CHOOSING THE ARTS: EXCLUSION AND ADVANTAGE IN THE EDUCATIONAL MARKETPLACE

by

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ABSTRACT

Situated within Toronto's expanding and increasingly segregated educational marketplace, this study examines how parents of students at one elite publicly funded specialized arts high school make meaning of their school choice decision. Utilizing a Neo-Marxist framework, I explore the role that material and symbolic resources play in making this school choice both available and exclusive. I conduct a critical discourse analysis of parent narratives to expose how they mobilize dominant discourses of the arts in order to produce the school as a good choice, and themselves as good parents. This research challenges dominant conceptions of the arts in education by showing how the arts are used to reinforce, obscure, and justify existing social hierarchies in school settings and society at large. This study further serves as an example of how arts education research can move beyond positivist conceptions of the arts.
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CHAPTER ONE:

Inequality and Choice in Toronto Schools

While various educational measuring sticks—high school graduation rates, per capita college graduates, and standardized tests, for example—point to high overall educational achievement in Toronto schools, recent reports by the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) (Sinay, 2010), Social Planning Toronto (Johnston, Sinclair, French, Dyson, & Wilson, 2011), and People for Education (2013) reveal that not all types of students are benefitting equally in Canada’s largest urban centre. This maldistribution of schooling opportunities mirrors Toronto’s growing income polarization, as well as the systematic shifting and clustering of particular socioeconomic status (SES) groups throughout Toronto’s sprawling urban/suburban geography.

Drawing on 35 years of census data, David Hulchanski’s Three Cities Report (2010) provides a comprehensive overview of this phenomenon, and details some alarming trends: from 1970-2005, the percentage of Toronto neighbourhoods classified as “low income” increased from 19% to 53%, while the percentage of “middle income” neighbourhoods plummeted from 66% to 29%. Moreover, poverty in Toronto—which some researchers estimate affects nearly a quarter of the city’s total population (Johnston et al., 2013)—has shifted from Toronto’s inner core to its inner suburbs, where there is relatively poor access to public transit and other public services (Hulchanski, 2010). Since the vast majority of Toronto public schools draw their student

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1 “Middle income” neighbourhoods are those census tracks with an average individual income 20% below to 20% above the Toronto CMA average income. “High income” neighbourhoods are those census tracks with an average individual income >20% above the Toronto CMA average income, while “low income” neighbourhoods are those census tracks with an average individual income <20% below the Toronto CMA average.
base from the surrounding catchment area,\(^2\) the TDSB displays similar patterns of clustering along SES lines.

In their most recent annual report, People for Education (2013) highlights the stark and alarming differences between low-income (LI) and high-income (HI) schools\(^3\) throughout the province of Ontario: the average parental income at LI schools is $44,455 compared with $152,773 at HI schools; 31% of students at LI schools come from single parent homes versus 12% of students in HI schools; and parents of children at LI schools are seven times as likely to not have a high school diploma, and more than twice as likely not to have a university degree, than parents of students at HI schools. Additionally, LI schools educate a disproportionately high percentage—and HI schools, a disproportionately low percentage—of recent immigrants (12% to 3%), aboriginal students (5% to 1%), students with special educational needs (25% to 13%), English Language Learners (10% to 4%) and students who speak a first language other than English (35% to 13%). These province-wide segregation patterns are further exaggerated in the City of Toronto, home to 50% of Ontario children living in poverty (Johnston et al., 2011). What makes these statistics especially disconcerting is the fact that each of the above categories is an indicator of students who are most likely to struggle in, and eventually get pushed out of, high school (see Curtis, Livingstone, & Smaller, 1992; Dei, Mazzuca, McIsaac, & Zine, 1997; People for Education, 2013; Sinay, 20107).

The resulting imbalance in the concentration of parental resources shapes the types of programs and opportunities offered to students throughout the district. A 2011 study by Social Planning Toronto revealed that the 20 secondary schools with the lowest scores on the Learning

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\(^2\) The area of a city or town from which a school’s students are drawn.

\(^3\) In this study, low income (LI) schools are defined as the 10% of schools in Ontario with the lowest average family incomes, while “high income schools” are defined as the 10% of schools in Ontario with the highest average family incomes.
Opportunities Index (LOI)—an index that ranks schools according to external challenges that affect student success, where the school with the most external challenges is ranked highest on the index—raise, per school, approximately 1000 times more private funds than the 20 schools with the highest LOI scores in the district (Johnston et al., 2013). With this additional pool of private funds, schools with low LOI scores can charge additional fees in order to provide enriched classroom-based, and extracurricular, opportunities to their students. On the other hand, students at schools with high LOI scores are now significantly disadvantaged at home, where they often lack access to basic necessities, and at their public school, where there is an absence of funds directed toward educational opportunities.

This combination of extreme income polarization, geographic clustering of SES groups, and private funds in the public system, results in vastly unequal schooling opportunities that reinforce and amplify existing disparities. If these trends continue, as Hulchanski’s *Three Cities Report* (2010) suggests, the crisis of inequity in Toronto public schooling—and in Toronto in general—will continue to increase.

**Educational Markets and Unequal Opportunities**

Prior to the early 1990s, publicly funded religious schools served as the chief alternative to catchment area public schools in the City of Toronto (Davies & Aurini, 2011). However, as school choice initiatives gained popularity throughout the United States (see Belfield & Levin 2002; Chubb & Moe, 1997; Hess, 2009; Merrifield, 2008), an increasing number of Canadian educational stakeholders began reproducing similar lines of arguments, calling for an equivalent market expansion in Canada (see Hepburn, 2001; Robson & Hepburn, 2002).

The movement toward greater school choice within an ever-expanding educational marketplace is one fraught with controversy. Coming from a variety of ideological positions,
proponents believe that each and every family deserves the opportunity to choose an education that best addresses their personal needs and desires. Invoking a neoliberal logic of choice (Giroux, 2011), they argue that the free market is most likely to promote educational equality, lead to equitable treatment of all students, and result in a more even distribution of “quality” across schools (Chubb & Moe, 1997). Schools are expected to work harder to attract and keep the best possible students, while families, in return, are believed to match this work ethic in order to gain admittance to, and stay enrolled in, the best possible schools (Coleman, 1992; Minter Hoxby, 2003). The presumed result is a reorganization of incentives—the replacement of “current [school] stratification by income and race [with] a stratification based on students’ performance and behavior” (Coleman, 1992, p. 260).

At the moment, the TDSB offers choice to families through course level selection (e.g., Academic and Applied courses), specialized schools (e.g., Arts, Entrepreneurship, and Integrated Technology schools), and specialized programs within traditional schools (e.g., Cyber Arts, Athletics, International Baccalaureate, and French Immersion programs). However, recent data on Ontario postsecondary schools suggests that the current divide between “applied” and “academic” courses mirrors the controversial high school streaming practices of the 1980s and 1990s (see Curtis, Livingstone, & Smaller, 1992; Dei, Mazzuca, McIsaac, & Zine, 1997), in effect, bisecting student populations along borders of social class and race (Rushowy, 2013). As well, a 2010 report on programs of choice in the TDSB demonstrates that the student population in specialized schools and specialized programs does not reflect the diversity of the TDSB population as a whole (Sinay, 2010). Specifically, students in alternative schools, specialized schools, and specialized programs are “more likely to come from families with higher SES, non-immigrant status, a two-parent family structure, and have parents with a high level of education”
The exclusionary reality of this choice regime directly conflicts with the hypotheses of school choice advocates who see a larger, more accessible, marketplace of educational choices as a means of disrupting the clustering of particular demographic groups by catchment area (see Brandl, 1998; Chubb & Moe, 1997; Coleman, 1992). It contradicts the philosophy of various educational initiatives geared toward promoting equity in the TDSB, around issues such as: 1) antiracism and ethnocultural equity; 2) antisexism and gender equity; 3) antihomophobia, sexual orientation, and equity; 3) anticlassism and socio-economic equity; and 4) equity for persons with disabilities (TDSB, 2000). These statistics also bolster a more than two-decade-old critique of expanded school choice policies. Challenging the assumption that the market is neutral, critical researchers suggest that the educational marketplace provides an even larger arena for parents with high SES to mobilize their resources to further their child’s social advantages (Ball, 1998; Cookson, 1995, Dehli 1996; Levine-Rasky, 2008; Reay & Ball, 1998; Taylor, 2001; Taylor & Woollard, 2003; Yoon & Gulson, 2010). Within this educational marketplace, specialized arts programs are one type of school choice option. However, while aiming to serve students with special artistic needs and talents, within Toronto, these programs disproportionately educate an already socially advantaged student body.

