this fierce debate surrounding possible solutions to the issue of school violence. Running parallel to the debate of school violence is that of the apparent unrelenting wave of community violence that has swept across much of North America. While United States is one of the world leaders in victimization rates among industrialized nations, Canada and some of its citizens have been poised to flex their destructive capabilities (Waller, 2006). From the recent brazen shootings that have plagued the City of Toronto to the unfathomable number of murders in the varying cities of the United States it begs the question from a humanitarian perspective, what’s going on?

Then enters the work of scholars, theorists, social scientists and varying authors who deconstruct the abovementioned concerns, leaving what I hope to be a new lens on what I posit here as the school industrial complex. To contextualize this term I would argue that the school industrial complex is an intricate set of symbiotic relationships that includes, but is not limited to, the public education systems, justice systems, racism, media conglomerates and government agencies that maintain a system constructed to regulate and dismantle already impoverished communities. Tyack (as cited in Watts & Erevelles, 2004) further legitimizes my conclusions by stating, “urban education in the nineteenth century did more to industrialize humanity than to humanize industry,” (p.279). In essence, one of the primary purposes of education in modernity
has been its ability to be used as a tool of moral regulation. Within the public education system suspensions and expulsions are commonly used, albeit unconsciously and consciously, as the ultimate form of enacting this moral regulation.

Purpose of the Study

Though pragmatic responses to addressing behavioural students has been one of a cookie cutter approach, “some scholars extend beyond the pragmatic to examine the social, cultural, political and economic environment within which school violence is situated,” (Watts & Erevelles, 2004, p.272). The issues of school suspensions and expulsions are as multifaceted, multisystemic and interrelated as their solutions. Using a review of the literature, this body of work seeks to create a working landscape of the issue, its players and promising solutions to this historic problem. I intend to use peer reviewed journal articles, books and newspaper articles that speak to research that has been conducted in the aforementioned areas of interest. The aim of my research desire is to develop a working understanding of school disciplinary practices as it pertains to all students but particular interest will be placed on racialized and ethno-minoritized students who have been historically found to have a dire need for transformation (Ruck & Wortley, 2002). My thesis focus, albeit broadly defined, ultimately looks at the use of suspensions and expulsions as a means of curtailing disruptive and nonconforming behaviours. This paper will venture beyond the scope of the issues, as well as analyze debates surrounding the issues, findings and implications. Additionally though my social location is situated in the city of Toronto, Canada, my research stems from across North America.

School disciplinary practices have long been one of the most contentiously debated topics of our modern era (Erevelles and Watts, 2004,). This debate took a backseat however to the more dominant historical debate concerning the public good that could come from educating children (Gwyn, 2012). After having to justify the need for a public school system in Canada by pioneers such as Egerton Ryerson, the issue of discipline took centre stage due to increased public discourse (Gwyn, 2012). The issue of discipline in recent history appears to be somewhat
trapped within a raging debate of student needs. Proponents of increased accountability through tougher disciplinary practices argue that such practises are needed and working (See Bear, 2012). Their proof stems from research similar to Theriot, Craun and Dupper’s (as cited in Bear, 2012) study that found that of 10,000 middle and high school age students, 78.3% of youth were never suspended or suspended only once (p. 178). Those who disagree with the premise of tougher disciplinary practises on the other hand question such practices due to the disproportionate number of students affected by these policies (Ruck & Wortley 2002; Watts & Erevelles, 2004; Payne, 2010; Bear, 2012; Chin et al, 2012).

Suspension and expulsions are used simultaneously and interchangeably throughout this paper because they are both, in my humble opinion, rooted in the same experiential, contextual and historical discursive frameworks. Additionally, this demographic of learners, within the student population, that tends to be disproportionally suspended is also disproportionally expelled. In my reading of this issue I find that expulsion, which in my view is the ultimate dissolution of one of society’s most celebrated relationships, to be an issue of vital importance facing the daunting task of education reform. This assertion stems from the idea that if the institutions are built with the specific task to teach students how to learn and more intrinsically what they learn, what then does this mean for the expelled learners that they produced. In other words schools teach learners about being human and when a child steps outside of the rules, in most cases subjectively created by administrators, they close the doors on the learners they helped to create. Suspensions become much more of a critical issue because they have been linked to high academic failure and prison (Payne, 2010). Some scholars have pointed to the fact that structural racism underpins the disproportionate levels of suspensions and expulsions of minority youth (Davis, 2003; Ruck & Wortley 2002; Watts & Erevelles, 2004; Payne, 2010).

The related topics in this thesis help to build a supporting foundation in order to create a clear view on the topic of disciplinary policies in the public education system primary as well as possible solutions.
The Theory

According to Delgado & Stefancic (2001) Critical Race Theory (CRT) emerged as a movement by a “collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism and power (p.3).” Development of the theory has been credited to a group of writers in the field of law such as Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman and Richard Delgado. The activist dimension of Critical Race Theory tries, “not only, to set out the as certain how society organizes itself along racial lines and hierarchies, but to transform it for the better (p.4).” Critical Race Theorists ultimately use a variety of methods and tools to transform the bond between racism and society. A few of the central tenets presented by Delgado & Stefancic include:

1. “[R]acism is ordinary not aberrational “normal science”, the usual way society does business, the common, everyday experience of most people of color (p.7).”
2. The “white-over-color ascendency serves an important purpose, both psychic and material… Because racism advances the interests of both white elites (materially) and working-class people (psychically), large segments of society have little incentive to eradicate it (p.7).”
3. Race as a Social Construction holds that “Race and Races are products of social thought and relations. Not objective, inherent, or fixed, they correspond to no biological or genetic reality; rather, Races are categories that society invents, manipulates or retires when convenient (p.7).”
4. Differential Racialization occurs when the white elite create advantages and disadvantages for different groups (p.8).
5. “Minority status brings with it a presumed competence to speak about race and racism (p.9).”

Prominent Critical Race scholars have further interrogated the public education systems to illuminate the pillars that have had great success (Erevelles and Watts, 2004, p.275). These authors have argued that racialized students continue to experience egregious inequalities, segregation through sorting practices, as well as disparities in achievement and differential treatment in discipline practices (Erevelles and Watts, 2004, p.275). Ladson-Billings (as cited in Payne, 2010) concludes that “[a]pplying a CRT lens allows us to go beyond focusing on the deficits of students, or even school staff”… and “examines the fundamental flaws and biases within societal institutions” both educational and legal (p.9). Matsuda (as cited in Dixson,
2007) also affirms that CRT sees the importance of recognizing, “the experiential knowledge of people of colour used to counteract the stories of the dominate group,” (Voice /Counterstory Section).

**About the Author**

As a Child and Youth Care worker by occupation and a Youth Outreach Worker with Ontario, Canada, a majority of my daily work responsibilities focuses on the most problematic areas within the life of young citizens. In many of my current and former employment and volunteer roles I have assisted multi-barrired youth with accessing community resources and I have conducted related workshops within a variety of community groups including schools, churches and recreation centers. I have also provided counselling to youth in conflict or at-risk of being in conflict with the law using an anti-oppressive framework. As a Child and Youth Care Practitioner currently working in the Children’s Mental Health sector I also have the privilege of conducting on a weekly basis, year round, Aggression Replacement Training programming which engages high school students that have been suspended and/or expelled. I have a strong passion and commitment to youth engagement initiatives as well as social justice activism. In my experience, a central factor in determining possible life outcomes for racialized or disenfranchised youth is having strong connections at school.

Personally, I grew up surrounded by many who thought I could not and would not amount to much professionally. Despite my determination, neither teachers nor administrators were ever consistently supportive of my educational goals. I also had the distinct experience of transitioning through my elementary to postsecondary schooling with an undiagnosed learning disability. Many, if not all, of my supports came from community workers and members of my church, as such I began to excel both as a community leader and a church member. Issues of equity and social justice are important to me especially in the field of education. Furthermore my analysis of this topic will be in some ways shaped through the worldview that I have developed over time.
Limitations of the Research

There are a few limitations that I would like to bring to the reader’s attention at this point. Let me begin by stating that the main intention for this body of work is not to present new findings into this discourse, amongst other related topics, surrounding disciplinary practices. The purpose of this work is to provide a nuanced glimpse into contemporary research findings. Ultimately this thesis serves as a genuine attempt to foreground the important components of change in discipline practices in education.

I also believe that not being a formal educator leaves me less informed about the practical application of discipline policies. I do believe however that my ongoing engagement with school-aged students as a mentor, in a variety of afterschool and community settings, gives me perspectives that formal educators do not have. In my opinion, lived experience helps to illuminate theory.

Short Story: ‘Staring at the Crowd’

In a crowded hallway people shuffle about trying to make small talk as they wait for a call over the PA system. The sight is a similar one for me, but each time I’m asked to come back to the space, a familiar sense of frustration is rekindled in my being. Today I’m supporting a young man that for all-intents and purposes should not be in the situation that he is in. Long story short, he and a friend went to a major shopping center and his friend decided to steal a pack of condoms. While leaving, security approached, his friend ran, and knowing his innocence, he complied with the demands of the store security officers. After the police arrived they let him know that, though he took nothing, they had “no choice” but to charge him with theft under $5000. Fast forward over a year later, you find us sitting at the courthouse waiting for his lawyer. As I glance around I recognized the usual suspects. The lawyers, often white and middle aged, chit chatting about an incident they recently encountered or catching each other up on their personal life. I see the duty crown court officers hustling from one family to the next, all the while trying their best to avoid eye contact with anyone else, lest they be recognizable by
others who may need their assistance. You see the sea of faces and, if not for the baggy clothing, visibly aggravated expressions, their visible minority status and most often having the supportive person by their side, you would wonder who is here for what purpose. This description by no means tells of the courtroom reality, but as you sit in the courtroom and defendants are paraded before the judge, one by one, the differences between lawyers and clients are quite clear.

Then out of the corner of my eye a familiar face appears and I greet an old friend from my high school days. He “hails me up” (a hand shake which shows comradery) and he fills me in on what has happened to him over the past few years. He let me know that he had the good fortune of beating (winning a court case) two gun-related charges and is currently back in Toronto dealing with another charge. After his second gun-related offence the courts ordered that he not reside in Toronto but on that day he had to come to court for these new charges. He lets me know that he has lived a tough life since high school and he truly wants to settle down for his daughter’s sake. I could sense his words were genuine as he spoke about his daughter but I couldn’t help but wonder what his options were now. We conversed for a few minutes longer, and then the announcement that court was in session came over the PA system. We once again “hailed each other up” (exchanged pleasantries) and parted ways. I can’t tell the number of times I’ve come to this very courthouse and am able to pick out three to five young people, usually males of colour, that I have a personal connection too. In Scarborough, Ontario alone I have still not had a court visit go by without finding a recognizable face in the crowd. This encounter was different though because this young man was a part of my circle when I was in high school. Our lives may have gone in separate ways, but I often wonder if his struggle was similar to mine. We now connect via e-mail, and every so often, via telephone and my spirit is often sorrowful when I recount his situation. My education, my professional experience and my personal life are filled with strikingly similar stories. At times it makes me feel as though all these stories have melted into this ongoing film of depressing episodes that finds elements of racism, anti-black racism, social exclusion and exploitation converging in various scenes. My hope is that I can present some of the young people with different alternatives that I hope may
see them back in that hallway in suits supporting teens that need their assistance. One day at a time I guess.
CHAPTER TWO: A CASE FOR TRANSFORMATION

Chapter Introduction

This opening chapter will be used to cover a nuanced view of the utopian goal of a public education reform, which seeks to develop a system that moves towards the enactment of policies and practises that address the aims of equality. This glimpse into the continuing debate on education reform offers readers an opportunity to gain an understanding of the landscape in which our main topic; an analysis of disciplinary policies grows out of. Topics covered include, but are not limited to, education reform, equity, teacher effectiveness, pedagogical approaches, divergent thinking and Africentric learning.

In recent years the discourse covering education reform has intensified. While conducting my research a number of components emerged. In almost every country around the world people are trying to reform public education (Robinson, 2010). Education for many is seen as an attempt to teach their children in order for them to, “take their place in the economies of the 21st century and to form a sense of cultural identity,” (Robinson, 2010). The given rationale for these reforms is often presented in, “terms of economic needs, especially in regards to international competitiveness,” (Young & Levin, 1999, para.8). In addition, “education policy has become much less consensual, more a matter of conflict and more overly driven by the political agendas of particular governments,” (Young & Levin, para.7). Even more grievous than the latter statement is the concern that in, “current reform agendas relatively less serious attention [is being given] to issues of equity and relatively more focus [has been on] individual outcomes,” (Young & Levin, para.9).

Closely related to the aforementioned statement, but equally devastating, is the concern that, “[t]he climate of opinion of the day no doubt helped shaped the kinds of options that could even be considered as politically viable...”( Young & Levin, para.67). This is currently the case in Ontario at the moment where our government has enacted legislation that is in part squarely set at two contentious issues facing schools in Ontario, bullying and the LGBTQ community (Mallick, 2011, p.A13). Historians Diane Ravish, a former Assistant Secretary of Education for President George H.W. Bush, also contends that there are various underlying and undermining
views when reform agendas have been presented (Rosenthal, 2011). Ravitch argues that teacher evaluation systems among others, in most cases, are a set up for failure (Rosenthal, 2011, para.10). In most cases such a system, “does not trust teachers to teach students,” argues Rosenthal (2011, para.7). What does occur however is that teachers would begin to teach students how to do better on tests instead of how to learn (Rosenthal, 2011; Cloud, 2010). In summary, education reform is by no means an effort undertaken, but involves deeply contentious and sometimes divisive issues. With so many competing areas of interest some things will inevitably be swept under the rug. If history is a correct predictor of things to come, then the key component of knowledge production will be nothing more than an afterthought.