**The Specialized Arts Program**

Over the past three decades there has been a significant expansion in the number of specialized arts programs in Toronto. These programs occupy a unique space in the Toronto educational marketplace because, unlike other specialized program focuses, the arts are believed to transcend the dynamics of social inequality that shape segregation in schools (Davis, 2005; Gore, 2007; Longley, 1999; Wilson, 2001). Based on the notion that *talent is everywhere,*
specialized arts programs are seen as “an expedient way to attract an ethnically and economically diverse student population to [school] buildings in city centers” (Wilson, 2001 p. 370).

At the same time, however, LOI statistics point to the fact that publicly funded specialized arts programs cater, almost invariably, to a student body with high SES. In addition to raising significant private funds, these programs, by nature of their specialized status, receive extra public funds and resources from the school board. The combination of students with high SES, small class sizes, and additional funding for specialized programming, contributes to parents’ frequent characterization of specialized arts programs as “tuition-free private schools” and “private schools in the public system” (Gaztambide-Fernández, Saifer, & Desai, 2013).

**Study Rationale**

While researchers have examined the ways in which SES shapes parental interaction with the educational marketplace, the question of how the arts fit into this equation has yet to be examined. This research is urgent in the Toronto context for a number of reasons: 1) Toronto public schools are providing unequal educational opportunities based on socioeconomic boundaries; 2) Toronto continues to expand its educational marketplace despite the established relationship between greater “choice” and unequal opportunities; and 3) a significant portion of this market expansion consists of specialized arts programs that disproportionately serve students with high SES. In addition, the examination of the arts within the educational marketplace brings into question the often-ignored relationship between the arts and SES, and how particular families can mobilize discourses of the arts in order to reproduce and maintain existing social hierarchies in school settings.

This study heeds the call of Howard and Gaztambide-Fernández (2010) who note the importance of “studying up.” Identifying educational scholarship’s lack of focus on the
privileges and advantages of elite groups, they argue that the study of elite institutions fills a missing conceptual link in our understanding of social inequality. With this in mind, this study will attempt to “illuminate the internal logic in the lives of [an] elite group” (Gaztambide-Fernández & Howard, 2010, p. 2) by focusing on a particular group of invested parents at Toronto’s School for the Creative and Performing Arts (CAPA), an elite specialized arts high school, frequently referred to by parents, students, and teachers as “the best of the best.” More than simply examining why these parents chose CAPA, however, I am interested in the role that discourses of the arts play in parents’ continued production of CAPA as the good choice, a discursive process that involves the justification of the school’s exclusionary practices. In order to address these objectives, this study will be guided by the following research questions:

**Empirical Questions:**

1. How do parents make meaning of their decision to choose CAPA for their child?
2. How do CAPA parents mobilize their capital to make CAPA available as a choice?
3. What discursive understandings of the arts are mobilized in parent choice narratives?

**Analytical Question:**

4. How does the discourse of CAPA as a good school choice contribute to the school’s exclusionary practices?

As Ball (1993) cautions, we must avoid the “limitations and distortions of research which rips choice out of social context or de-socializes choice-making and treats it as a kind of individual rational calculus” (p. 393-394). With this in mind, this study of parental choice and the arts in Toronto will be explored in relation to the educational marketplace that shapes it, the schooling landscape that envelops it, and the crisis of inequity that plagues it.

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4 In order to protect the identity of participants, CAPA, as well as all names used throughout this thesis, are pseudonyms.
CHAPTER TWO:

The Conceptual Context

Conceptually, this study differs from other qualitative case studies of school choice because of its focus on a specialized arts program and, as a result, the “baggage”—both material and symbolic—that the arts carries with it. As a result, when participants explain why they chose the School for the Creative and Performing Arts (CAPA), they necessarily rely on an understanding of what a specialized arts education offers their child. With this in mind, I begin this chapter with a brief overview of the dominant advocacy arguments for the arts in education, as well as the scholarly research used to support and defend these lines of argument.

The bulk of contemporary research on the arts in education focuses on establishing a causal link between participation in the arts and cognitive non-arts outcomes. According to Gaztambide-Fernández (2013), this should come as no surprise since the project of schooling has historically been grounded in an educational philosophy premised on outcomes, measurements, and predetermined goals. As a result, arts educators have focused their advocacy around how the arts can enhance these goals, be they academic, civic, or social.

Gaztambide-Fernández notes that the resulting advocacy literature can be grouped into two prominent schools of thought: 1) the instrumentalist argument, which attempts to measure how the arts affect academic achievement (see Catterall, 2000; Deasy, 2002); and 2) the intrinsic argument, which centres on specific artistic skillsets and life tools that are only secured through an arts education (see Eisner, 2002; Hetland, Winner, Veenema, & Sheridan, 2007). These two lines of argument are frequently used by educational stakeholders—such as students, teachers, administrators, and parents—and, as a result, help us frame CAPA parents’ understanding of CAPA as a good school choice.
The Instrumentalist Argument

Proponents of the instrumentalist argument claim a significant correlation between learning in the arts and the development of measurable cognitive capacities useful in other school subjects (see Catterall 2000; Podlozny, 2000; Scrip 2002; Winner & Hetland, 2000). Grounded in the field of developmental psychology, research tends to focus on establishing three particular relationships: 1) the relationship between the study of the arts, in general, and academic achievement measured by standardized tests and grades; 2) the relationship between the study of the arts, in general, and creativity as measured by creativity tests; and 3) the relationship between the study of specific art forms (e.g., music) and specific measurable cognitive outcomes (e.g., spatial reasoning) (Meyers, 2000). Key to the instrumentalist argument is the ability to prove the existence of a particular type of skill transfer that is “specific rather than general, proximal rather than distal, in-domain rather than out-of domain” (Eisner, 2002, p. 41). Put in simpler terms, researchers strive to prove the transfer of what is learned in one (arts) discipline to another (non-arts) discipline without being taught how to do so. This line of argument is at the core of frequent parental claims about the academic benefits of an arts education.

While the data supporting the instrumentalist argument is tenuous at best, there nevertheless is an ever-expanding literature of experimental studies and meta-analyses that attempts to prove or disprove this connection (see Burton, Horowitz, & Abeles, 2000; Catterall, Chapleau, & Iwanaga, 1999; Deasy, 2002; Hetland, 2000; Israel, 2009; Miga, Burger, Hetland, & Winner, 2000; Smithrin & Upitis, 2005).

The Intrinsic Argument

A significant group of arts education advocates and researchers are sceptical of the above argument. Since instrumentalist studies are correlational in design and do not allow for causal
inference, some critics argue that any data that suggests specific, proximal, in-domain skill transfer—once grounded in its social context—can be chalked up to external socioeconomic factors. Winner (2000), for instance, suggests that high academic achievers may simply be more likely to choose the arts than low academic achievers. Heath (1998) puts forth a slightly different argument, claiming that all students, regardless of SES, will display improved academic outcomes when involved in any non-school activity for nine hours or more a week. Academic success as a result of the arts thus becomes no different than academic success as a product of athletics, shop class, the debate team, or a science and technology club. Rather than isolating the arts as a promising educational reform initiative, these studies point to the need for increased investment in all extracurricular programs in low-income schools including, but not limited to, the arts.

Oftentimes, the above critique is coupled with an alternative advocacy argument—the intrinsic argument—based on the notion that the arts “contribute to the growth of the mind” in specific artistic ways (Eisner, 2002, p. xi). Some of the leading voices in this philosophical camp take particular issue with the instrumentalists’ reinforcement of the marginal position assigned to the arts by advocating for the arts using non-arts instrumentalist justifications (Eisner, 1998). Like the instrumentalists, however, proponents of the intrinsic view conceptualize the arts as possessing an inherent quality that can serve a developmental function “through the experience that the creation or perception of expressive form makes possible” (p. 24). Engagement with the arts is believed to exercise our imaginative and creative capacities in ways that allow us to experience the world in new artistic ways. While intrinsic benefits of an arts education may not be as universally desired as instrumentalist/academic benefits, within the context of a specialized arts program like CAPA—a program chosen by parents who value the arts—the intrinsic
outcomes of an arts education proposed by Eisner (1998, 2002) are viewed as both positive and desirable.

The Arts and the Neoliberal Economy

In the context of this study, I argue that there exists a third prominent arts education advocacy argument that revolves around the relationship between an arts education, a particular kind of cultivated creativity or personhood, and success—economically and socially—in the neoliberal economy. Rather than being taken up alongside arts education’s instrumentalist/intrinsic debate, however, this line of argument is found in the somewhat limited literature on the arts and social policy. This concept helps us establish a point of intersection where discourses of the arts, school choice, parenting, and student futures come together to shape parental understanding of the decision to choose CAPA.

Taking a different approach to answering the question—why do the arts matter?—Stern (2011) argues that the arts must be understood as part of a comprehensive notion of social wellbeing (see Ramsey White & Rentschler, 2005). Drawing on 17 years of data collected as part of the Social Impact of the Arts Project (SIAP) at the University of Pennsylvania, he concludes that “natural cultural districts” form around areas with non-profits, a vibrant commercial culture, and artists, which, in turn, lead to high levels of social wellbeing. For Stern, social wellbeing is characterized by high levels of social diversity (ethnic, economic, and household), a positive correlation between the presence of the arts and public health (even when corrected for economic inequality), and reduced ethnic and racial harassment. As with the instrumentalist and intrinsic arguments, researchers like Stern conceptualize the arts as a thing that causes predictable outcomes—in this case, high levels of tolerance across differences of gender, sexual orientation, race, social class, and ethnicity, as well as improved psychological health (see Karkou &
Stern notes that the economic benefits of the arts occur as “spill over” effects from their social impact. However, other social theorists highlight a direct link between creativity and economic prosperity, both on a societal and individual level (see Frey, 2003; McGuigan, 2002; Myerscough, 1988; Throsby, 2001). Over the past decade, Florida (2002a, 2002b, 2005) has written extensively about the “creative class,” a new “class” of creative citizens—the “super creative core,” the “thought leadership,” and the “creative professionals”—whose presence correlates to economic growth in the post-industrial age. According to Florida, this work is, based on a relatively simple underlying theory that human creativity has replaced raw materials, physical labor and even flows of capital as the primary generator of economic value, and that a new class structure is emerging as a result of that basic economic transformation. (Florida, in Lang and Danielsen, 2005, p. 218)

The turn toward creativity is important within this study because many arts education stakeholders, particularly those adhering to intrinsic lines of argument, understand “a creative disposition” as a central positive outcome of an arts education (see Eisner, 2002).

To this effect, instead of focusing exclusively on artists and cultural workers, Florida’s (2002a) notion of the “creative class” includes scientists, academics, healthcare workers, legal professionals, and finance workers, as well anyone whose work demands what he describes as “creative problem solving drawing on complex bodies of knowledge to solve specific problems” (p. 4-5). In Florida’s model of the creative city, creative individuals who possess the “meritocratic values of the creative age” (p. 8) and value creativity “as a route to self-expression and job satisfaction” (p. 5), are hired by firms, businesses, and organizations that value creativity “for the results that it can produce” (p. 8). This line of argument suggests an arts education as a possible pathway to the “creative class” both inside and outside of the arts.

The critiques launched at Florida’s work are extensive and philosophically diverse (see
Malanga, 2004; Moss, 2009; Peck, 2011). Relevant to this study, however, is the prominent critique that Florida’s understanding of the “creative class” is “a profoundly class-biased, and capital-privileging notion” (Wilson & Keil, 2008, p. 842). “Creative class,” as a signifier, is incredibly vague, essentially encompassing any and all individuals who work in professional, managerial, administrative, or artistic capacities. As a result, Florida chooses to value the “creativity” of high SES groups while disregarding the creativity demanded of low SES groups in both their professional and non-professional lives.

Similarly, Florida fails to consider the role of resources—symbolic and material—in purchasing and demonstrating culturally specific forms of creativity—through the arts or schooling, for example—in ways that are rewarded by “creative class” industries and the neoliberal marketplace. This socioeconomic distinction is evident in Florida’s statistical representation of the “creative class.” According to Florida, in 1999 (three years prior to the publication of The Rise of the Creative Class), the average salary for a member of the “creative class”—as loosely defined by Florida—was nearly $50,000 compared to roughly $28,000 for a working-class member and $22,000 for a service-class worker. And yet, despite the problems associated with Florida’s argument, the notion of the “creative class,” and the perceived relationship between the arts and the neoliberal economy, continues to be referenced by stakeholders in specialized arts programs throughout the City of Toronto (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2010) in order to make particular claims about the value of an arts education.

**Disrupting “the Rhetoric of Effects”: Reframing the Arts as Discourse**

According to Gaztambide-Fernández (2013), the fact that arts education advocacy arguments are focused on what the arts do—i.e., improve academic outcomes, foster tolerance, or lead to economic success—should come as no surprise as the project of schooling is grounded in
a positivist educational philosophy premised on outcomes, measurements, and predetermined goals. His critique of the intrinsic and instrumentalist lines of argument—and my own critique of the arts and the neoliberal economy—centres on the language and logic of these justifications, which operate according to what he refers to as the “rhetoric of effects.” This resulting need to construct advocacy arguments around what the arts do, he contends, reinforces the same social hierarchies reproduced through traditional schooling, and impairs the ability of educators to “mobilize alternative ways of conceptualizing what we mean by ‘the arts’” (p. 213).

Gaztambide-Fernández’s choice to place “the arts” in parentheses in the above quotation is deliberate and speaks to a reconceptualised understanding of the arts that he mobilizes in his work, and that I will utilize in this study. In order to move beyond the positivist limitations of the “rhetoric of effects” (i.e., the arts are a thing that does), he instead views the arts, “as a discursive construct through which particular kinds of cultural practices are defined in ways that reflect and reproduce the larger social and cultural context” (p. 215).