**Equity in Education**

Issues of equity are arguably some of the most discussed topics in the world today. In recent memory, events such as the world-wide protest dubbed “Occupy Wall Street” and the instantaneous uprising in the “Arab Spring” have all shifted several conversations around the world. The latter events, which differ on so many levels, have undoubtedly presented a physical manifestation of the growing divide among the world’s wealthy and poor populations. The education systems worldwide in many ways could be considered a microcosm of our larger global village. Issues of equity for example have been researched in countless educational journals and disparities have been found in Dei (1996) and Jull’s (2000) work, to mention a few. The book *Postcolonial Challenges in Education*, Coloma et al. (2006), which asks readers to consider the, “realm of education to include not only the components of elementary, secondary, and tertiary schooling, such as curriculum, pedagogy and policy, but also the corollary techniques of cultures and knowledge production, subject formation and community/nation building,” (pp. 9-10). Stuart Hall (1997), in a article entitled “Making Diasporic Identities”, argues, “that culture is absolutely central to our concerns, in my view, ... it constitutes the terrain for producing identity, for producing the constitution of social subjects.” Read together, these statements affirm that schools are tremendously powerful institutions that have the ability to
mould culture and knowledge production, thus enabling them to, in part, produce the social subjects that we are. With the aforementioned thoughts in mind it would be difficult to speak about reform without prefacing the issue of equity. In the grand scheme of things equity can be said to be the great equalizer. In essence, being equitable is about levelling the playing field and doing so in a way that is not counterproductive to the learner.

Africentric Learning

Arguably, one of the most studied communities in Canada could be categorized as Blacks, Afro-Canadian, Afro-Caribbean or individuals of African descent. By no means, a homogeneous group as illustrated in the above-mentioned categories, however for the purposes of this chapter, I will use the term Black Canadians to represent this group. Some Black Canadians have had a long and rich cultural history in Canada, however, whether 6th generation or recent immigrant, a large majority still face issues of being disenfranchised (Wortley & Owusu-Bempah, 2006). Black Canadians have a “higher rate of unemployment and lower personal incomes than the national average,” (p.129). Some researchers have attributed these disadvantages to racial discrimination (Galabuzi & Teelucksingh, 2007; Saloojee, 2003). Tyyskä (2001), an associate professor in the Department of Sociology at Ryerson University, argues Black Canadian youth, “face additional challenges including ill effects of hunger and sickness, housing conditions that make it difficult to do homework, limited access to educational materials such as books and computers and lowered educational aspirations,” (p.42). Facing such obstacles and coupled with years of differential treatment from the public education system, it was not a surprise that an Africentric school was established in Toronto. In an article entitled “Our evolving diversity,” co-authors Arlo Kempf and George Dei (2011) wrote, “[the] Africentric school is built on a philosophy of education that integrate[s] teachings of culture, identity and history that can be used as cornerstones for both social and academic excellence,” (p. A21). Such a decision for many was an appalling sign of regression into a system that reflected segregation (Pieters, 2011, p.A15). In a “Toronto Star” article, Gary Pieters’ argued
that, “[s]egregation involved the suppression of people based on race. However, the Africentric school’s approach provides an opportunity to create an inclusive learning environment for all students,” (2011, p.A15). Olson (2011) contends that, the argument against them is how they will function in the rest of society (Lecture notes, October 31, 2011). He went on to say that, “they don't just teach Africentric education; they must teach western thought as well,” (Lecture note, October 31, 2011). While I do not entirely agree with this model of education being limited to only one school in the Toronto District School Board I feel that the pedagogical and sociological impact of such an institution will do wonders to mould a new breed of critical thinkers. In a personal conversation with professor Dei, he made it quite clear that the importance of such a school is not whether they will learn or not but it is the questions they will continue to ask of the world that will be of critical importance (personal conversation, April 04, 2011).

**Teacher Effectiveness**

Most academics would agree that teachers are viewed as the segment of the education system where pedagogy and policy is enacted. They have been historically found to be the difference in educational outcomes for students of all socio-economic and/or socio-cultural backgrounds (Cloud, 2010; Stewart, 2008; Tyler, Boyhin, Miller & Hurley, 2006; Smith, Schneider & Ruck, 2004). That said it is always astonishing that most reform movements tend to peg them as a major area of concern. In some reform movements, for example in Alberta, Canada, during the years of 1994-1997, the provincial government at the time held the view that teachers and the education system as a whole were getting too expensive (Young & Levin, 1999). According to my view of the education systems across North America, teachers are, figuratively speaking, where education receives its spark. Haderman, (as cited in Mckinney, Haberman, Stafford-Johnson & Robinson, 2008), argues that having effective teachers is a matter of life and death (p.71). Mckinney et al., (2008) felt that “[s]tar teachers are able to capture the spirit of learning for all students regardless of their socioeconomic status, background, life circumstances, or life experiences,” (pg.72). That said, some researchers have
found that teacher attraction, recruitment and retention has emerged as a major area of contention in recent years (Mckinney et al., 2008; Cloud, 2010; Ripley, 2010; Billingsley, 1993). Teachers are the single-most accurate indicator of student’s academic success (Mckinney et al., 2010, p.69). According to Joyce Anderson (2004), a professor of English at Millersville University, if we are to equip this generation with the praxis needed for their future endeavours as, “educators we have to be prepared to motivate and stimulate their thirst for excellence,” (p.59). However, if our intentions are to create convergent and submissive thinkers whose idea of learning is figuring out how to remember answers, the current education systems across North America are spot on. In addition, I would argue that though teachers are a major component of the current crisis we cannot simply download the blame for the problems squarely on their shoulders. After all, they were once students themselves. I’m of the view that most teachers begin and stay in the field of teaching because their hearts are in the right place. I further contend that through learnt teaching practices or constraints placed on them, trying to deviate from the ministry-downloaded curriculum is a difficult, if not impossible, task. In a majority of the cases it would be as though we would blame teachers for trying to do what the current system is asking them to do.

**Pedagogical Approaches**

The pedagogical approaches to teaching, as well as a teacher’s worldview, are also areas of interest, which should be taken into consideration. Of significance in my findings include the importance of a teacher’s approach to cultural capital, creating effective teaching environments, technological shifts and bridging community connections. Ultimately teachers are tasked with the goal of improving a student’s understanding of a subject matter, crafting creative problem solvers and using students’ lived experience as relevant knowledge (Bransford et, al. 2000, p. 228). Some researchers have argued, for example, that teachers need to recognize the cultural capital present in students, “and use student culture as a springboard to enhance learning,” (Leonard & Hill, 2008 p. 23). This acquired knowledge, as argued by Bransford et al. (2000), would thus provide students with a cognitive roadmap to navigate their way through
assignments (p.230). Additionally, teachers must be constantly reflective in order to modify
teaching plans to fit where students are in their learning stages (Bransford et al. 2000, p. 230).
This should also be met with a perception checking to recognize signs of misconception
(Bransford et al. 2000, p. 230).

Teachers themselves need to be constantly growing and reshaping their own pedagogy.
According to Bransford et al., (2000):

(1) Teachers need a knowledge base (an epistemology) of pedagogy, including
knowledge of how cultural beliefs and the personal characteristics of learners influence
learning.

(2) Teachers need opportunities to learn about children’s cognitive development
and children’s development of thought (children’s epistemologies) in order to know how
teaching practices build on learners’ prior knowledge (Bransford et al. 2000, p. 230).

Furthermore, teachers need to have a “disciplined, systematic approach to professional
development which can be accomplished, “[b]y reflecting on and evaluating one’s own
practices, either alone or in the company of a critical colleague (Bransford et al. 2000, p. 230).

Bransford et al., (2000) also found that learning is constant within a child’s life since
they are embedded in the culture and social structures that organize their daily activities (p.234).
This assertion would suggest there is a wealth of potential in utilizing cultural capital and lived
experience to unearth new ways of engaging learning (Leonard & Hill, 2008, Bransford et al.,
2000). When the doors for community engagement (e.g. after school programs, clubs, family)
become more structured in a conscious effort to bridge the school-community divide, there is an
increased opportunity to strengthen the continued growth of children. Leonard & Hill (2008)
also found that culturally relevant teaching is arguably essential to the ongoing success of,
“historically marginalized students who have not been adequately served by the education
system” (p.24). It would be careless to minimize the important role the latter statement, or
section, ultimately plays in the context of the aim of this thesis. Put simply; in classrooms where
good teachers constantly seek to be better for the sake of all of their pupils’ learning is the
foundation of an effective public education system.
These pedagogical approaches can in some ways bring up some barriers due to the intricacies presented in fully understanding the cultural backgrounds with a diverse group of learners. I would counter such an argument by saying that it is better to be aware and to openly discuss such topics to support tolerance and cooperation than to be dismissive and induce a classroom, and ultimately, a school culture of ignorance.

A relatively new debate to the education sector that has emerged has come as a result of the rise of the technological era. Boards of education now have to contend with these powerful tools such as computers in their approach to educating future global citizens. Teachers, as well as administrators, must continue to grasp and graph these societal shifts into, “new pedagogical approaches that are more child-centered and more culturally sensitive, all with the objectives of promoting effective learning and adaptation” (Bransford et al., 2000, p. 235). Thinking through the lens of critical race theory, it could be said that when an active dismissal of a learner’s cultural upbringing is divorced from everyday learning experiences it can create a void in the learner’s sense of self and their connection to the public education system. In other words teacher pedagogy plays an active role in welcoming a learner’s entire consciousness into the classroom.

Ultimately, public education institutions must provide ongoing mandatory professional training for faculty, encourage dialogue between stakeholders to better understand the environmental landscape of their students and utilize complimentary assessment tools to ensure the ongoing needs of faculty and students are being met.

**Divergent Thinking**

In a video concerning the topic of education reform Sir Ken Robinson (2010) outlines several key points that he feels need to be taken into consideration if an effective attempt at the aforementioned task is to take place. One of the key points that he covers in the video is the effects of education on a student’s ability to be a divergent thinker (Robinson, 2010). According to Robinson (2010), “divergent thinking isn’t the same thing as creativity. It is, however, an
essential capacity for creativity, but more specifically, it is the ability to see multiple answers to a problem or question. We systematically destroy the capacity for our children to imagine.”

Essentially, Robinson contends that we educate our children out of their ability to be divergent thinkers. I would further contend that such outcomes are not coincidental, but are a part of a larger structure designed to maintain colonial and imperialist ideology. Dei (1996) referred to this structure as the “deep curriculum”. This, he argues, includes, “not only stipulated and hidden school rules, but also regulations that influence student and staff activities, behaviours, attitudes, perceptions, exceptions and outcomes” (p.177). Critical Race scholars would argue that it is within this deep curriculum that meaning making, model moulding and ultimately human subject formation takes the turn towards fundamental inequalities. Why create critical thinkers who may push the limits of administrators when you can have submissive participants who see their primary function as absorbing what is being told to them. These assertions point to the need for any type of reform to take serious how inequalities within society infiltrate the framework of the public education system and give rise to further perpetration of disadvantage especially for racialized and marginalised population. I would further contend that as we educate our children we must allow them to view their everyday experiences as being intricately woven into their educational experience. For Dewey (1938) it is imperative for us to ask what is at stake in the fact that “they lose the ability to extract learning from their future experiences as they occur” (p.49)?

**Constructing Connections**

An article entitled “Early School Leavers: Understanding the Lived Reality of Student Disengagement from Secondary School” prepared by the Community Health Systems Resource Group of The Hospital for Sick Children (2005) illuminates the pressing need for critical analysis and change to occur in the Ontario public school system. Above all else in my estimation is the revelation that the most commonly cited reasons offered by early school leavers for disengagement were related to school risk factors, rather than external influences”
Chapter Two Conclusion

Nowhere else in society is the business of meaning making such a powerful tool than within the institutions of academia. For example, how do we come to know that the chaos that we live day by day is in part due to the discourses that we are taught in the aforementioned institutions? Our collective and individual future is dependent on a public education reform. If we want healthier, smarter effective world class leaders we need to put greater emphasis on the one area of our society that will give us substantial returns for our strategic investments. School plays a major role in teaching our children to be many things but most importantly it should teach them to be critical and competent thinkers. The topics in this chapter outline my humble attempt to foreground a nuanced understanding of a few of the critical components that must be taken into strong consideration if a robust public education reform is to be achieved. In my research I have found the following themes to reign true: (1) Teachers must actively take part in a culture of ongoing professional development; (2) The public education system has to do more to effectively support teachers; (3) Ineffective teachers and administrators need to be held accountable; (4) Issues of equity must be appropriately addressed on a reoccurring basis; (5) Creating critical thinkers and not submissive participants has to be a fundamental pillar of the public education system.
Solutions do exist and it is paramount that we address these problems head on. Better learners make informed decisions and to that end we pave the way for a future that is full of possibility and tangible promises. If we heed such a call, our culture, heritage, future innovators, engineers, business owners, entertainers, politicians, social workers and even our janitors will be equipped with the tools to take their professional careers to new heights. If there are solutions that work why are they not being adopted for the sake of future generations? The tools we equip our children with are the ammunition they will continue to use within the corridors of our school hallways and the streets of our communities. What then do we do with such power and responsibility? Olson (2011) felt that we need, “to educate people and arm them with ideas (Lecture notes, October 24, 2011). Dewey (1938) writes, “[t]he intensity of the desire measures the strength of the efforts that will be put forth. But wishes are empty castles in the air unless they are translated into the means by which they may be realized” (p.70). As daunting as the task may be, finding effective solutions for a public education system that best fits the needs of diverse learners has to be addressed.
CHAPTER THREE: RACISM IN THE CONTEMPORARY CANADIAN CLASSROOM

Chapter Introduction

The issue of race, racism and anti-black racism has been an arena of immense debate. It is not my intention to rehash the left-right schism of that debate in this thesis. However, the looming presence and devastating effects of racism within society and the public education system must be addressed when engaging in any type of public education reform. Racism and its many disguises is a reality and that must be confronted, then effectively eliminated. In the next few pages of this thesis I will attempt to speak to the issue of racism, upward mobility, hidden curriculum, school culture and other interrelated school disadvantages.