This conceptual turn requires a clear understanding of the difference between cultural products (e.g., a dance or a song) and art (e.g., a dance or a song, produced according to a particular aesthetic informed by specific artistic discourses). This division is at the core of the distinction between, let’s say, a song by The Clash and a “piece” by Mozart; both are cultural products, yet only the latter is elevated to the status of art in a specific social context. In the following section, I use Bourdieu’s (1984) concept of the economy of cultural goods to explain the logic behind the elevation of certain cultural practices and products above others. For now, however, it is important to note that, within the context of this study, I use the arts to name the set of discourses that governs the cultural products that we understand as art. Additionally, this reframing does not suggest that cultural products typically associated with the arts (e.g., music,
dance, and film) cannot be used to resist inequality; rather, what Gaztambide-Fernández (2013) and I are claiming is that the arts—the discursive construct—cannot be used as a tool of resistance against inequality because they are founded and dependent on dominant social hierarchies. As Gaztambide-Fernández (2013) notes,

>a discursive approach reveals the complex ways in which discourses of the arts are mobilized to particular ends. To think of the arts discursively means that we examine the ways in which claims are made, the assumptions that support such claims, and the social rules and relations that enable some people to make claims about particular kinds of practices to particular ends. In the case of the arts, particular notions of culture and cultural change define which practices and processes of symbolic creativity we come to qualify with the label “the arts” and, by extension, how we make claims about what the arts do. (p. 215)

I turn to Foucault (1978), and his work on power and discourse, in order to elaborate on this conceptual reframing. Rather than viewing power as a “thing” possessed by individuals or institutions, and used by actors to repress or coerce, Foucault understands power as dispersed and relational, “produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another” (p. 93). At the core of this understanding of power is the social construction of “truth” and the discourses that govern what we understand as “truth” in specific socio-historical contexts. For Foucault, discourses are more than bodies of knowledge or ideas; they are “rules, system, and procedures that constitute, and are constituted by, our ‘will to knowledge’ … a conceptual terrain in which knowledge is formed and produced” (Hook, 2001, p. 522). Discourses govern how we think, perceive, make meaning, and communicate what we understand as “truth.”

In every socio-historical context, multiple discursive frames exist. However, particular discourses are elevated to “truth” status because they are circulated, reproduced, and validated by dominant groups and institutions, and reflect dominant group interests. In a schooling context, dominant discourses not only dictate the nature of what is taught, but also shape social
interactions, and the ways that social hierarchies are constructed according to what appears to be a natural order. Likewise, in arts education settings, discourses of the arts govern which students and which cultural products and producers of culture are welcomed and which ones are Othered according to socially constructed “truths.” Foucault argues that every interaction is structured by a multitude of discourses, and through our daily interactions we reproduce these discourses. While this understanding of power appears to operate on a micro level, taken together, these individual interactions produce hegemonic effects and the systems of power that shape our local and global society.

The Economy of Cultural Goods

Bourdieu’s (1984) notion of the economy of cultural goods provides an important framework for understanding why particular discourses of the arts are elevated at CAPA, and how these discourses determine which cultural practices are, and are not, valued (as art) in the CAPA school setting. As well, the economy of cultural goods is essential to theorizing why parents who are “skilled/privileged choosers” (Ball & Vincent, 1998) choose CAPA as opposed to any other form of elite public education.

According to Bourdieu, there is a particular logic that governs which cultural goods, and which ways of consuming cultural goods, are considered legitimate (and illegitimate) in every socio-historic context. He argues that institutions of legitimization—public schools, museums, galleries, and universities, for example—are at the core of this process, and function to reproduce and maintain a hierarchy of culture and of aesthetic tastes, as well as dispositions, attitudes, preferences, and behaviours (Bourdieu, 1973, 1986). However, this form of classification is not natural (no matter how natural it may feel at times); rather, legitimate culture always reflects the interests of dominant groups. In this way, culture is produced according to a particular logic.
It is important to note that a discursive understanding of the economy of cultural goods underscores how dominant discourses govern these institutions; nevertheless, the result is the same. For Bourdieu, the economy of cultural goods drives social reproduction through the invisible transmission of cultural capital—“the distinctive forms of knowledge and ability that students acquire—whether at home, at school, or in the relations between the two—from their training in the cultural disciplines” (p. xviii). In his 1986 article, “The Forms of Capital,” Bourdieu introduces three forms of cultural capital: 1) the embodied state, which includes long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body such as knowledge, taste, and skills; 2) the objectified state, which includes owning, and the ability to consume, particular cultural goods; and 3) the institutionalized state, which includes institutional distinctions such as academic qualification. These three forms of cultural capital are crucial to making sense of CAPA as a choice, as they help us name and articulate the relationship between the perceived knowledge and skills that result from an arts education, and student futures in the neoliberal marketplace. For instance, parents understand that CAPA provides their child with particular arts-related skillsets (e.g., the ability to read music), a familiarity with the dominant culture (e.g., high culture versus popular culture), and particular experiences that signify their social standing (e.g., the opportunity to perform with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra). Taken together, CAPA augments students’ cultural capital by teaching them how to interact with the culture of power, and by providing them experiences that signify their “belonging” in the culture of power.

Parents with high SES endow their children with an initial stock of cultural capital by familiarizing them with the “right” culture (i.e., high culture), as well as the correct ways of consuming this culture (e.g., in a large theatre, dressed in a particular way). This cultural capital is rewarded and augmented in an educational system that rewards cultural practices that denote
and mark high SES. This leads to more success in school, recruitment to “better” postsecondary institutions (further increasing cultural capital in the institutionalized state), and eventually, well paid and powerful occupations in “creative” industries (Florida, 2002b). These socioeconomic relationships are reproduced when this economic capital is exchanged for additional cultural capital, which is then passed down from one generation to the next. It is in this regard that, within the neoliberal marketplace, cultural capital is just as much a factor as economic capital in social reproduction.

**Misrecognition (of Social Advantages)**

As Gaztambide-Fernández, Saifer, & Desai (2013) show, processes of exclusion can be reproduced and justified in specialized arts programs through the mobilization of particular discourses of the arts. At the same time, these discourses function to hide the program’s exclusionary practices from view. To make this argument, the authors draw on the concept of “misrecognition,” Bourdieu’s (1977) technique for overcoming the incommensurability of objectivism (i.e., the notion that material truth exists independent of the mind) and subjectivism (i.e., the notion that all truth is subjective). This ability to name the disconnect between our subjective understanding of a given phenomenon (e.g., CAPA is a school for the talented) and the material conditions that we witness (e.g., CAPA is a school for students that can afford training in the arts), is extremely important to this study, and the ability to deconstruct parent justification of a choice.

For example, Florida’s (2002b) “creative class” argument is predicated on the notion that an arts education improves student creativity, and that this creativity translates to economic and social success in the neoliberal job market. Creativity, however, is a very “fuzzy concept” (Markusen, 1999). As Markusen (2006) notes, what we subjectively understand as the positive
trait of creativity, is objectively the ability to mobilize a particular kind of cultural capital in a market that isn’t neutral. Similarly, Gaztambide-Fernández, Saifer, & Desai (2013) show that what we subjectively understand as “talent” and “passion” are objectively the ability to afford to train in the arts, and to consume culture in particular ways. Misrecognition thus names a “symbolic violence, a gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims, exerted for the most part through the purely symbolic channels of communication and cognition,” (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 1–2). Since this study is situated within an educational marketplace that is dependent on an ideology of neutrality, misrecognition helps us decipher how particular social advantages are misrecognized and rewarded as skilled choosing.

**School Choice and Evaluating ‘Risk’**

Extensive research in the United States, Britain, and Canada points to the function of school choice as a tool for the maintenance and reinforcement of socioeconomic divisions and inequality in society (see Ball, 1993; Gerwitz, Ball & Bowe, 1995; Taylor & Woollard, 2003). While the neoliberal discourse of choice positions the educational marketplace as neutral—a place where all are free and equal to choose whatever is in their best interest—Ball (1993) argues that it actually presupposes “possession of the cultural code required for decoding the objects displayed” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 51-52). Parents are expected to possess knowledge of local schools, the ability to decipher and engage with school promotional activities, the tools to “work the system” (p. 13) through multiple applications and scholarships, and the skills to engage in direct advocacy in pursuit of a choice. As a result, non-choosers or poor choosers are understood as “bad parents” (Ball, 1993) and the system is never held accountable due to its façade of neutrality. Though an expanded educational marketplace is said to democratize choice, it ends up creating an even more obscured arena for the cashing in of various forms of less
“visible” resources.

In this study, I draw on Beck (1992) and Giddens (1999) concept of the ‘risk society’ to make sense of how parents engage with choice in the educational marketplace. The two authors argue that modern day societies (or “risk societies”) present individuals with a wide range of potential courses of action among which the individual must make choices, usually with the intention of minimizing risk. The risks are specific to the individual and, therefore, their goals. For instance, Beck (1992) largely focuses on the “sociological implications of large-scale hazards that are created as ‘side effects’ of institutional arrangements, economic conditions, and technological achievements of industrial modernity” (Wilkinson, 2011, p. 488). Beck’s early work concerns threats such as environmental and health risks (notably the Chernobyl disaster and HIV/AIDS) and, more recently, he extends this concept of risk to global financial crises and transnational terrorist networks (Beck, 2002). Nevertheless, the authors argue that contemporary society, as a result of industrialization, is organized in response to risks (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1999).

Within the context of the educational marketplace, choices are very much constrained by an individual’s material and symbolic resources. As a result, working-class families tend to make choices out of necessity, while upper-middle and middle class families engage with choice and cultivate risk as part of their process of identity construction. Since CAPA primarily serves families from high SES groups, risk is a useful lens for making sense of how parents make educational choices before, during, and after, their time at CAPA, as well as for analyzing how they engage with risk with specific goals in mind. Risk also is a constructive framework for understanding the ways in which participants make sense of their own approaches to parenting and their notion of what constitutes “good” parenting.
Concerted Cultivation and Intergenerational Closure

Lareau’s (2003) research on social class and parenting styles speaks to this notion of socioeconomically constrained risk cultivation as well as Bourdieu’s (1984) theory of distinction. According to Lareau, SES closely informs how parents raise their children. She notes that working class parents exercise a child rearing style that she calls “accomplishment of natural growth” (p. 3), wherein children experience long stretches of leisure time, child-initiated play, distinct boundaries between adults and children, and daily interactions with relatives. Middle and upper-middle class parents, on the other hand, practice a style of parenting that she titles “concerted cultivation,” marked by parental attempts to foster talents by incorporating organized activities into children's lives.

While CAPA parents’ cultivation of the arts should be viewed as an example of concerted cultivation, Lareau also provides us the tools to understand that the arts can be understood as just one aspect of a larger socioeconomic strategy of risk minimization (Beck, 1992). Vincent & Ball (2007), for instance, note that enrichment activities are one response to the anxiety and sense of responsibility experienced by people who are socially advantaged as they attempt to best guarantee the success of future generations. Likewise, Wilkinson (2011) writes,

> a substantial portion of the risk society thesis is devoted to the contention that people are disposed to become anxiously preoccupied with risk as a consequence of a more pronounced experience of uncertainty in conditions of everyday life. (Wilkinson, 2011, p. 489)

Horvat, Weininger & Lareau (2003) illuminate the role of parents’ social capital in dealing with problematic issues arising at schools, and as a result, shaping what schools look like. They point to important class-specific differences in the architecture of parental networks and, as a result, parents' ability to effectively intervene in school matters. Drawing on the work of Coleman (1992), they use the term "intergenerational closure” to describe network ties
connecting parents of school peers, though they write that this is primarily a middle class phenomenon. On the other hand, in working class communities, closure is organized predominantly along kinship lines, since these social ties are a result of the child’s participation in organized activities, which is a privilege constrained by socioeconomic capital. The notion of concerted cultivation and intergenerational closure therefore helps us understand how, in addition to economic capital, upper-middle and middle class parents have access to additional, though less visible, symbolic capital through socioeconomically constrained extracurricular activities. It is in this way that the cultivation of the arts can be understood as a method of risk minimization.

Concluding Thoughts

I have used this chapter to introduce a number of concepts that, taken together, inform my examination of CAPA parent interviews. The resulting conceptual framework draws from a range of scholarly literatures, with a particular focus on the arts in education, school choice/the educational marketplace, and socioeconomically informed parenting styles. Part of what makes this study so fascinating and new is the fact that, conceptually, it pulls from so many fields. While Gaztambide-Fernández’s (2013) reframing of the arts as discursive construct drives this work, a familiarity with the prominent arts education advocacy arguments—and the discourses of the arts that structure them—as well as the relationship between the educational marketplace and social reproduction, is essential to making sense of why parents choose CAPA and “choose the arts.” In the following chapter, I explain my method for working with these concepts in order to address my research questions. I begin by situating myself in the research, before outlining how I collected the research data, and the tools and frameworks I utilized in my data analysis.
CHAPTER THREE:

‘Getting Uncomfortable’

During my second semester of graduate school, I took two courses—one in qualitative methodology, the other in curriculum theory—that demanded a new kind of reflexivity in my work. In preparing to write this chapter, I decided to journey back to this three-month period of reflexive shifting, and the discussions, insights, and cultural products that came out of it. I did this in order to address my autobiographical connection to the subject of this particular study, and to reflect on the historical relationship between researcher and research participant in the social sciences, a relationship “obscured in social science texts, protecting privilege, securing distance, and laminating the contradictions” (Fine, 1994, p. 72).

In what I, at the time, believed to be a clever ‘shout-out’ to Patti Lather’s notion of “getting lost” (2007) in research, I coined the phrase “Getting Uncomfortable”: the act of locating my academic and creative work in an uncomfortable reflexive space. Considering the social advantages afforded by my identity as a white, heterosexual, man, as well as the privileges granted by my upbringing and educational biography, this new orientation forced me to ask difficult questions of myself as a researcher and as an individual. Still very much engaged in this process, I approach the current study as both a researcher committed to examining the relationship between the arts, the educational marketplace, and social inequality, and as an individual keen on exploring how discourses of the arts and my own extensive history with the arts has shaped, and continues to shape, my own lived experiences. These dual approaches will inform my own future work as an educator and a researcher, a musician and creative writer.

Although this study deals explicitly with a specific set of research questions in an attempt to fill a major gap in both the school choice and arts education literatures, I would be remiss to
disregard the important ways in which this process of ‘Getting Uncomfortable’ has functioned as a personal journey of self-examination and self-critique. As a result, before explaining and rationalizing the methodological framework that I use to uncover the “rowdy silences” (Sykes, 2001, p. 16)—the institutional discourses and social conditions—that shape the school choice narratives of a particular group of invested parents, I begin, rather uncomfortably, with myself, and my attempt to “leav[e] in order to return home” to a home that “does not stay the same” (Pinar, 2011, p. 106).