The Origin of Race

The concept of race emerged and took shape in the 17th, 18th and 19th century as Europeans encountered with other persons who, “looked, spoke and acted different from themselves and what they understood to be “normal” (Caliendo & Walton 2011, p.3).” These encounters increased the desires for some form of classification and as the, “mixing of common understanding and scientific evidence opened the door for widespread abuse...” (p.4). As is the nature of such desires several scientific understandings emerged. Credited as the first and widely accepted scientific method is that of German physician and anthropologist, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (Caliendo & Walton, 2011, Gabbidon & Greene, 2005). He classifies human beings into five races: “Caucasian (white), Mongolian (yellow), Malayan (brown), Negroid (black) and American (red) (p.3).” This system of classification opened the floodgates for future definitive definitions of race (p.4). Research on Race has taken many twists and turns but in our current contemporary context, “it is [a] socially constructed category which lacks any sound scientific validity (Dei, 1996).” An offspring of such research has been the normalization of racial classifications and with it, “assumptions about members of racial groups have been used to control power on multiple contexts (Caliendo & Walton, 2011, p.5).” Today, far removed from the classification system in which it has its origins, race, “has come to embody a series of assumptions that subconsciously affect our thoughts and behaviours and which have been
incorporated into our social and political institutions (p. 5).” The concept of race and its many implications has laid the foundation for such things as racism, which is described by Caliendo & Walton (2011) as, “the imposition of political, social, and economic power, as justified by racial categorizations (p. 4).” Racism thus opens the door for injustices to persist throughout all facets of society.

**The Struggle against Racism in the Contemporary Canadian Classroom**

When a student walks into a Canadian classroom the expectations of what they will learn and how they are treated should, ideally, be consistent. Historically, however, the education systems across Canada were a fierce battleground between political and religious leaders (Barakett & Cleghorn, 2000). Nevertheless, during the early years of this nation, the curriculum, administrators and school culture were all entrenched with the racist practices and ideologies of the dominant elite. At the time, overt racism was the norm because members of the dominant elite believed that these measures were necessary for the acculturation of the Aboriginals and all other non-white immigrants (Barakett & Cleghorn, 2000). In essence, the governing elite used the education system to monopolize control of a student’s culture. This happened by forcing the student to participate in a system designed to oppress them. Similarly, an undercurrent of these racist themes and practices has helped to produce and perpetuate this system of oppression for visible minority students. In the contemporary Canadian classroom, the curriculum, administrators and school culture has maintained a system of oppression by refusing to address some of the oppressive disadvantages the Canadian education systems has always struggled with. The reproduction of Canada’s racist education ideologies has created enormous barriers for marginalized and racialized students who, through no fault of their own, must struggle within this system of oppression.
Upward Mobility for Whom

Education for many is seen as a tool for upward mobility. According to Barakett and Cleghorn, “[t]here are several functions of schooling that are considered unintended which include: (1) social control; (2) custodial; (3) establishment of social relations and subgroup maintenance; and (4) promotion of critical analysis” (2000, p. 6). An element of Canada’s oppressive education system that has plagued marginalized communities includes their inability to have equal opportunities, which ultimately results in an overall lack of social control.

“Historically,” Dei (1996) points out, “immigrant parents and community workers have organized and demanded structural changes to address concerns about discrimination and prejudice practices in the schools, and worked for policy and curriculum changes at the school board level” (p. 80). In essence, the struggle to free marginalized students from this racist education system has been present since the creation of the Canadian school system itself. Furthermore, the lack of social upwards mobility, which is associated to low educational attainment, is one of the most significant reasons for the need to rectify this form of oppression. This deficiency may then cause a number of different social, familial and personal difficulties (e.g. low educational attainment, low-wages, less parent-child bonding time, etc.). It is through these well-researched assertions that we find the purpose behind acknowledging and rectifying the destructive force of racism. Put simply, if we fail to act, we will continue to stand by as marginalized students fall through the cracks.

Racism and the Curriculum

Another critical tool of oppression within the Canadian education system is the curriculum. The argument put forth is that because the curriculum is grounded in Eurocentric ideology, marginalized students experience difficulty in connecting their lived experience to this material. It was Bohnstedt et al., (2008) who acknowledged that “[t]o understand the achievement gaps among students of different racial/ethnic groups and social classes, we should pay attention to how and why the groups’ lived experiences differ from one another.” This lack
of reflection of the diversity in lived experiences of marginalized students is the primary argument put forth by contemporary education activists and students alike. Dei’s (1996) argument regarding the deep curriculum could once again be useful in contextualizing the above-mentioned lack of acknowledgment. He asserted that, “[t]he term “deep curriculum” is used here to refer to both the official and hidden aspects of the school curricula as well as the intersections of the school culture, environment and relations of power among educators, students and parents” (Dei, 1996, p. 79). In particular, students, parents and activist groups have all questioned whose history and whose view of history is being reflected in the current curriculum. In essence, the ability of the deep curriculum to mask racist, colonial and imperialist ideology creates an invisible fortress and an enormous challenge for marginalized and racialized students to confront, let alone breakdown.

The Race to Erase

Another component to the public education system that must be addressed is the culture and the agents within this culture that consciously or unconsciously perpetuate this system of oppression. Dei, asserted that “[i]t is not refreshing to note that many educators are still grappling with a comprehensive understanding of how race and the relational aspects of different (ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality) factors affect the schooling and educational outcomes of youth” (1996, p. 78). The latter point is important to critically analyze because it suggests that many administrators are essentially unaware of the racist practices being reproduced within their schools and in their very own classrooms. This comes as no surprise, however, because it was this exact system that educated them. Dei has also found that, “[w]hen minority students…resist hegemonic norms and values and patriarchal structures that they perceive as subordinating them even further, students are labelled “deviant”, “problem children” and “at-risk youth” (1996, p. 78). In addition to this, Bohrnstedt et al. (2008), noted that more teachers are paying attention to the students they feel are highly motivated and achievement oriented. What this suggests is that marginalized students who enter the education system at a disadvantage, who must challenge certain racist ideologies they face daily, could be further
excluded by teachers who prefer to work with less challenging students. As a result, marginalized students are left with ultimately one of two choices: either try to resist an oppressive system and run the risk of being ostracized; or find a way to navigate through a system that does not want to acknowledge one’s presence. It should also be noted that I do not want to minimize the challenging task teachers face having to manage sometimes up to 35 students in a classroom at a time (Contenta & Rankin, 2009). However, the public education system knows these issues exist and if it so chooses to turn a blind eye, some will suffer, and more often than not, it tends to be racialized and marginalized students.

The latter of the two paths in which marginalized students can confront this oppressive system is a road that many successful minority leaders had to craft their way through. It was Richard Shall (1993) who said that, “[t]he young perceive that their right to say their own word has been stolen from them, and few things are more important than the struggle to win it back...[a]nd they also realize the educational system today – from kindergarten to university – is their enemy” (1993, p. 34). One of the aspects within this assertion Shall (1993) wants us to understand is that our ability to recognize this struggle is instinctual. He also wants us to be aware that along with these instinctual feelings of oppression are the overwhelming urges to fight back. Researchers have found a great deal of evidence which supports the fact that the cultural practices central to such marginalized communities have a great wealth of positive attributes (Boykin et al., 2006, p. 364). The failure of the contemporary public education system to recognize and build on this is essentially the failure to create an equal playing field for all. As Dei points out, “[t]he… school rules and regulations, school calendars, celebrations, food services, assemblies, concerts, athletics, bulletins, hallways present students with the “acceptable” values and standards of the school” (1996, p. 79). The message here for many students is a clear and concise one: visible minorities (e.g. different cultures, values, traditions etc.) are not compatible with mainstream Canadian society and are, therefore, placed outside of the box. This ultimately leaves marginalized students in disarray as to what must be done. They are aware of the oppression; however, they are cognizant about eminent risk attached to overtly challenging the system.
This conscious neglect of marginalized students and their feelings of disempowerment is the essence of the core difficulties facing these students. These difficulties include issues like the high dropout rates, low educational attainment and a lack of access to post secondary institutions (Dei, 1996). It is also vitally important to acknowledge that it is in truly exploring these issues through the eyes of these students that solutions will be found. As Macedo asserted, “[i]n this sense dialogue presents itself as an indispensable component of the process of both learning and knowing” (2000, p. 18). When the doors of dialogue are truly opened and the goal of positive change is placed at the center of the oppression, the end result will be satisfactory for all students, regardless of one’s minority status in Canadian society. However, the manifestation of this will require both the students and administrators to be present at the table for change to materialize. According to Dei, administrators must be, “…willing to challenge the status quo by rupturing the racialized, hetero-patriarchal nature of educational settings and the prevailing culture of dominance” (1996, p.85). It is always easy to stay on the side of the clear path because, as a professional, this is what is expected of you. It is seen as ambivalent when an administrator decides to challenge inequalities, but it takes tremendous courage do so. These educators however, must also be accompanied by students who are willing to take a stand against these injustices because only through collaboration can change be possible.

Unifying in the Community

Though some may still believe that the past systems marred with racists’ ideology have been remedied, numerous studies conducted on disadvantaged and marginalized communities have suggested otherwise (Tyyskä, 2001). Another key component of this struggle, the family, has increasingly played a large role in the upholding of this fight against student oppression. One of the reasons this has come about is because many of the governing elite feel that children are not able to make these decisions on their own. Acknowledging the latter fact, parents and activists engaging in activism surrounding educational issues for elementary and secondary schools are primarily carried out by large entities of parent and professional bodies. “As one parent plainly stated, “you don’t mess with people’s kids… when you do, you get it back”
(Robertson, 2007, p. 11). These parents realize what is at stake and know that if nothing is done then the future that they will leave for their children and grandchildren will be bleak. For example, “[r]esearch from the 1990s has shown that educational inequality is reproduced across generations” (Dei, 1996, p. 81). As we move forward the one thing that is evident is that it must be under a unified front. As another parent asserted it is “[t]ime for us to resist learnt helplessness” (Robertson, 2007, p.14). Until we embrace the activism that is in an army of one and bridge the gap between the cultural divides that separate us we will always fall prey to the elitism of the few.

**Constructing Connections**

The presence and devastating effect of racism in the public education system is an undeniable reality. This chapter was an attempt to foreground the issue of racism in this thesis in order to have a more holistic dialogue to occur concerning disciplinary policies. In my opinion, the topic of racism is fundamental to discussions concerning discipline policies in the public education system because enforcing disciplinary action is a tangible way that the affects of racism can be measured. We all agree that when a student puts the lives of others and themselves in harms way, educators must take action. The problem, however, as I reveal elsewhere in my thesis, lies in the fact that most suspensions occur as a result of minor infractions. Racism, ultimately, is in part, responsible for the presence of varying external oppressions, curriculum disadvantages, cultural disadvantages, teacher engagement disadvantages, a recognition of differential treatment and being suspended for minor infractions. Despite all of this, some still refuse to acknowledge the presence of racism and its consequences. This for me is typified in the Toronto District School Board’s, not alone in their stance, refusal to collect race related data. Dei summarizes such a refusal best when he asked, “[h]ow can you confront a problem you refuse to acknowledge exists” (Lecture Notes, May 11, 2011)?
Chapter Three Conclusion

The conclusions are as clear as they are straightforward. It will take administrators who recognize that for there to be a different outcome they must come up with alternative approaches to educating their students (Dei, 1996). This relatively old understanding must also be connected with the vigour and passion of the students, families and activists most affected within this oppressive system. Macedo asserted that, “[d]ialogue is never an end in itself but a means to develop a better comprehension about the object of knowledge” (1993, p.18). We must first attain a cohesive understanding of the issue and then use this understanding as our guide to reshaping this oppressive system. Dei asserted that, “[c]ontemporary educators should be able to critically examine the nature of the patriarchal relations and male organizational modes of schooling and to call into question how schools function to establish hierarchies” (1996, p. 85).

In essence, we must not only ask the tough questions but also be able to walk the tough picket lines as well. It is not enough for us to know the problems, we must also be engaged and be willing to engage others in the fight to transform this national issue. It is not enough to wish, think, or pray for change to arrive, we must recognize that we are the agents of change. For this reason, Freire asserted that “[a]s long as I fight, I am moved by hope; and if I fight with hope, then I can wait” (1993, p. 92). It is vital for everyone in the struggle to recognize that the fight for change never dies, it is just that we hide these lanterns so deep inside of ourselves that others never get the chance to be inspired by them. Education is the tool that has crafted this divisive world around us but, ironically enough, it will be through education that these divides must be reconciled.
CHAPTER FOUR: VIOLENCE IN MODERNITY

Chapter Introduction

The multiple and intricate manifestation of violence in our contemporary modernity is arguably one of the most discussed topics today. It has been argued by many that this has been an elaborate scheme by some media conglomerates, special interest groups and government agencies to create a moral panic within the psyche of citizens globally [see Davis 2003; Schissel 2005; Waller 2006]. Perceptions or facts aside, it is quite clear that violence, as well as perpetrators and victims of violence, is a part of our ever-present reality. This chapter seeks to explore the issues of violence, school violence and the politics behind blaming children for such violence.

The Landscape

Irvin Waller, (2006) a professor and well read scholar on the issue of victimization describes violence as an everyday reality, committed often by men and, “behind closed doors, it is predominately against a woman” (p.37). Waller (2006) also believes that politicians are quick to react rather than explore prevention. He comments that: “[t]hey miss the logic that young men who are prepared to risk their own lives in fights or shootings will not be deterred from violence by threats of incarceration and in some cases the death penalty” (p.37). In my reading of Waller’s above claims I cannot help but to be reminded of the fact that complacency and compliance are symbiotically linked to inaction. If policy makers, in an attempt to stay employed, ignore what is blatantly obvious what vision of the future can be possible?

Youth violence can be seen as “mirroring societal norms, values, and the socially constructed popular culture” (Jull, 2000), which in turn further perpetuates youth violence. In this regard violence among youth can be seen not solely as a school problem, but a societal problem that has transferred into the domain of school systems (Jull, 2000). The vast body of work that has been done to highlight much of the factors that contribute to youth violence could fit into several volumes of encyclopaedias. It is my intention to review and outline factors relating to school-based violence.
A study by Guetzloe (1992) illustrates that the prevention of violence consists of the following factors:

(a) public education as to the origins and preventions of violence; (b) providing food, jobs, child-care and medical care for all; (c) providing for the basic needs of all young children; (d) encouraging prosocial behaviour in all children; (e) regulation of the media to reduce or eliminate the representation of violence; (f) reducing the availability of illegal drugs; and (g) gun control…” (p.6)

The interconnected nature of the factors can also not be taken lightly. Because youth violence is multifaceted, solutions require a multifaceted approach to effectively address this issue. According to Day et al., (1995) a long-term solution involving a concerted effort from partnerships with community groups, parents and guardians, the juvenile system, government agencies, law enforcers, health centers and racial and ethno-culturally minority organizations are needed. Ultimately, the more risk factors and barriers a youth may face, the more inclined they will be to exhibit violent or delinquent behaviours. Therefore any multifaceted approach to address the issue of youth violence must seek to reduce or alleviate the amount of risk factors present.

In a report entitled “Roots of Youth Violence”, one conclusion found that youth who exhibit violent behaviours may experience a deep sense of alienation, feel silenced and have no sense of hope (Ministry of Child and Youth Services, 2008). The report further argues that the latter risk factors can potentially lead to youth violence, but more importantly, when looked at in depth, they provide the foundational elements that give rise to these risk factors. The main argument of the article is that poverty, racism, an unequal education system, family, health, justice system and the lack of economic opportunities for youth all play a vital role in setting the foundation for potential violent incidents to occur. These factors all deserve to be interrogated from an overarching perspective in order to have a comprehensive analysis of this issue. This analysis could then be used by policy makers who in turn could lay the groundwork for a transformation to occur in the lives of a young person within society. In an educational context it is important for public education systems to recognize that no student works in isolation of the above-mentioned risk factors. School board policies therefore have to mirror this and must also
include review boards to address the inevitable changes that occur over time. Jull (2000) asserts that, “[g]iven that school demographics change over time, policies that address the social/behavioural aspects of schooling need to remain as ‘working documents’.”

The Media, Young Offenders and the Politics of Child Blaming

Schissel’s (2006) analysis of society’s treatment of children is outlined in her book *Still Blaming Children: Youth Conduct and the Politics of Child Hating* argues that attacking youth makes for good business and politics (p.8). As an example she writes “election platforms from parties of all political philosophies contain promises to get tough on kids” (p.8). She also argues “that children have become the number one enemy of the state and an easy scapegoat because they are disenfranchised with few tools to fight back” (p.8).

Referring to the purpose of her work she argues, “the condemnation of children and youth in popular cultural discourse is closely tied to the reality that youth are, now more than ever, exploited for their labour, their consumption and their sexuality” (p.8). She further argues that justifying their immorality is the first step in exploiting them (p.8). The latter areas of contentions read together would lead me to argue that this justification, via the proliferation of sensational depictions of children and youth, adds a psychological dimension to the psyche of these children. In that dimension you can find the crossroad where manipulation meets exploitation. In her book she argues that the war on crime is by its very historical nature a war on youth (p.9). She also finds that it is a war that has seen the rhetoric reintroduced through topics of the death penalty, mandatory boot camp, increased punishment and more recently deportation (Schissel 2006, p.9). There is a transformation happening, Schissel (2006) claims, one that has seen an historical shift from the “notion that children were essentially “adults in training,” to a belief that children were in need of protection and welfare, [to the contemporary notion that their needs] to be a balance [between] the needs of youth with the rights of society in regard to public safety” (Schissel 2006, p.12). Giroux (as sited in Schissel, 2006) also warns about the politics of individualization or the notion that crime lives within the individual and is
conveniently accompanied by policies that grants privilege to, among others, multinational
corporations and deregulation (p.12). Furthermore, Schissel has argued, that in some concrete
and discursive ways the media also portrays individual acts as a reflection of specific
communities. For example, studies have conclude that issues pertaining to particular racialized
and marginalized communities are addressed by using descriptive terms such as gang related,
from broken communities or homes, or known to police. CRT scholars would view such
stereotypical descriptions as othering racialized and marginalized communities (Dixson, 2007).
Schissel (2006) aptly describes this discourse as, “the people outside the norm” (p.103). In her
own example she comments on an article, which describes the abduction of a Vancouver
millionaire’s son (p.104). She writes:

The kidnapping resulted in the victim being returned, but the article is not only
noteworthy in how it engages in speculation about the age and the race of the
perpetrators, but also in how it distances the victim and the family from the social
milieu of the ostensible offenders. The article makes a concerted effort to discuss
the social attributes of the victim’s family, including the fact that the kidnapping
had shaken the city’s “Southland neighbourhood of large country homes,
pastures, and horse barns” and that the victim drove away from the “family’s
mansion... which is worth about $3.8 million.” The article includes a series of
comments by neighbours and friends that affirm that “these things don’t happen
around here,” in the quiet, pastoral, wealthy community. The article distances the
victim and his family from the underworld of crime, a distancing that places the
moral world of conspicuous wealth against the implicitly immoral world of poor,
ethnic, minority, young people. While the journalistic exposé is probably of
prudent interest to the middle-class reader, it is an attack on the outsider, the
“other” (p.104).

In her analysis of the above argument she utilizes Critical Race Theory in order to
connect the dots between the social construction of race, the discourse of class and the use of
media role in the production of the “other” (p.104). Put succinctly she argues, “[r] ace has an
implicit reference to difference, especially with relation to moral conduct” (p.104). Referencing
Hudson, the “other”, Schissel further concludes, “in this paradigm, is distinguished by a lack of
values (both democratic and familial), by lack of achievement (mostly measured in monetary
terms) and by lack of a personal or cultural legal framework (p.104). All of the latter points have
a particular historical and destructive significance. The above excerpt and following comments
speak to the media’s ability to construct ideological differences between groups of people within society. Ultimately, Schissel argues that children and youth are negatively profiled in public discourse (p.14), exploited in the labour markets, are scapegoats in the war against crime and are capitalism’s most lucrative consumers (p.15). In essence, Schissel (2006) concluded children have essentially become “our most dangerous threat” when they should be our “most valuable resource” (p.13).

According to Waller (2006) media coverage plays a particular role in the ongoing perpetuation of violence in our society. He makes mention of reports that are exceptional and sensational in nature that paint dominating imagery about violence. He writes that it is:

“Not the drive-by shooting, the high school student killing his peers, the sexual predator or the London suicide bomber who perpetrates the most frequent or even the most devastating violence. It is parents and intimate partners committing violence behind closed doors that most often send loved ones to the hospital or the morgue (p.37).”

In his writings Waller (2006) cites public health doctors from the World Health Organization who argue that violence is “not an accident, it is preventable” (p.38). They also asserted, in a report on interpersonal violence, that because social forces create violence, the solution thus lies in tackling “social risk factors” (p.38). In addition, though they see the need for law enforcement and criminal justice they are, “by no means a central or exclusive role (p.38).”

Causes, as outlined by WHO, include a culture that fosters violence - the availability of firearms and excessive alcohol consumption (p.38).

In Schissel’s chapter entitled “The Reality of Youth Crime and Misconduct” she speaks to the issue of youth crime and the consistently pervasive, but often excluded, other side. Addressing this factor, her research suggests that marginalized youth, “are increasingly faced with hardship and some more so than others” (p.119). She further argues, “[w]e have built up the system of disadvantage around them, push them to the fringe of society, glorify their misdeeds, incarcerate them and simplify these everyday oppressions” (p.119).
person faces disciplinary action these oppressions are largely unrecognized and are generally ignored in the law-and-order rhetoric, which leaves them vulnerable. Her findings suggest:

“... Young offenders in custodial institutions show their inordinate vulnerability to involvement with the law, which often begins at a very early age, their exposure to numerous foster homes and, for some, incarceration in adult facilities. Their lives are further characterized by lack of success in school, despite generally positive attitudes to education, inordinate victimization including self-injury and physical and sexual assault, and exposure to dangerous substances. In essence, these are not the experiences of criminals; they are the traits of highly disadvantaged, highly vulnerable children and youth (p.119).”

Furthermore she analyzes the direct connection of vulnerable youth and the education system. Failing in the educational realm, she writes, “is the primary conduit for young people to end up in the justice system; there is a high reciprocal rate between failure in school and experience within the criminal justice system” (Schissel 2006, p.114). This is strengthened with additional research which finds that “[o]verall 77.6 per cent were expelled or suspended at least once and 42.8 per cent were expelled or suspended five or more times” (p.114). These numbers, I would argue, could have varied meanings, however, combing through these interconnected meanings could unearth the relationship between disciplinary practices and disconnect with the public education system. One area of grave concern for me was present when she concluded that “[s]chool expulsion is indicative of many things, but mostly that the young person and the school are not compatible” (p.114). This revelation, combined with the fact that most young offenders in her research said that they felt positive about school, leaves you to question the reason why they are not compatible. In my understanding of this, I would argue that Dei (1996) correctly referred to marginalized students as being pushed out of the public education system rather than willingly leaving.

Foregrounding these findings into this research it is important to note that the lived experiences of the youth mentioned in this book are from a Canadian context, but also represent a quasi-global perspective. Though Schissel’s (2006) primary arguments speak to the important need for transformation in the way we treat our children it also provides some valuable insights for this research. Using the information on young offenders as a particular area of interest I find
it important to recognize the understanding of education in their lives. This was of particular interest because the offenders spoke positively about school, which left the door for re-engagement open. However, Schissel (2006) points out that there still remains a disconnect between these offenders and the education system. These intersecting points and Dei’s (1996) arguments all lead to one question. Understanding that schools are not necessarily a good fit for everyone, what has to change in the public education system that would see it become a system designed to educate our most valuable resource?

**Prison Industrial Complex and Schools**

Davis (2003) in her book *Are Prisons Obsolete?* argues that, “racism surreptitiously defines social and economic structures in ways that are difficult to identify and thus are much more damaging” (p.38). Her analysis, though focused on the prison industrial complex, points to the intricate role schools have in the larger picture. Davis contends that an overarching strategy to dismantle the aforementioned complex should be viewed on a continuum of alternatives to prisons. Alternatives that include, “demilitarization of schools, revitalization of education at all levels, a health system that provides free physical and mental care to all, and a justice system based on reparation and reconciliation rather than retribution and vengeance” (Davis, 2003, p.107).

Concerning the school system, Davis (2003) points to the growing presence of the prison system in schools that reside in poor communities. She writes, “[w]hen children attend schools that place a greater value on discipline and security than on knowledge and intellectual development, they are attending prep schools for prison” (Davis, 2003, p.38-39). Davis further ponders, “[i]f this is the predicament we face today, what might the future hold if the prison system acquires an even greater presence in our society” (Davis, 2003, p.39)?
A Nuanced View of Gun Violence within the African-American Community

On a recent trip to Chicago I came across a well-written article that draws some clear boundaries around the issues of violence, the African-American community and guns. The article is entitled, “Murder was the Case” and John W. Fountain authored it. Some of the more salient points he outlines in this article are as follows. His research found from “1980 through [to] 2008, 93 per cent of black victims were killed by other blacks” (Fountain 2012, p.122). In 2010, the recorded number of deaths was 6470, though they makeup roughly 13 per cent of the American population (p.122). He contends that numbers can only tell us a, “part of the story of this war in which the victims bare an uncanny resemblance to their killers” (p. 123). According to his research, “[t]he number of Black males and females 14 and older murdered across the country in the 35-year period from 1976 through 2010 was 295,893” (p. 123). He further added, “[p]lacing that number in historical context is the number of lynchings – once seen as the largest homegrown, domestic terrorist threat to African-Americans – carried out by gun-toting racist White mobs, was estimated at 3446 over an 85 year period” (p.123). Those numbers came from the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama (as cited in Fountain) and spoke to the years of 1882 through 1968 (p. 123).

He further added, “[t]ranslations: for every Trayvon Martin killed by someone of another race, nine other African-Americans were murdered by someone of their own” (p. 122). In his understanding of the issue he wrote, what is clear is that “[b]ehind the murders of young Black men are mostly other young Black men armed with guns that are the primary agents in this domestic war being waged in our communities around the country” (p. 121). Fountain further argued that “...placing the blame of the violence that grips poor, urban, minority communities squarely on a mechanism that requires human manipulation and will to kill would be unfair; misguided, in fact.” (p. 121). He does admit, after the latter comment, that to overlook the trafficking of guns within the abovementioned communities would be a grave mistake (p.121).

In an exceptional journalistic fashion he wrote:
“Guns. They are a source of endless American fascination: rooted in our soil since the celebrated first shots fired in the American revolution, embedded in our Second Amendment, in the swagger of Wild West gunslingers, and immortalized from history books to Hollywood. Enter Al Capone, the St. Valentine’s Day Massacre, and the mob underworld. Enter Scarface and the portrayal of prowess wielded by the man with his finger on the trigger and the power of life and death. Enter Black street gangs, heroin, crack cocaine and violent rap music that become the soundtrack of a generation. Enter poverty, desperation, and the disintegration of the family, faith and community. Enter fatalistic young, urban minorities and easy access to firearms. Enter our country’s culture of violence that runs as deep as its soil. Enter our glorification of guns and our relegation of some human life to being expendable and extinguishable.” (Fountain, 2012, p. 123, 132)

This, I would argue, is an outstanding capsulated glimpse into the world of gun and gun-violence within the African-American community but by no means the entire picture. The positing of this article may also raise question of its importance within this thesis. This article, in my opinion, was insightful regarding the imagery and statistics that were posited and the role of American culture in Canada culture cannot be understated. That said, his work, when juxtaposed with that of Schissel, allows the reader to recontextualize the issue of gun violence in a way that is forcefully illuminated by his writing and statistics. It is also noteworthy to mention the fact that for an overwhelming majority of the young black men and women represented in his stats, at one point or another, they were connected to the public education system. If the latter statement is true, then the role of the public education system in addressing and reshaping the issue of violence in our society cannot be disregarded.