**Beginning With Myself: A Short Case Study in Misrecognition**

Since before I can remember, the arts have played an integral role in my life. I was the seven-year-old kid who spent his weekends sprawled out in front of the television set, eyes and ears glued to whatever was on MuchMusic, trying to memorize song lyrics that would have made my parents blush, could they decipher them. At night, I’d stand in front of the mirror, broomstick in hand, and ‘rock out’ to Soundgarden or Nirvana, pretending I was Chris Cornell, Kurt Cobain, or any one of the number of musicians whose posters I had taped to my bedroom walls. As I grew up, music, and soon, creative writing, drove my intellectual, social, and political development; they were essential to a great many of the meaningful friendships and relationships I established over the years and they served as an important resource during some very difficult times. For years I identified, almost exclusively, as a musician and as a writer. Not surprisingly, when I reflect on the chronology of my life thus far, I look to my arts-related commitments in order to get a sense for who I was at any particular time. What bands did I play in? What story was I working on? What was I reading? Who was I listening to?

I recall getting my first short story published around the same time that I decided I was comfortable improvising over the chord changes to John Coltrane’s “Giant Steps.” In retrospect,
the story wasn’t very good, and my take on the 1960 tune was, without a doubt, mechanical and
difficult on the ears (some things never change). And yet, at the same time, I had the distinct
impression that, because I was able to “create” music and stories from nothing, I could do
anything. The 17-year-old version of myself would have waxed poetic about the inherent
relationship between the arts and self-empowerment. Suddenly, art was no longer about helping
a moody teenager build confidence; it was about making clear my ability to craft any future I
desired. I was “talented.” I was “creative.” I could be a journalist or a lawyer, a social worker or
write clever ad copy for some big name beer company. My future was an open book just waiting
to be written.

Within the context of the neoliberal educational marketplace, my story with the arts was,
without a doubt, a success story. However, my story was also one of misrecognition (Bourdieu,
2001) and cultivating a particular kind of privileged personhood (Lareau, 2003) through ‘risk’
(Beck, 1992); it was about the exchange of social, cultural, and economic capital within the
economy of cultural goods (Bourdieu, 1984), and the relationship between social reproduction
and education (Apple & King, 1977; Bowles & Gintis, 1976). My family and I were mobilizing
discourses of the arts in order to obscure my social advantages behind the veil of an arts-based
meritocracy. No matter how committed I was to the murky intersection of the arts and social
justice, my understanding of the arts—as a thing that does—trapped me in Gaztambide-
Fernández’s (2013) rhetoric of effects. As a result, all the work that I was trying to do through
the arts was reproducing the social hierarchies that I wished my work to disrupt.

Over the course of this study, however, I have been challenged to reconceptualise the arts
as a discursive construct. In addition to opening my eyes to the ways in which the arts are used to
maintain and justify unequal presents and futures, I have also become aware of the ways that
forms of symbolic creativity (Willis, 1990) typically associated with the concept of the arts can be used in educational projects committed to social justice, antiracism, and decolonization (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2007, 2010, 2011, 2013). This has shifted how I speak about the arts in educational settings and how I approach my own practices of cultural production. And just as importantly, I remain committed to the importance of symbolic creativity in the classroom, in storytelling, and in relationship and community building. As a result, all the choices that I make in my methodology are informed by these goals and this journey, as well as the knowledge that I am approaching this study as someone who is very much a product of this type of education and parenting.

With these commitments in mind, I now move on to the methodological approach that I utilized in this research. The remainder of this chapter is divided into two sections. The first describes the research site and the parent participants involved in this study, as well as the limitations of this research as constructed. The second focuses on the research tools and frameworks that are employed in this study for the purposes of data analysis.

**A Case Study: The School for the Creative and Performing Arts**

The data for this study was collected as part of the third phase of the Urban Arts High Schools (UAHS) project, a comparative ethnographic study of six specialized arts high schools in Canada and the United States. As a member of the UAHS team over the past two years, I helped gather qualitative data through field notes, one-to-one interviews, and focus groups with students, teachers, and administrators in two schools—one in Canada, one in the United States—and co-authored several technical reports and academic articles with other UAHS team members (e.g., Gaztambide-Fernández, Saifer, & Desai, 2013; Saifer & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013; Desai, Saifer, & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2012). This thesis, however, differs significantly from
the research typically produced by the UAHS team because it focuses exclusively on interviews with parents of students enrolled at a specialized arts program. Moreover, this study looks at a particularly invested segment of the parent population involved in the School Council at Toronto’s School for the Creative and Performing Arts (CAPA).

CAPA is recognized as one of the best public schools in the TDSB, and places near the top of the annual rankings put out by the widely cited Canadian think tank the Fraser Institute. The school prides itself on its reputation as “a specialized public arts-academic high school,” a reputation reinforced by its high rate of postsecondary placement, its near perfect scores on the province-wide grade 10 literacy test, and its high EQAO\(^5\) scores. CAPA’s dual focus on the arts and academics separates it from similar elite public specialized arts institutions that seek to provide more of a conservatory feel (i.e., a school focused primarily on the arts). CAPA’s admissions process is highly selective, attracting students who demonstrate what is perceived as talent and potential in one of six majors—dance, drama, film, music (band or strings), music theatre, or visual arts—and “excellence” in academics.

CAPA is also extremely homogeneous considering the demographic diversity of the TDSB. For instance, 76% of CAPA students identify as white versus 33% district-wide. Forty-five percent of CAPA parents were born in Canada compared with 19% in the district, while over 60% of the parents have university degrees, and 80% have professional and management level jobs.

\(^5\) According to the Education Quality and Accountability Office website, EQAO tests “measure student achievement in reading, writing and mathematics in relation to Ontario Curriculum expectations. The resulting data provide accountability and a gauge of quality in Ontario’s publicly funded education system.”
Parents play a prominent institutional role at CAPA through the School Council, as well as through Supporters of Creative Talent (SCT), a Registered Charity composed of parent and community volunteers who raise private funds for the school. While there is a lot of crossover between members of the School Council and SCT, the two parent institutions serve very different purposes. The School Council provides a weekly forum for parents to discuss school-specific issues with administrators and other parents in an attempt to improve and shape school policy. SCT, on the other hand, raises private funds that are used to provide enriched programming for CAPA students. Whether funding student productions, purchasing supplies and equipment, or paying for guest teachers, SCT’s tax-deductible donations are redirected to areas that the TDSB does not cover in their budget. In addition to collecting donations, SCT raises money through a popular annual craft fair and silent auction of student work, and through selling refreshments at student performances year-round. This past year alone, SCT raised over $33,000 to support CAPA programming.

Data Collection

As articulated above, prior to beginning this thesis, I spent a significant amount of time at CAPA over the course of four months collecting field notes and conducting interviews and focus groups with students, teachers, and administrators. While I conducted a few of the parent interviews used in this study, another research assistant—Vicky Maldonado—working with the UAHS project, led and orchestrated the collection of the parent data and led the majority of the interviews. Once Vicky left the project and I decided to work with this data, I was placed in the precarious position of making meaning of stories that had been crafted by parent participants with the aid of other researchers. As well, my reading of the interviews was, without a doubt,
heavily influenced by my extensive experience working at CAPA with students, teachers, and administrators.