Bullying

Bullying is described as aggressive behaviour that is institutional, involves a balance of power or strength and is spread out overtime (Kowalski et al., 2008). When the term youth violence is mentioned, in the context of the school system, it is almost instinctively linked to bullying. A term that was first studied in the 1980s (Kowalski et al., 2008) bullying is seen as the primary instigator and perpetrator behind incidences of school violence. This form of prolonged,
unwanted interactions has often led to some of the worst cases of school violence ever reported through mainstream media (Waller, 2006; Schissel, 2003). As Waller (2006) points out, “[m]ore than any of the incidents in North America or Europe, the shootings at Columbine caught the imagination of the press” (p.30). It is important to recognize the ongoing nature of bullying so that it is not confused with isolated occurrences of violence. Using the Columbine shooting as an example, these young men were bullied over a number of years, but their retaliation is considered an incident of violence. As mentioned earlier it is a complex issue that when left unchecked can cause irreversible damage and even lifelong trauma. Put into perspective though “more than 99.9 per cent of U.S. public schools have never had a homicide of any kind” and “[l]ess than 1 per cent of youth murders occur at school, 7 per cent of eighth graders stay home at least once a month out of fear of other students” (Waller, 2006, p.30). In a, not so similar, but still relevant, report the Public Health of Canada reported in 2006 that 36 per cent of boys reported bullying others, while 39 per cent of students Grades 6 through 10, said that they were bullied in the past months. Bullying, much like school violence as a whole, is multifaceted and thus solutions must seek to be the same. Zuker et al. (2009) points out that one of the main issues that has plagued the efforts of administrators in the fight against bullying is that many students simply do not report these occurrences. This further reinforces the need for schools as well as school boards to have components within their curriculum to specifically address bullying.

School boards and their policy makers must take note of such issues because any problem left unchecked can move from a simple solution to one that warrants a drastic overhaul. At the school level faculty must be knowledgeable of the policies surrounding bullying and administrators must see that this is being complied with. Students have to be introduced to this topic through the curriculum as well. The author finds it absurd to think of school boards where bullying prevention education is not standard learning material. It is a shame to know of a problem and let it persist, but it is a greater offence to know of a solution and allow a problem to become a widespread issue. In my opinion, reducing the rate of bullying will in turn lower school violence occurrences.
Cyber Bullying

As students across the world equip themselves with the ever-present companion of their cell phones, new challenges are brewing within schools. Long gone are the days that only the well off could afford the next best interactive gadget or even the knock off brand. Students, as a result, are becoming more and more plugged in. This wired generation has led way to a new monster that can destroy individuals within a simple click of a button (Shariff, 2004). Cyber bullying also known as electronic bullying or online social cruelty is defined as bullying through email, instant messaging, chat rooms on a website or through digital messages or images sent to a cellular phone (Kowaski et al., 2008). Mishap et al. (2008) in their research found that one in three young Canadians have threatened others online while approximately one in five have been subjected to online threats. This represents a new avenue of bullying that has lifelong ramifications. The unfortunate and amplifying factors are the sheer magnitude of the reach of such bullying techniques.

In R.T. v. Durham Catholic District School Board (EA s.311.7) a 13-year-old student in Grade 8 was expelled from her school for cyber bullying which entailed writing threatening emails and statements on Facebook. The authority of the Principal to suspend the student in this particular case came from section 310 (1) of the Education Act. The Principal recommended expulsion from all schools of the Board and a mandatory investigation under subsection 311.1(1) of the Education Act, which was then referred to the School Board and a hearing conducted under the right of subsection 311.3 of the Education Act. The School Board has the authority to expel a student under subsection 311.3(6) of the Education Act. Ultimately, in this particular case the Board felt that the incident of cyber bullying affected the climate of the school. The potential harm of a pupil and fear caused by the acts of cyber bullying justified the expulsion of the student from the school only (CanLii, 2008).

Policy makers are once again placed into a situation where it is imperative to engage frontline staff, students and parents. This relatively new form of bullying literally takes the battle to the streets using traditional and interchangeable players. The unlikely perpetrators such
as victims of school bullying occurrences can be perpetrators within the cyber bullying context. According to Kowaski et al., (2008) in order to create a school environment that reduces the incidence of bullying factors such as practices against bullying, policies focused on bullying, monitoring levels of bullying and garnering support from adult allies are all to be strongly considered. These authors also find that implementing bullying prevention within school curriculum should also be considered (Kowaski et al., 2008). These implementations in my opinion follows the understanding that if faculty and student are both equipped with intervention strategies, the school environment would have less issues dealing with violent incidents.

**Chapter Four Conclusion**

In conclusion, the overall concern of this chapter was to share reflections around: the varying manifestations of violence, the bad role of media, the role of violence within culture, the prison-industrial complex, school violence and promising solutions. Elements within this chapter also spoke to the socially constructed and maintained factors of disadvantages. These intersecting factors thus play out in the halls of the public education system. Noting that the public school system is a relatively safe environment it is however connected to shaping the present and future realities of the young men and women who enter and leave school doors on a daily basis. It is my opinion that the public education system should be committed to bolstering protective factors in the fight to create policies that reflect the needs of students. All these interrelated factors point to the public education system’s role in shaping meaning within the lives of young people. The question then becomes, are public education boards helping to shape critical thinkers or more federal prisoners. No system in the world is perfect so incidents of violence for various reasons will occur from time to time. The strength of a public school system, in my humble opinion, does not come during moments of crisis, but in trying to aim for the highest standards when all is going as it should, without disruption.
CHAPTER FIVE: A SEARCH FOR SOLUTIONS

Chapter Introduction

This short chapter will look to discuss some of a few of the findings from Irvin Waller’s research on randomized control trials and violence prevention initiatives. Topics to be discussed include: randomized control trials (RCT), pre-school intervention, school outreach program and a teenage intervention program. Possible cross-discipline implications are also discussed in the chapter conclusion.

Irvin Waller (2006) and his book “Less Law More Order” is, by my humble estimation, well researched on the topic of crime. In the book he goes through a plethora of research, government reports, journals and other documented findings to paint for the reader a concise layout of the landscape of crime prevention. It is a recommended read for all interested in deepening their understanding regarding issues concerning crime, victimization, policing, politics, industry, courts and their intersections with crime. Waller does his best to access sound studies on the topics but more specifically on the topics of: investing in at risk youth, preventing family violence, public health advocacy, a more effective court system and smarter policing practices, to name a few. Furthermore, Waller goes above and beyond to give readers practical ways and strategies that could be used to implement some of his recommendations. He posits several scientifically proven ways to reduce the burden of crime, but he concedes that unless there is a commitment from government, public and private interest, crime and its branches will always be a major achilles heel for contemporary society.

One of the premises of the work that he outlines is that the best measure of research findings comes from those that have done large-scale scientific trials and randomized control trials. Regarding this he describes:

“[a]n RCT is a field experiment where the subjects of an innovative intervention, such a program to avoid youth at risk of dropping out of school, are selected at random from a pool of eligible youth so that the scientists can determine whether the intervention was the only experience responsible for a change in an outcome such as offending (Waller 2006, p.18).”
Invest in Parenting and Child Development

In his research he spoke about the Perry Preschool Program that used a scientific randomized control trial (RCT) to measure outcomes of three and four year olds that went through the program (Waller, 2006). The program looked at supporting these children with enriched childcare, which assisted them regardless of an inconsistent or uncaring parent. Qualified childcare workers would spend at least two and a half hours per day with the children they were assigned. They provide educational material for the children that centered on self initiated learning. This learning was taught to help the selected group in developing “sound intellectual and social development” skills (p. 24). The study began with 123 low-income African-American children who they determined to be “at a high risk of school failure” (p.24). Half of the group was assigned to one group and the others were to be the control group. The scientific evaluator then tracks the groups from point of intervention, pre-school, until they were 40.5. Findings for the study suggest that the Perry Preschool Program “caused a 34 per cent reduction in arrests by age 40” (p. 24). These findings gave enough ground for Waller to conclude that if crime and victimization reduction is the aim, then giving at risk communities the infrastructure to replicate similar models of pre-schools could be a starting point. He also contends that “[t]his reduction in arrests nationally saved $15 in the costs of police, prisons, and judges for every dollar originally invested” (p. 24).

School Outreach Program

The second study that was mentioned that I found useful to make mention of was a study conducted by the Child Parent Center Program. Scientific trials were not conducted for this group of participants however they were able to interact with a large population of participants. The program, “one of the oldest federally funded preschool programs in the United States… provides comprehensive educational and family support services to economically disadvantaged children from preschool to early elementary school” (Waller 2006, p.25). The goal of the program is to serve children not attached to a program already, and “promote children’s
academic success and to facilitate parent involvement in children’s education” (p.25). The three pillars of the program are as follows: Trained professionals (1) Go to the family’s home and organize meetings for them to come to the center, (2) Provide students with an enriched and comprehensive programming that focuses on acquiring language skills (3) Engage parents around parenting practices while at the center (p.25).

Research around the program came in the form of Arthur Reynolds who, alongside his colleagues, scientifically compared children in the Child Parent Center Program to 550 children who attended other alternative programs (Waller, 2006). Their findings suggest that “17 per cent of those” who took part in the program were “arrested by age 20 compared to 25 per cent of the comparison group” (p.25). That amounted to a 32 per cent reduction in arrest rates and the findings also mentioned that the Child Parent Center Program students also completed school at a higher rate. The research team further calculated that per child the program cost was $6,730 yet the return on those funds “equal to $47,759” (p.25). Waller concluded his thoughts with some figures from the research that demonstrate: (1)“[h]alf of these benefits are increases in lifetime earnings of $20,000, including $7,000 in taxes” (p.25) (2) “savings identified included $7,000 for the justice system, $6,000 for crime victims, and $4,000 for special education” (3) “the 989 children” from the program “cumulative sav[ed] $47 million.”

Waller concluded by stating that the latter was a number that has changed because since the findings came out 100,000 participants have passed through the program representing $4.7 billion in benefits, $700 million in tax revenue over their collective lifetimes which is, “ironically just short of being able to pay the budget of the Chicago Police Department of $1 billion for one year” (p.26).

**Teenage Intervention**

When researching teenage intervention Waller found that the most affordable program is to assist children aged 6 to 18 with having a mentor. “The Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) —a hybrid between a government audit office and research library for politicians in the state of
Washington — undertook a review of over 400 evaluations of the cost-effectiveness of various prevention and treatment programs designed for youth at risk and juvenile offenders. They showed that for “$1,054 spent for mentoring, they could identify net benefits of $4,524 in reduced costs to victims and the community” (p.28-29). Mentorship for most would consist of “mentor meet… with the youth for about four hours, three times a month and so providing a caring relationship and role model” (p.28).

According to Waller (2006), “Dr. Hahn, a professor in the School of Management and Social Policy at Brandeis University, was the evaluator of the program set up originally by Opportunities Industrialization Centers of America (OIC), often referred to as Quantum Opportunities”. In Waller’s (2006) opinion, this study is considered to be the poster child program for RCT testing (p.31). Running out of “an abandoned police station in Philadelphia,” for the past 40 years the OIC has been supporting minority youth to get into a solid job market (P.31). In 1989, the program started using an RCT to measure the effectiveness of the program. The program “started with youth in the ninth grade” and “[i]t had three components for each of which 250 hours of activities were provided” (p.31). The pillars of this program are as follow: (1) homework coaching was used to enhance academics (2) life skills training (e.g. preparing for job interview) (3) mentors and volunteer activities were well organized. The students did have some financial motivation which included being paid to participate at a rate of $1/hr and $100 for completing specific activities (p.31) A matching amount to what they are able to make doing the specific activities will be secured for use by the student once they have completed the program (p.31). The findings concluded that the “proportion of those arrested after completing the program was 70 below that of the control group” (p.31).

Chapter Five Conclusion

Waller’s findings and conclusions are posited into this conversation for a few reasons. One such reason is my firm belief that the youth mentioned in the above programs, for the most part, have parallel experiences to those of the young people that are disproportionately affected
by suspension and expulsions. Similar demographical background and lived experiences would lead this author to conclude that in many ways they are one in the same. In addition, I contend that no matter their age whether six or 27 the ability for any program to engage, assist and redirect the lives of marginalized youth should be critically analyzed for solutions/initiatives that can be replicated in the educational realm. That said, some of the findings that can be taken away from this section are: (1) early and enriched intervention, (2) the importance of consistent mentorship, (3) consistence around staffing, and (4) the role incentives play as a motivator. These are all factors that can contribute to reducing incidences of violence.

It should be noted however that the programs mentioned above do speak to some direct and immediate benefits to the participants. I would also add that their future desires and outcomes are in many ways directly tied to the programs (e.g. daycare support, employment, economic benefits, etc). I would argue, however, these incentives had to have been combined with an inherent desire to participate reflected in the participants’ commitment to getting and staying connected with the program. In some districts there are ongoing debates around the use of financial incentives to keep students in schools. I would argue, using CRT scholarship, when a child’s desire to attend school is prompted by a small financial incentive rather than a desire to learn, is fundamentally wrong. Yes, there can be so many explanations for why a child would choose the former, my argument however, is that it should never come from a place of need. Using the latter questions as my springboard I find that Waller’s examples best fit in my overarching topic at this juncture. A real and honest debate concerning school disciplinary policies can only occur when issues of inequality are centered in that debate.
CHAPTER SIX: RESPONSES TO SCHOOL VIOLENCE

Chapter Introduction

The following chapter outlines, by way of a synopsis, an overview of the responses to school violence. Policies, statistics, practices and outcomes using primary research and secondary sources from both United States and Canada are discussed. It need not be mentioned again, but it is always of importance to mention that while it is possible to use solely Canadian statistics and scholarly works, the lack of available race based data limits the quality of the information one is able to speak to. I would also contend that it posits into the discussion a more open dialogue concerning the public education systems across North America.

Entering into this chapter on responses to school violence authors Ivan Eugene Watts and Nirmala Erevelles (2004) help to shape this discussion with their article entitled “These Deadly Times: Reconceptualizing School Violence by Using Critical Race Theory and Disability Studies.” They contend that:

“[A]lthough it could be argued that these new concerns regarding school violence have transformed schools into prison-like facilities, a far cry from the romantic notion of the one-room school house of yesteryear, historians of education point out that the school's role as an institution of social control is not a new development but has, in fact, existed, since the very inception of public schooling (Watts & Erevelles, 2004, p. 278).”

Other researchers have also cited similar sentiments concerning the topic of school violence and are quite consistent with this analysis (Fenning et al., 2012, Garibaldi, 1979). For example, a large contingent of researchers has concluded that there has been a shift towards creating a penal system like environment for the public education system (Daniel & Bondy, 2008, Ryan & Zoldy, 2011, Contenta & Rankin, 2009, Waller, 2006). No matter the origins, however, the reality remains that overall, the public education system, its policies and physical security measures have led to the discriminatory outcomes for minority students (Advancement Project, 2005, Bhattacharjee, 2003). This further strengthens the argument that “schools serve primarily as institutions of social control. As a result, in recent years, new ways of thinking about constructing apparatuses of discipline, confinement, surveillance and deviance that call into question current views about violence and punishment have mushroomed” (Watts & Erevelles, 2004, p. 278). The irony here is that “... since common schooling first became a reality in the
late 19th century, schools were seen as places that protected children from the vicissitudes of social life...” (Watts & Erevelles, 2004, p. 277).

What’s Needed?

In their work Watts and Erevelles (2004) argued that “[a]lthough a pragmatic response to school violence has been the general trend of contemporary research on school violence, some scholars extend beyond the pragmatic to examine the social, cultural, political and economic environment within which school violence is situated” (p.272). They further asserted, “that the pragmatic response treats school violence as an individual act, so that programs instituted to prevent violence seek to assign individual blame and instil individual responsibility” (Watts & Erevelles, 2004, p.272). Yvette Dainel and Karla Bondy’s (2008) journal article entitled “Safe Schools and Zero Tolerance: Policy, Program and Practice in Ontario” in part comes to a similar conclusion. They found that a social context of interpersonal interactions should be relevant when interrupting a policy infraction committed (Daniel & Bondy, 2008 p.14). In contrast to this, however, the participants interviewed in their study, several of them school administrators, “acknowledged that school violence was a societal problem that extends beyond the boundaries of the classroom”... but “firm treatment of problem youth in a school setting was necessary to act as a warning for potential offenders” (Daniel & Bondy, 2008). This sentiment is illuminated by a guidance counsellor who contends in the study, “if you’re very consistent with who is getting a suspension and why they’re getting a suspension then the rest of the student population kind of falls in line” (Daniel & Bondy, 2008, p.8). If effective solutions are the ultimate goal, then researchers have argued that they must be equitable and socially responsible (Daniel & Bondy, 2008; Chin et al., 2012; Bear, 2012), which shifts from a focus of the, “individual to the social context within which school violence is enacted” (Watts & Erevelles, 2004, p.272). Ultimately, researchers’ findings that have long argued that the programs that are most needed must address the “holistic and humane approaches” in order to contend with these issues (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011).
School and Discipline: A Historic Perspective

One of the more celebrated journal entries that peaked my interest and further added legitimacy to the primary assertion of this chapter that some of the contemporary responses are not new by any means was an article entitled, “In-school Alternatives to Suspension: Trendy Educational Innovations” written by Antoine M. Garibaldi (1979). As I read through his article I could not help but wonder what has been done within the last three decades to address the issue of effective behavioural management strategies by way of innovation since this article. The premise of his article was to highlight the “salient features of the most-commonly used alternatives to suspension and elaborate more specifically on the concerns offered earlier” in the article (Garibaldi, 1979, p.97). A few of these concerns included, “[p]arents and educators have been alarmed by the increased attention that has been given to apparently excessive violence and vandalism by students”... “the reported unscrupulous use of corporal punishment in schools”... “and the arbitrary use of suspensions and expulsions by administrators” (Garibaldi, 1979, p.97). What I found interesting was that “... the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) in 1975” who found after “survey[ing] a portion of its membership”... “that suspensions were being used by principals as a “sanction of last resort” (Garibaldi, 1979, p.98). Following the latter argument Garibaldi went on to say, “[g]iven such a thorough consideration of out-of-school suspensions, one must ask whether administrators do dole out suspensions arbitrarily, unilaterally, and sometimes for the nebulous reasons more often called “insubordination” (Garibaldi, 1979, p.98). The comments from the National Association of Secondary School Principals and the response by Garibaldi in my reading of the article spoke to the ever raging debate that sees administrators stating that their hands are tied when it comes to suspending a disproportionate number of minority youth and the fact that most suspensions are a result of issues such as insubordination and truancy. He furthers points out that the dual goals of giving a student time to “cool off” and to reflect on the trouble they have caused may not be remembered, “because many students are sent home for problems that could have easily been solved by the teacher at school and because many suspensions are for truancy, tardiness or
cutting classes (Garibaldi, 1979, p.98). The author follows his latter assertion by stating that “[s]tudents are often the victims, but do not always deserve the blame; because of their own frustrations, teachers easily fall into the trap of using suspensions as an expedient response to a problem that they do not want to or are unable to handle (Garibaldi, 1979, p.98). The article also spoke to the need for school systems to distance themselves from a ‘prison’ atmosphere, “because some students interpret being escorted to the lavatories, which is done in some programs, as being tantamount to solitary confinement” (Garibaldi, 1979, p.102).

Contemporary Approaches

As mentioned previously responses to school violence have evolved into an ever present onslaught of physical and visual “protective” measures and strategically punitive policies that emphasize an ever-present reminder for students. A crowning achievement of such an atmosphere was the implementation of what has been deemed the zero tolerance policies. According to research conducted by Watts and Erevelles (2004),

“[t]he origin of zero tolerance policies can be traced to 1994, when the Republican-dominated Congress decided to get tough on crime. Although the new laws allow expulsion policies to be decided on a case-by-case basis, these laws have conferred on school officials the responsibility to enforce a rigid and sometimes unjust form of discipline in schools. In reality, zero tolerance policies go beyond weapons. They also include illegal drugs or drug paraphernalia. Like other policies that are designed to reduce crime in schools, such as the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994, the implementation of zero tolerance policies are viewed as giving schools new ways to justify the expulsion, exclusion, shaming and labelling of students who need professional help rather than punishment”(p.281).

In Canada, Ontario in particular, the Safe Schools Act 2000, “which amends sections of the Education Act” came about at a unique juncture and in the midst of a particular social and political climate of Ontario’s history (Daniel & Bondy, 2008). Although the term “zero tolerance” didn’t appear in the Act or in its amendments, certain parts mandated a tougher approach, which included mandatory suspension, expulsions and police involvement for certain infractions (Daniel & Bondy, 2008, p.6). In fact, the new amendments to the Act were “hailed as
tough measures to ensure school safety...” (Roher, 2007, p.203). Even prior to these amendments, however, boards such as the Toronto District School Board had already implemented similar measures, notably the Safe Schools Foundation Statement Policy, which had a zero tolerance likeness (Daniel & Bondy, 2008). Some commentators felt that “zero tolerance policies have become the episteme in an age of standardized solutions to complex issues” (Daniel & Bondy, 2008, p. 2).

Criticisms of the Safe Schools Act amendments were severe and aggressive to say the least. Ryan and Zoldy (2011) for example pointed out that though the overreliance on suspensions as a result of multiple factors did make some schools safer, “society was now dealing with youth who were alienated by school authorities” (Abstract section, para. 7). Having been a student to enter into high school as the Safe School amendments were implemented, my lived experience may illuminate some of the agreements and counter arguments being posited at this point of my paper. One of my major contentions with this Act at the time was the devastating effect it had on the group of friends that I had. Of a possible 14, only three graduated in the allotted time frame with a few, after being suspended or expelled, who bothered to get their high school diploma or GED equivalent. In saying this, I do not want the reader to believe that I, for a moment, hold these amendments to be the sole reason for what happened to the company I held at the time. I would however contend that the punitive nature and spirit, which the Act invoked, along with other socio-economic disadvantages, which my circle faced, were inextricably linked to their academic outcomes. My latter contentions are further supported by researchers who found that “[t]here is considerable anecdotal evidence that students of minority status backgrounds and males receive harsher consequences for transgressions, but there is no statistical data to support these claims” (Daniel & Bondy, 2008, p.13). It should be noted that statistical data is not available because the varying boards of education in Ontario argue that such data may be misinterpreted (Bhattacharjee, 2003).

Some years later, the Liberal government, after, what I would deem as, deplorable revelations about the Safe Schools Act (see Ontario Human Rights Commission Settlement, 2007), introduced Bill 212 (Roher, 2007). This Bill came on the heels of a culmination of
advocacy and literature that pointed to the noticeable need to “reduce out-of-school suspensions, which, unfortunately, can be highly correlated with negative outcomes and do little to prevent or correct student misconduct” (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011, Abstract section, para. 4). Bill 212, the Ontario Education Amendment Act, was passed in June 2007 with an adjustment period, which paved the way for full implementation in February of 2008 (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011, Abstract section, para. 2). According to Ryan and Zoldy (2011), the legislation was an attempt by Ontario’s Liberal majority government to reduce suspension rates, “prevent unsafe and inappropriate behaviours”, and to ensure that “disciplinary measures are corrective and supportive rather than punitive” (Abstract section, para. 2). In essence, it was “targeted at addressing the shortcomings of the Safe Schools Act 2000 by introducing more discretion”, but it also placed more of an “emphasis on progressive discipline” (Roher, 2007, p 203).

Criticism of these more recent amendments were summarized by Eric Roher (2007) whose article was entitled “Will the New Safe Schools Legislation Make Ontario Schools Safer?” and cast some doubt on the desired outcomes. Among the many arguments he posits a few that I find very insightful such as; the possibility of inconsistent application (p. 206), the time commitment required may bring about unwillingness to proceed with suspensions/suspension appeals/expulsions/expulsion hearings (p.209), vagueness in and application of the term ‘other factors’ (p.215-216), removal of principals’ right to expel may lead to inability of them to respond effectively to an incident (p.212), the need for more funding to support suspended and expelled student programs (p.215) and the undermining ability of the terms in progressive discipline (p.217-218). The overarching sentiment of this article spoke to the complexity and administrative workload of these amendments, which may “result in inconsistent application of school discipline” (Roher, 2007, p.221). Simply put “[i]t could result in different forms of discipline arising out of similar incidents” (Roher, 2007, p.221). The arguments put forth by Roher (2007) in his article are all worthy of independent analysis and should be taken into great consideration when trying to assess the effectiveness of these new amendments. That being said other researchers have found the “[l]egislation and its related reforms are a good start”... and have seen some progress since implementation (Ryan & Zoldy,
2011, Background section, para. 5). Other criticism of the relatively new legislation came by way of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers’ Federation which added that in-school suspensions may not be the best way to address some behaviours and that it will be difficult to strike a balance between individual rights and those of the collective community (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011, Abstract section, para. 8).

As eloquent as Roher’s arguments were there still remains the overwhelmingly disproportionate number of students that were adversely affected by the previous Act. To his credit however his insights are aimed squarely at the new amendments to the Education Act. However, it does little to speak to the devastating outcomes primarily experienced by minorities. The Safe School Amendments and its zero tolerance rhetoric did bring about some consistency, but it was not the kind of consistency that any school board should dare to parade as a success. The problem with zero tolerance policies is the assumption “that individuals act/transgress in a rational manner and based upon the premise that if the possibility that they get away with the transgression is zero, they will not do it” (Daniel & Bondy, 2008, p. 4). The latter argument assumes that subjects act on the basis of knowing the consequence and act accordingly within the limitations of the parameters set out by rules (Daniel & Bondy, 2008, p. 4). No matter the rationale for or against the fundamental tenants of the Act, the outcomes will always have the final marker of success. Bhattacherjee’s report (2003), which was conducted on behalf of the Ontario Human Rights Commission, found since the implementation of the Safe School Act, there has been a marked increase in the number of students with disabilities that were being suspended and expelled. According to Ryan & Zoldy (2011) such a revelation is ironic since these are the students that should be, by policy standards, on the receiving end of the most support (Ineffective: Out-of-School Suspension section, para 5).

As previously mentioned outcomes south of the border speak to a more nuanced outlook on the issues of zero tolerance and its outcomes. One of the most prestigious reports on this topic entitled “Opportunities Suspended: the Devastating Consequences of Zero Tolerance and School Discipline Policies 2000” was conducted by the Civil Rights Project at Harvard University (Bhattacherjee, 2003). After analysing several decades of data on school discipline, it
was concluded that minority students are disproportionately impacted by these policies, which in most cases are an, “overzealous approach taken in the name of promoting safety” (Daniel & Bondy 2008, p. 5). Within this the “Report argued that school admin in most cases failed to apply the discretionary clauses provided in the legislation and policies” (Daniel & Bondy 2008, p. 5). The report also found:

“The following points about the application of zero tolerance: it conflicts with the healthy developmental needs of children, particularly students at-risk; there are long-term detrimental consequences for the child; there is a need for high quality alternative education programs; there is increased criminalization of children; it has not reduced violence or increased safety in schools; and some schools are defying the status quo by creating a safe environment with a low number of disciplinary referrals.” (Bhattacharjee, 2003)

The above comments are one of the well-documented revelations that is closely associated to the outcomes of zero tolerance policies in the school being associated to the prison pipeline. Casella (as cited in Daniel & Bondy, 2008, p.5) argues that, “zero tolerance strengthened the link between schools and prisons that began a century ago with the development of truant officers.” The Advancement Project (AP), a legal action organization, argued that the essence of the link between schools and jails rests in the linkages being made in order to impose twice the punishment on offending students. They are first suspended or expelled and then are referred to juvenile court for further punishment (AP, 2005). Further barriers to success arise when students attempt to go onto post-secondary education, apply for jobs or to even volunteer their time in the community. In Toronto, Canada one of the major newspapers has conducted an investigative report that culminated in a series of articles that spoke to suspensions and expulsions (AP, 2005). Put succinctly, The National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (AP, 2005) contends that the school to prison pipeline speaks to “various policies, collectively referred to as the school-to-prison pipeline, which push children out of school and hasten their entry into the juvenile, and eventually the criminal justice system, where prison is the end of the road.”
The latter sentiments and their related circumstances is addressed in an article by staff reporters Sandro Contenta and Jim Rankin (2009a, The Toronto Star) entitled “Suspended sentences: Forging a school–to-prison pipeline?” In the article the authors spoke of some questionable practices that were leaving some students symbolically and literally in limbo (Contenta & Rankin, 2009a). According to these Star reporters some students are being expelled and left off the stats sheet because only, “one in 10 suspensions qualify for an alternative program” (Contenta & Rankin, 2009a). Some principals are not providing the programs that work for the students, and some principals set the criteria to return to regular day school so high that some students never reach them and thus have to contend with where they are (Contenta & Rankin, 2009a). Another article in the series entitled “Are Schools too quick to Suspend” (2009b) addressed other elements in this complex area of interest. For example, Executive Superintendent of the Toronto District School Board, Melanie Parrack contends that more money is needed to hire additional support staff workers. The article also found that, “[w]hile some argue principals are too quick to suspend, teachers think otherwise” (Contenta & Rankin, 2009b). Doug Jolliffe, president of the Toronto branch of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation argues that, “[t]here is a feeling among many of my members that they don’t suspend quickly enough” (Contenta & Rankin, 2009b). Reflecting on these findings one would assume that Roher (2007) was correct. I would contend that by the consistent inability of the school system to affectively address difficult behaviours what would be gained by opening up the avenues for principals and teachers to suspend at will. This is not to downplay the tremendously stressful and demanding occupation that these admirable professionals face, but I for one, believe that the students that are the first out the door are the ones that need that door opened the most.