When it came time to analyze the interview data, I made sure to follow a specific multistep process with each recording in order to most thoroughly familiarize myself with the 12 interview conversations I selected to analyze for this thesis. First, I listened to the interview from start to finish, recording a series of “memos” (Groenewald, 2008), which consisted of my initial thoughts and reflections on the conversation. As I had limited access to interview notes, I paid close attention to information that would not appear in the transcribed text such as vocal mannerisms, interview conditions, and any technical difficulties. I then used the transcribing software, ExpressScribe, to transcribe the interviews. Once the interview transcripts were formatted, I uploaded them into the qualitative analysis software ATLAS.ti in order to organize the data along themes that had emerged throughout the research process (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Using meaning categorization as a strategy (Kvale, 1996), I first coded the data along four general themes—1) Journey; 2) Teaching and Learning; 3) Community; and 4) Administration—drawn from the UAHS team’s portraiture work (see Desai, Saifer, & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2012). Next, I developed ad hoc themes (Kvale, 1996) that arose in the data including prominent discourses of the arts, instances of misrecognition, and narratives of parenting style. Though this stage demanded I return to and bolster my conceptual framework, it also gave rise to the signposts that would eventually drive the data sections of this study.
Participants

On October 11th 2011, CAPA’s principal invited Vicky and Professor Gaztambide-Fernández, the UAHS project’s principal investigator, to attend one of the weekly School Council meetings. By that time, the UAHS pilot study of CAPA was already underway, and the parent community had been sent a detailed letter, which provided a general overview of the UAHS project and how it would involve their child should they consent to participate. The purpose of the meeting was to explain and answer any questions about the parent component of the project.

In addition to Vicky and Professor Gaztambide-Fernández, 14 people attended the meeting: eight mothers, two fathers, two teachers, one nurse, and one student. All parents were given a letter explaining the project (see Appendix A) as well as an interview consent form that they would have to turn in if they wished to participate (see Appendix B). Beyond this group, we recruited additional parent participants through a “snowball” process whereby those already enrolled in the study recruited additional participants in their social network (Eide, 2008). In the end, 12 parents agreed to participate in a semi-structured telephone interview6 lasting roughly 30-60 minutes:

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6 Ms. Kanter’s interview was conducted in person immediately following the initial parent meeting described above.
Fig. 3.1: Parent Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Level of Education</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Child’s Name</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Major</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heather Cooper</td>
<td>BA (Film Studies)</td>
<td>Business Manager (Film Company)</td>
<td>Beth Gladstone</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Visual Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura Jansen</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Homemaker</td>
<td>Talia Brook-Jansen</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Music Theatre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betty Carpenter</td>
<td>MA (English)</td>
<td>Editor</td>
<td>Kevin Ryans</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whitney Kanter</td>
<td>MPT (Physiotherapy)</td>
<td>Physiotherapist</td>
<td>Alyssa Tucker</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Music Theatre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanya Cassipi</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Adam Roslin; Ben</td>
<td>11; 9</td>
<td>Film</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben Dawkins</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>Engineer</td>
<td>Cassandra Dawkins</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicole Dawkins</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Homemaker</td>
<td>Cassandra Dawkins</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carly Schwartzman</td>
<td>BA; Business</td>
<td>Project Manager</td>
<td>Kelly Schwartzman</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Drama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danielle Tate</td>
<td>BFA</td>
<td>Production Designer</td>
<td>Daniel Winner</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Drama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faye Sandberg</td>
<td>Part of PhD</td>
<td>Psychotherapist</td>
<td>Alexander Silver</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Drama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annabelle Landsman</td>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>Homemaker</td>
<td>Chrissy Landsman</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Visual Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabrielle Sellers</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>HR Manager</td>
<td>Ryan Sellers</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Music Theatre</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since participants were recruited through the School Council, and further identified as “invested” in CAPA, they cannot be said to represent the average CAPA parent. Rather than viewing this as a weakness, however, the “limitation” to this specific subsection of CAPA parents functioned as a strength within the context of this study for a number of reasons. While previous studies of the educational marketplace have highlighted the role of social, economic, and cultural capital in the educational market, the narratives of invested parents provided rich
data for examining how parents contribute to the production of a school as a good choice. In this regard, the interview can be understood as a performance of a desired CAPA (Reissman, 2000). Similarly, the parents in this study are invested in the unique artistic nature of the program and hold strong opinions regarding an arts education. As a result, their narratives were explicitly shaped by prominent discourses of the arts, providing a fascinating entrance into an analysis of how discourses of the arts are mobilized within an exclusive arts institution in order to continue producing CAPA as a good choice.

The focus on what Ball and Vincent (1988) call the “skilled/privileged chooser”—parents with a high inclination to choose and high capacity for choice—further aided the contextualization of this phenomenon within Toronto’s educational marketplace because these parents, according to the ideology of the market, are successful choosers. Finally, the decision to “study up” (Gaztambide-Fernández & Howard, 2010) helped me address a gap in our understanding of inequality that is all-too-often ignored. While it certainly would be worthwhile to speak to parents who are not nearly as involved with their child’s education—or who are unhappy with their choice—the participants in this study provided a particular perspective containing a wealth of new information regarding education markets, the arts in education, and social inequality. Additionally, it is worth noting that parent participants, while happy with their choice, were still quite critical of many parts of CAPA.

**Tools and Frameworks of Analysis**

At the core of this study were two research purposes: *understanding* and *deconstruction*. I wanted to best *understand* how participants make meaning of their choice to send their child to CAPA. I wanted to *understand* why they sent their child to CAPA and why they believe it was a good choice. At the same time, however, I was interested in *deconstructing* how they produce
CAPA as a good choice, the discourses of the arts that are mobilized in this production, and the social conditions that are implied in their narratives. Each of these research purposes implied divergent underlying political and epistemological assumptions. As a result, as I began to transcribe and code participant interviews, I found myself thinking about this study in two distinct stages, within differing paradigms, with two different research purposes, and the need for two separate analytical processes.

**Stage One: Interpretivist, Narrative Analysis.** During Stage One, I situated myself in the interpretivist paradigm. Understanding reality and knowledge as multiple and socially constructed (Tullis Owen, 2008), I sought not “to discover what is true ... but to describe, as accurately as possible, how different people in different contexts have constructed reality and what these people take to be true” (Donmoyer, 2008, p. 592). I attended to the ways that participants constructed their own stories and truths, and how these were situated within larger cultural, social, and institutional narratives (Clandinin, 2008). Methodologically, narrative analysis demanded that I “take as [my] object of investigation the story itself” (Reissman, 2000, p. 4). At times, I struggled with this task, as the majority of parent narratives involved telling stories about their child rather than themselves. Since the child’s “experience” was explained by the parent, this could not be viewed as truth and deductions could not be made about the child. As a result, I was tasked with making sense of what the parents were saying about themselves when they told a story about their child. More than the child’s experience, this process was much more important to my research questions. During this stage, I moved beyond the idea of the story as truth, and asked, why was the story told that way? (Reissman, 1993). What was the parent trying to say about themselves through this performance? How did their narratives help produce CAPA as a good school choice? As well, if storytelling is a reciprocal event between researcher
and participant, how do participants perform a “preferred identity” (Reissman, 2000), both of themselves and of CAPA as an institution? Since this is a study of how discourses of the arts are used to justify exclusionary practices, this performed identity is essential to making sense of the discourses that underlie the narratives.

**Stage Two: Deconstructivist, Critical Discourse Analysis.** Throughout the “second stage” of this study, I positioned myself in a deconstructivist paradigm. My purpose, thus, moved beyond understanding and meaning-making toward deconstruction and critique. As a result, my epistemological and ontological orientations shifted as well. Rather than viewing reality as co-constructed between researcher and participant, reality became something that was ultimately unknowable. Likewise, rather than there existing many forms of “truths,” the notion of “truth” was understood as a “socially constructed systems of signs which contain the seeds of their own contradiction” (Sipe & Constable, 1996, pg. 155).