School Resource Officers

In addition to the thoughts mentioned in the above paragraph I would argue that the use of police in the public education system is also worthy of some debate. Though their title has changed time and again over the years, the presence of uniformed police officers is visually
present in some education systems. In the Toronto District School Board, for example, they are placed in various schools across the city and are recognized under the title of School Resource Officers. In an article entitled “School Resource Security Officers Public Protection Officers in Public Schools” author Christopher McNicholas (n.d.) provides readers with an overview of the history behind the use of police officers in the Public Education system. According to his research the presence of police officers in schools began in Flint, Michigan in 1953 (McNicholas, History section, n.d.). Since then, they have emerged in varying districts under varying job titles such as “juvenile detectives” and “juvenile tactical officers” (McNicholas, History section, n.d.). Through his research of the topic McNicholas found that some of the primary duties of the School Resource Officers (SROs) include: (1) acting as informants when the information they receive could be used to deter a crime, (2) develop a rapport with youth so they could act as informants, (3) prevent crime by finding and “solving problems before they erupt into violence”, (4) to effectively communicate to parents, teachers and administrators around issues of their role in the school (McNicholas, Function section, n.d.). Curt Lavarello (as cited in McNicholas, History section, n.d.) who was the Executive Director of the National Association of School Resource Officers believes there are three main functions for SROs. They include being “[a]rmed Police Officers with the powers of arrest, [c]ounselors of law-related issues and [t]eachers of the Law (either classes or presentations)” (McNicholas, History section, n.d.). McNicholas argued, “[S]chool Resource Officers also act as a visual deterrent to crime, their uniforms acting as a beacon to criminals and non-students” (McNicholas, Job Description section, n.d.).

Despite improvements thanks to the SROs, he asserts, “[t]eachers, normally in the authoritative position in the classroom, may have trouble subordinating themselves in times of crisis and police officers may have trouble subordinating themselves in times of peace to educational personnel” (McNicholas, Arguments section, n.d.). On this subject he concludes by stating that though both “demand compliance with rules and behaviours, it may cause conflict when one demands compliance of the other” (McNicholas, Arguments section, n.d.). In my reading of such an open-ended clause, it would suggest that in such a situation compliance
should be given to the professional whose job it is to regulate compliance. Another area of contention that is posited is the, “loss of student rights and an interference with the educational process” (McNicholas, Arguments section, n.d.). Of this he says that, “[s]tudents may become distracted or even afraid when they see police in schools, which is a problem seeing as schools are a place of learning” (McNicholas, Arguments section, n.d.). This statement he leaves as an open-ended clause with no direction as to how such an area of contention could be addressed. Noguera (as cited in Watts & Erevelles, 2004) argues the presence of SROs and other visible security measures ultimately supports, “an underlying philosophical orientation toward social control that exacts a heavy toll on students, teachers and the entire school community”(p. p.272) He concludes his article by stating that “not everyone can agree on all topics” but “anyone who doubts the effectiveness or need for in-school police officers surely has not looked at the evidence” (McNicholas, Conclusion section, n.d.). The arguments posited by McNicholas were not based on any empirically studied or critically analyzed data. Waller, (2006) in his assessment of SROs, found, “that the independent scientific evaluations have not confirmed that these activities have any impact on reducing crime” and “[e]ven if they had reduced [the presence of some crime], one can only wonder whether it would not be more cost-effective to pay professional teachers to undertake these tasks” (Waller 2006, p.38).

In some jurisdictions across North America the ongoing shift towards a penal-like system has included a number of different measures. Watts and Erevelles (2004) argued that these measures present a dynamic psyche shift to one,

“where students feel that they are being confined and watched by security guards and reflect Foucault’s conceptualization of the panopticon that makes surveillance intrinsic to daily life. This is especially evident in poor urban schools, where the organization of the security guards, school safety officers and police officers has become a vibrant paramilitary force that is relatively independent of the school’s administrative staff” (p.283).

In school boards across Ontario the presence of School Resource Officers are becoming more present (Ruck and Wortley, 2002). Using the Toronto District School Board to provide a localized context for the School Resource Officers one can gain a better understanding of such a
program from a Board perspective. According to a Toronto District School Board (2008) correspondence “[t]he primary focus of the SRO Initiative is to develop and enhance safe and caring school relationships and programs with students, school staff, parents and partnership members.” Their duties include; “[b]eing visible and active in the school community, [p]roviding information and education on programs to support positive outcomes for students, [and p]articipating on the School Council and other school and community associations” (Toronto District School Board, 2008). Their overall aim is to “work with students to develop action plans and programs, aimed at reducing victimization, improving reporting and preventing crime and violence” (Toronto District School Board, 2008).

According to TDSB Director of Education, Gerry Connelly, “SROs are an additional program resource that will support a school environment that is safe and caring. We said we would make a difference and we are (Toronto District School Board, 2008).” Connelly also emphasized that, “[t]his partnership is an extraordinary opportunity to nurture and enhance positive relationships among students, staff and the wider school community (Toronto District School Board, 2008).” The Chief of Police also gave his public endorsement of the initiative by stating that the overarching goal of the program is to make schools safer through the proactive approach centered on the building of healthy relationships (Toronto District School Board, 2008). In addition, to attain such a goal, “this can only be accomplished if we develop and maintain a respectful and trusting relationship with all our partners” (Toronto District School Board, 2008). McNicholas’ contentions and the reflections here are by no means mirror reflections of each other, however, they somewhat paint a portrait of how SROs are presented and how they are enacted in schools across North America. Researchers Watts and Erevelles (2004) point out that “[s]tudents are gradually introduced to the tactics and practices that police officers use in handling street criminals”( p.283). My thoughts outlined in this section and the latter quote are not to suggest that I have an outright aversion to SROs, I would ask the question, however, could those dollars be used more efficiently?
The Issue of Truancy

As mentioned elsewhere in this thesis suspensions and expulsions can have significant negative impact on the lives of many students. Some researchers have pointed to disciplinary policies being too punitive in nature, which could be contributing to, “the ineffective practice of suspension, particularly when applied to minor behavioural infractions” (Fenning et al. 2012, p.106). In an effort to verify the latter assertion, a team of university-based discipline policy researchers and education professionals conducted an analysis of 120 disciplinary policies from across six states. In their research they address, through a coding system, the differences in reactive, proactive natural consequences. In their analysis of the above-mentioned policies they found that there were three types of consequences found in almost all policies. The three types include, reactive, proactive and natural environment. According to their findings:

“Reactive consequences were defined as traditional consequences that were punitive in nature and ranged from minor (e.g., those that did not involve removal from classroom, such as detention) to severe (e.g., those that involved school removal, such as suspension or expulsion). Proactive responses were those that involved some semblance of a teaching component without explicit use of punishment, and were further rated as global (e.g., parent or teacher conference) versus those that provided explicit instruction in alternative responses (e.g., peer mediation, substance abuse counselling)... Natural environmental consequences were described as those that did not involve explicit teaching of expected behaviours (e.g., direct skill-building), but were also not punitive in nature (e.g., suspension, expulsion)” (Fenning et al., 2012, p. 110-111)

Fenning et al. after conducting this content analysis of written policies found that most measures which were written with a proactive spirit were not being actualized. According to their findings these policies did more to spread punitive responses even in cases of minor infractions (Fenning et al. 2012, p.107). According to the research team “[o]f the three consequences they found that reactive was most commonly used and suspension and expulsions” (p. 110-112). In my reading of such findings it is interesting to note that though the spirit of the policies were meant to be proactive the outcomes turn to punitive measures to bring about desired results. This beckons the question of who stands to gain from such policies and regardless of a possible restructuring would the outcomes change?
It should be noted that researchers in the United States conducted this content analysis. It was noted by the researchers that policies being analyzed in this research did not necessarily reflect what was actually done in practice (p.112).

**Chapter Six Conclusion**

One of the most overlooked factors about the public school system is that it has been one of the safest spaces in modern day society (Waller, 2006). Though ideological shifts have occurred overtime in how to maintain or bolster such a phenomenal fact, one that serves to perpetuate a system of disadvantage for racialized and marginalized students is the creation of a penal system like environment (Bhattacharjee, 2003; Daniel & Bondy, 2008; Waller, 2006; Contenta & Rankin, 2009; Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). Maintaining structure and discipline is one thing but to militarize a school system for the sake of relationship building is the wrong answer to for this complex problem (Garibaldi, 1979; Davis, 2003; Bhattacharjee, 2003; Watts & Erevelles, 2004). In reading the above comments it is important to mention that I do not want to minimize the earnest attempts of some School Boards and the varying Police Departments for wanting to bridge the divide between youth and police. However, with the widely documented discrepancy in policing tactics (Ruck and Wortley, 2002) and punitive policies that serve as a gross disadvantage to a particular student population; one can only wonder what will be the gains and losses with the presence of School Resource Officers in school environments. Similarly, some administrators and teachers alike would contend that it helps to have the ability to remove the worst rule breakers because this allows a school to maintain order (Daniel & Bondy, 2008). According to researchers, however, approaches to school discipline need to be equitable, socially responsible, holistic and use programs as a tool to bolster protective factors rather than to banish disruptive students (Garibaldi, 1979; Bhattacharjee, 2003; Watts & Erevelles, 2004; Daniel & Bondy, 2008; Waller, 2006; Contenta & Rankin, 2009; Ryan & Zoldy, 2011, Fenning et al, 2012).

This chapter and its components attempted to posit a nuanced view of the widely documented responses to school violence. I think that it is quite clear that further analysis must
be conducted at multiple sites. Nevertheless the primary purpose of this chapter was to give an insight to the strategies and outcomes implemented as a response to school violence. A major area of conflict in the section is synthesized in the assertion that, “[w]hen the social control of students is given higher priority than learning and the mechanisms for controlling students are sanctioned by state boards of education, structural violence is [and will continue to be] present” (Watts & Erevelles, 2004, p.281)
CHAPTER SEVEN: WHAT ARE MY CHOICES? : A GLANCE AT ALTERNATIVES TO SUSPENSION/EXPULSION PROGRAMS

Chapter Introduction

In this chapter I will attempt to outline for the reader a selected few of the intervention strategies that have all shown varying signs of success in different educational settings. It should be noted that most of these strategies have not been rigorously tested for their effectiveness. It should also be noted that depending on the setting and resources, if not implemented effectively, outcomes could work against the programs’ best intentions. Those contentions aside, the research is clear that suspensions and expulsions do not work for everyone, in particularly for those with whom they were designed for (Bear, 2012, Chin et al, 2012, Garibaldi, 1987). It is also clear that when you are able to meet the needs of the most vulnerable in our population they can in turn reach the goals that they have set out for themselves (Garibaldi 1979, Watts & Erevelles 2004, Ryan & Zoldy 2011). Another important point to take note of is presented in a straight and direct way by researcher Garibaldi (1979). He argued:

“In-school alternatives to suspension [should] not just [be] another set of programs for the “disadvantaged” - which usually implies the non-white and poor members of the student body. The OCR and CDF (see Garibaldi, 1979) surveys demonstrate that non-white, especially black, students are suspended disproportionately, for a longer period of time and for less uniform reasons than white students. The concern [here] is whether these types of alternative programs are another way of pushing students out of the regular classroom. If the referral process is not well defined, some teachers may use the alternative program instead of handling problems in the classroom.” (p.101)

Put simply, if these alternative programs are misused by faculty they may work as a further barrier to integration for students already deemed problematic, disruptive and unmanageable. Finally these programs are not meant to replace innovative teachers’ training courses. I would argue that the best space and place for any kind of behavioural modification techniques is in a classroom. The most effective teachers, in my opinion, know and can recognize when a child needs to leave the class to regroup, but they also know that within all classroom interaction resides a teachable moment for all of their pupils.
To resolve such a problem I would advise school administrators to add a clause stating that if a teacher uses the program on a consistent basis, work needs to be done on one of two fronts. This teacher should, with the help of school administrators explore varying alternatives to strengthen their ability to provide in the class behavioural modification techniques. In addition to ongoing assessments and plans of action should be put in place for any student who continues to be a repeat visitor to the program. From my understanding of the research conducted for this thesis such a plan should include assessing and implementing strategies that would help to meet the student’s educational, social and psychological needs.

Program Possibilities

In most cases alternatives to suspension programs take one or a combination of the following three strategies. The three strategies according to Saunter (2001) include:

(1) Universal Strategies: 85 to 90 per cent of all students respond appropriately to the school-wide disciplines system when the following are provided: social skill instruction; positive, proactive, discipline techniques; teaching and modeling of behaviour expectations; active supervision; positive reinforcement systems; and firm, fair and corrective consequences.

(2) Selected Strategies: 7 to 10 per cent of students will respond better to classroom and small-group strategies that include intensive social skill instruction, self-management programs, adult mentors and increased academic support.

(3) Targeted or Intensive Strategies: 3 to 5 per cent of students will require individualized interventions based on functional behavioural assessments such as intensive social skill instruction, individual behaviour management plans, parent collaboration and additional service providers.

Positive Behaviour Supportive Interventions

The Positive Behaviour Supportive Interventions (PBIS) as outlined by Chin et al. (2012) appear to utilize elements of all three of the abovementioned strategies. According to Chin et al. (2012) PBIS works similar to the way students learn other skills which is “teaching
appropriate behaviours and setting forth clear behaviour guidelines and expectations” (Chin et al., 2012, p.160). Features present in PBIS include:

1. Universally adopted, consistently applied, well-defined expectations of behaviour
2. Staff and students who are informed/trained on these expectations
3. A reward system for students’ appropriate behaviours
4. Additional intensive supports to address student needs in addition to systematic universal, school-wide procedures. (Chin et al., 2012, p.160)

Several integral components specific to the PBIS program that Chin et al. (2012) assessed are also noteworthy for this discourse. They include “a social–emotional curriculum… which covered topics such as anger management, emotional regulation, problem solving and strategies to deal with and prevent bullying” (p.162). When a contract with the student is broken, parents are called in and a collaborative plan for intervention is created and implemented (p.163). Counselling to identify issues facing the student, parent supports to aid with the student’s behaviour, debriefing and reflection assignments, as well as interviews and observation sessions were also important to creating the best possible solution for students (p.164 -p.165). According to their research findings it is suggested PBIS interventions lead to “a reduction in office disciplinary referrals and suspension rates… decrease in infractions related to both physical and verbal conflict… improvements in knowledge related to conflict resolution and problem solving” (p.160). Additionally, the findings demonstrated that “[o]f the nine students receiving specific activities from the ATS program, two of these students (22 per cent) each had a re-offense of suspension and seven (78 per cent) did not” (p.167)

**An All Hands on Deck Alternative**

Another approach to suspensions and one of the most impressive that I came across in my research surrounding this topic was outlined in an article entitled “An Alternative Approach to School Suspension: The Dothan Model” and was written by Greg Frith, Jimmy Lindsey and Jack Sasser in 1980. In the article they spoke of a radical approach to school disciplinary practices that a school system in Dothan, Alabama underwent with a relatively small enrolment
of 9,745 students (p.637). Over the course of a year they went from 878 suspensions in 1976-77 to three the following school year, 1977-78, and 10 the subsequent school year, 1978-79 (p.637).

Their approach to intervention in order to accomplish this transformation was fivefold. Interventions for them involved these key areas:

1. Modification of unacceptable behaviour - To modify the behaviour of delinquent students in such a way as to allow them to function successfully in the regular classroom.
2. Counselling - To provide students with an opportunity to better understand the nature of their personal problems through individual and group counselling.
3. Instruction - To provide students with an opportunity to continue their regular academic work while being disciplined.
4. Attendance - To allow students to attend school while experiencing a period of behavioural adjustment.
5. Communication - To formulate a solution to the student’s behaviour problem through conferences of all concerned: the parent(s), teacher, counsellor, student and other appropriate individuals. (Frith et al., 1980 p. 637)

All students of the school system were eligible to attend the program (p.638). and referrals came via classroom teachers and automatically for unexcused absences, smoking, fighting or insubordination and weapons (p.638). The location of the program was next to the main office and students were able to complete school work while in the program (p.638). Students were prohibited from any extracurricular activities while taking part in the program (p.638). Program staff included a former “coach who ha[d] his/her elementary/secondary certification in physical education and a fulltime counsellor” (p.638). A crisis counsellor, also hired, worked with students who were referred a second or third time to provide more intensive support (p.638). Other important aspects of the program included: record keeping to keep track of behavioural shifts, recorded descriptions of teacher-student interactions, conference with parents and periodical student progress evaluation sessions (p.638). One of the consequences of the program that I was greatly disappointed to see was after three referrals students were referred to juvenile court and had to have a parent conference upon return to school (p.638). Though my professional and personal motivations are my driving my
thoughts about this aspect of the program, research, in particular Waller’s (2006) and Schissel’s (2003) works, would both agree that introduction to the justice system would without a doubt do more harm than good.

It should also be noted that, “[t]hough assignment may be temporary, the cumulative effects of stigma and lower self-esteem, together with a subjective view by the student that justice is not distributed equally might lead to (1) dropping out or eventual exclusion from school, (2) a potential label as juvenile delinquent, and possibly (3) another statistic in the already dismal teen-age unemployment pool” (Garibaldi, 1979, P101-102).

The RISE Program

The Respect in Schools Everywhere (RISE) is a bullying and dating violence prevention program. As I speak to the program it should be noted that I spent several years working in various capacities for the RISE program. So while I do not know everything about the program I can speak to some of the components that I had the privilege of experiencing. It should also be noted that since this program is a privately owned program I will limit my thoughts to the information provided on the website.

The program is premised on the fact that youth are the experts in their lives (Rise Above Violence, n.d.). The program tackles issues such as bullying, dating violence and harassment and works with students from grades 7 through 12 (Rise Above Violence, n.d.). The sad reality, as pointed out on the website (n.d.), is that “approximately 50 per cent of all students experience bullying, 75 per cent of youth experience sexual harassment and 25 to 35 per cent report experiencing dating violence” (Why RISE? section, n.d.). During the development of the program, heavy emphasis was placed on the year, which saw the greatest spike in bullying incidences, the grades 8 and 9 years (Why RISE? section, n.d.). The program engages elementary schools with pro-social and not so pro-social grade 11 and 12 students in an attempt to transform the lives of the students in their age bracket but more importantly the grades that
fall under them. We arm these young leaders with information pertaining to statistics, workshop information, de-escalation techniques and effective conversation management techniques to name a few and then ask them to spread this message to their younger counterparts. The program also recognizes that “when given an opportunity, youth have a great deal to contribute to their community, and that when youth speak, other youth listen” (What We Believe section, n.d.). Studies conducted on the program revealed “[r]ates of bullying victimization among students also declined after receiving the RISE program, and suspension rates also declined in RISE schools from 17 per cent to 4.6 per cent from the first to second year of the program” (RISE Research, n.d.).

Chapter Seven Conclusion

The primary aim of all of these programs is to create an environment of learners who understand expectations, but also equipped with the knowledge to effectively navigate moments of tension whenever or wherever they may occur. Through the research completed for this thesis and the work that I have outlined here it is my hope that this information will be beneficial in creating a roadmap to navigate this area of school policy. Ultimately, students need to have their needs met, the need to feel wanted and to be inspired. This should be the goal of the public education system and the core tenet to any disciplinary response program. Failure to live up to these basic tenants will, without a doubt, ultimately mean failing to help some of the most vulnerable of our future citizens.

Given the sheer magnitude of research findings presented in the thesis, several conclusions regarding effective disciplinary programs were repetitive. The first is that the most effective programs seek, on some level, to engage all students. Research findings suggest when a student is armed with information about protecting themselves or their fellow students this can only help to bolster a more positive school ethos (Rise Above Violence, n.d.). One area which many of the programs that I encountered did not specifically address was the role of the bystander(s). In my professional practice as a program staff for the RISE program we often
spoke at great lengths of the very important role onlookers play while incidences of bullying take place. In such a situation providing a student with positive and safe ways to intervene allows them to be the agents of change. Secondly programs must be prepared to work with the most hard to serve youth and in part be ready for resistance. How does a teacher who oversees a behavioural modification site handle a student who lashes out or at them without physically touching them? Thirdly, any teacher, assistant staff, counsellor or volunteer attached to any type of disciplinary program needs to be a trained, seasoned and skilled educator. Research suggests that such an educator needs to be someone who has a high tolerance level, an unswerving commitment to the needs and problems of students, culturally competent, well-versed in crisis management training, competent in many subject areas and does well to respond to issues of inequality (Garibaldi, 1979; Watts & Erevelles, 2004). The importance of parent involvement cannot be stressed enough. When a parent is actively involved in the life of a young person, their opportunities for continuous growth is almost certain (Morrison & Vaandering). It should be noted by the reader however, that the parents of the most hard to serve youth that schools encounter may have multiple barriers to contend with as well. Whether that reason may be financial, psychological, or a lack of parental skills or even denial of the problem, such barriers could further complicate parental involvement. Though solutions are not discussed in the thesis, barriers to bridging the school-family divide may hinder a student’s ability to grow up within an ecological perceptive. My recommendation for the reader would be to seek scholarship that would help to inform ways to strengthen the aforementioned divide. Finally, the staff must ultimately want to be a part of a student’s transformation. I think it is fair to say that students attend school for a plethora of reasons, but teachers are there by choice. When a teacher chooses to not to work through a challenging incident with a student, but instead enacts some form of disciplinary action against that student on multiple occasions chances are that student will perceive that relationship as a broken relationship. If this happens often enough and with multiple members of a school faculty, one day that student will turn their back on the system and try something else. That said, no teacher is perfect, nor is any system known to humankind, but when a teaching staff or board makes a concentrated effort as was outlined by the Dothan board, nothing except the sheer determined will of a child to fail could stop such a movement.
CHAPTER EIGHT: ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

The conditions that we live in today are best described by the words of Vorassi and Garbarino as (as cited in Watts & Erevelles, 2004) ‘socially toxic’ (p.290). These toxins “represent the degree to which the social, political and economic conditions have become harmful to people” (p.290-291). They include, “… community violence, child abuse, domestic violence, family disruption, poverty, despair, depression, reception, paranoia, alienation and other social pollutants that demoralize families and destroy communities” (p.290-291). Enter the public education system, that is in essence to be the great equalizer. Its goal to educate the future citizen in a way that is fair, just and equal for all. There is a road block however which appears in the form of the deviant unrelenting student. For every problem however there must be a solution.

The contentious debate around the issue of suspensions and expulsions, in my opinion, is an area that has tremendous potential for circumventing a number of the world’s current and future ills. It would be an ecological fallacy to presume that by finding an innovative alternative solution to suspensions would bring about such gains as mentioned above but what could such an alternative do? From the beginning of this journey to this point we have encountered a number of noteworthy viewpoints and statistics while other revelations left questions around what lies ahead for this continent as well as the world. Nevertheless, we have learnt that hurting children, hurt children and that those hurting children have been victims at some point in their life. We have learnt that students that are more often suspended or expelled, in most cases do not take it as a punishment and when we send them away they often return to the unconstructive environment that they are reared in. It is obvious that the use of suspensions and expulsions by school administrators and teachers are consciously or unconsciously having a detrimental effect on racialized and marginalized students. Additionally, no matter what is written within a particular legislation, frontline administrators and teachers will ultimately define the fate of the students we place in their care. We also understand such a transformation as effectively reducing the number of suspended students cannot be seen as an overarching solution to delinquency or criminality because these problems are routed in complexity of an intrinsically racist human social existence. I would contend however that a transformation in one of the most
powerful meaning making entities, discipline practises within the school system, in a child’s life can only reverberate outward.

The above introduction is important because it presents an important contextual landscape to my analysis of this debate. As Bear points out, “[t]oo often, advocates of… alternatives [to suspensions] fail to recognize why suspension is valued by educators, while also making the mistake of advocating for alternatives that have their own limitations and share the same aim of suspension obedience and compliance” (Bear, 2012, p.174). He further concluded that “[i]nstead of advocating for the elimination of the use of suspension[s], it might be wiser for researchers to advocate for a combination of evidence-based techniques (both positive and punitive) that not only prevent and reduce behaviour problems but also foster self-discipline and a positive school climate” (p.174). The issue with this seemingly centrist argument is that the aim to which Bear (2012) contends is necessary, is the need for enforced rules and a positive atmosphere to foster self-discipline. As you may recall I entered into this debate stating that there is nowhere else in society that the business of meaning making is as central as it is in the public education system. Bear’s (2012) argument of self-discipline essentially suggests that students must ascribe to a submissive role and externally imposed rules, failing which, they shall suffer the consequences.

Such an argument is reflective of an attitude that suggests that students who do not comply with rules are deserving of the consequences. From a CRT perspective such arguments remove ownership of the social disadvantages and power inequality faced by racialized and marginalized students. Additionally, when those in power, such as administrators, draft a set of rules that the less powerful, students, are asked to adhere to, this does nothing to disrupt intrinsically racist hierarchies that remain present within the public education system. These hierarchies ultimately help to delineate between the socially constructed ‘good’ student and ‘deviant’ student. Moreover they help to “perpetuate the subjection to the ruling-class ideology by teaching conformity through rudimentary education” (Watts & Erevelles, 2004, p.286). Scholars such as Bear and others, well intended as their conclusions may be, fail to acknowledge the debilitating role “structural violence [plays] in the daily lives of oppressed
people” (Watts & Erevelles, 2004, p.286). Additionally racialized and marginalized students are forced to take part in a public education system where they are continually being exposed to: racism, stereotyping, streaming, differential treatment, non-relevant curriculum and unfair disciplinary practices (Community Health Systems Resource Group, 2005). Any system that fails to address the latter factors is looking at this issue through a blurred lens. Recommendations towards a more humane and equitable system do exist. Research suggests these recommendations could include: smaller schools, cooperative learning programs, full-service schools, curriculum reform, cooperative development of discipline policies and nurturing a culture of professional development (Watts & Erevelles, 2004; Community Health Systems Resource Group, 2005).

The presence and devastating effect of racism in the public education system is an undeniable reality. Such a reality, ultimately, is responsible for the presence of varying external oppressions, curriculum disadvantages, cultural disadvantages, teacher engagement disadvantages, a recognition of differential treatment and being suspended for minor infractions. Watts and Erevelles (2004), as do I, advocate that a transformation not a reform is needed. As such the transformation they argue must seek to improve on pedagogical practice while implementing a more culturally relevant curricular content and to “nurture the resiliency of oppressed students” (Watts & Erevelles, 2004, p.294). If the aim of the public education system is to nurture healthier, smarter, critical thinkers and effective leaders in all avenues of our society and to have substantial returns for more strategic investments, then the arguments in this paragraph cannot be ignored. As daunting as the task may be, finding and implementing effective solutions for the public education system that best fit the needs and societal disadvantages of diverse learners must be addressed. What is promising is that some public education boards across varying districts are making an attempt to provide evidence-based strategic approaches to address the abovementioned deficits in current approaches. It is my opinion that the outcome for students, school systems, as well as society, will only stand to benefit from such efforts.
REFERENCES


70


Education Act, R.S.O. (1990), c. E. 2.


Memorandum of Settlement between the Ontario Human Rights Commission and Her Majesty the Queen in the Rights of Ontario as Represented by the Minister of Education, (April 10, 2007).