When analyzing the stories, I wanted to “explore how things have come to be the way they are, how it is that they remain that way, and how else they might have been or could be” (Cheek, 2008, p. 356). Critical discourse analysis offered the potential to challenge ways of thinking about aspects of reality that have come to be viewed as being natural or normal, particularly within the world of the arts and the educational marketplace. Through this approach—and taking a cue from Foucault (1977)—I sought to figure out how CAPA as a choice became available materially and discursively, through the elevation of dominant discourses of the arts, “good” parenting, and “good” educational choices, and how discourses of the arts are both consciously and subconsciously mobilized in school choice narratives, thereby justifying and perpetuating the crisis of inequity in Canadian public schools.
Concluding Thoughts

This chapter has fulfilled three objectives. First, I sought to provide the reader with a brief glimpse into my own lived experience, and the role my experiences play in how I approach this study. I made clear both my familiarity with the types of stories told by participants, as well as my commitment—as an educator and as a writer/musician—to the potential for cultural production to serve as an educational and political tool for social justice. Second, I explained how I collected my data as a member of the larger UAHS project, introduced the study participants, and examined the strengths and limitations of my research with this particular group of parents. Finally, I detailed the tools and frames of analysis that I used to examine participant interviews in an attempt to answer my research questions.

The data for this thesis will be presented in the next four chapters. I begin by exploring how parents make sense of their own role in the choice process (Chapter 4), before moving on to the bulk of the analysis organized around the question, “why choose CAPA?” Drawing on the UAHS project’s portraiture method, I have structured the following chapters according to meta-themes: Teaching and Learning: The Arts, Need, and Talent (Chapter 5); Community: The Arts and Inclusivity (Chapter 6); and Journey: The Arts, Social Reproduction, and the Whole Rounded Person (Chapter 7).
CHAPTER FOUR:
Negotiating a Choice, Negotiating a Role

It’s not your neighbourhood that determines you going to the school. It’s your choice to audition and audition successfully. (Interview: Ben Dawkins, father of a grade 10 strings major, November 24, 2011)

The above quotation serves as an example of how many parent participants disregard the role that social conditions play in the educational marketplace. Mr. Dawkins describes a meritocratic process, which he contrasts with the arbitrary and stratifying nature of catchment area based school assignment. Another participant grudgingly relates her daughter’s negative experience with lottery-based schools: “She was on a draw for two of the alternative schools, and got into neither, because they were based on luck, not credentials” (Interview: Whitney Kanter, November 25, 2011). In both examples, parents envision the School for the Creative and Performing Arts (CAPA)—and specialized programs, in general—as a shift toward meritocratic fairness, where applicant talent and good parenting choices are rewarded with a top-notch education.

When explicitly asked to describe their own role in the school choice process, however, parent participants relate a different story. This story consists of two parent involvement narratives that I have titled the Parent as Guide and the Parent as Cultivator. The following section describes these two narratives and examines how parents mobilize them in tandem in order to reinforce the identification of their child as the active chooser while, at the same time, creating a school choice arena where they can most effectively and covertly “cash in” (Ball et al., 1996) their material and symbolic resources in an attempt to “colonize the future” (Taylor & Woollard, 2003).
“Talia was definitely driving it,” says Ms. Jansen, referring to her daughter, a grade 10 music theatre student. When asked if she wanted to go to their home school’s open house, Talia “refused to go. She said, ‘I am not going to that school, so I m not going to the open house. I don’t care’” (Interview, November 25, 2011). As a result, attending their home school never became an option for the Jansen-Brook family.

Another mother, Ms. Kanter, recalls clashing with her daughter over whether CAPA was the right school choice, as well. In particular, she was concerned that the one-hour commute from their house to the school would create a variety of unnecessary academic and social stresses:

Her friends [at CAPA] are from Oakville, Burlington; you can’t walk across the street. You can’t ride your bike down to the friend’s place … We fought her because it’s a one hour commute there and one hour commute back. And I said to her, ‘if you forget your books I am not driving up to drop off books. Like, you’re out of luck man.’ So we didn’t want her to go there. (Interview, November 25, 2011)

These two parents put forth differing levels of resistance to their child’s choice of CAPA. Ms. Jansen suggested to her daughter that she give other schools a fair chance, while Ms. Kanter actively resisted her daughter’s desire to go to CAPA. In both narratives, however, participants position their child in an active choosing role where they are entrusted with the final school decision. In another interview, Ms. Carpenter, mother of a grade 10 strings major, tells a slightly different story in which she is forced to take a more hands-on role in the choice process:

[My son] had two other options. One was [an IB program] and the other was [an Alternative school]—specifically, the cyber arts program, which is a program that’s basically an arts—it’s like the use of computers in the arts. And he got into those as well. Well, we attempted to let him make it be his choice, but he dithered for so long that we stepped in and strong-armed him—which he did not thank us for initially. He was very cross and said he ought to be able to make-up his own mind and we said, ‘that’s great, as long as your own mind chose CAPA, because
that’s the best of the three’ [laughter]. (Interview, December 5, 2011)

On the surface, the narratives of Ms. Jansen, Ms. Kanter, and Ms. Carpenter seem to convey completely different family decision-making processes. However, if each choice making narrative is set against a backdrop of what these parents describe as ‘other possible school choices,’ an interesting trend emerges:

Fig. 4.3: Select Parent/Child Possible School Choices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Child</th>
<th>Possible Choices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Jansen</td>
<td>Talia Jansen-Brook</td>
<td>- Arts High School (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Arts High School (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- CAPA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Kanter</td>
<td>Alyssa Tucker</td>
<td>- Arts High School (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- International Baccalaureate Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- CAPA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Carpenter</td>
<td>Kevin Ryans</td>
<td>- Application-based Alternative School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Application-based “Cyber Arts” Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- CAPA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above figure depicts what Ms. Jansen, Ms. Kanter, and Ms. Carpenter list as ‘possible school choice options’ for their child. Each of these possible choices is a specialized program located within the Toronto District School Board (TDSB). Talia chose CAPA over two other arts schools, while Alyssa and Kevin selected CAPA—albeit with differing levels of explicit parental input—from three possible specialized high school options. In all three instances, the child was provided possible choices and parental guidance before being allowed to choose for themselves. This trend is apparent throughout the narratives of other participants, as can be seen in Fig. 4.4:

---

7 While Ms. Jansen asks her daughter if she would like to attend their home school’s open house, she later excludes the home school from what she considers “possible school options.”
As Reay and Ball (1998) note, it is common for middle class parents to establish choice limits, and for their children to have to choose from within these limits. While each participant approaches the school choice process differently, Fig. 4.2 and Fig. 4.3 indicate that, in each case, the Parent as Guide mobilizes this parenting strategy, having their child choose CAPA from among several possible options.

Drawing on Ribben’s (1994) threefold typology of how mothers view their children, Reay and Ball (1998) argue that middle class parents construct their children as “little innocents” who are “naïve, gullible … [and] need to be protected from the rougher elements and the wrong sort of influences” (p. 440). Educational choice therefore becomes extremely important as schools serve as sites for upper-middle class socialization, or as Apple & King (1977) more explicitly put it:

the selection and transmission of certain kinds of cultural capital on which a
complex yet unequal industrial society depends, and how it maintains cohesion among its classes and individuals by propagating ideologies that ultimately sanction the existing institutional arrangements which may cause the unnecessary stratification and inequality in the first place. (p. 356)

Within the *Parent as Guide* narrative, it is also critical that the parent believe that their child made the decision—a crucial component of upper-middle class parenting (Lareau, 2003). Nevertheless, the parental act of establishing “predetermined limits” (Reay & Ball, 1998, p. 439) creates a fixed arena where parents can minimize the risks associated with choosing a desirable secondary school.

**Parent as Cultivator**

Employing what Lareau (2003) calls “concerted cultivation”—a middle and upper-middle class style of parenting characterized by an intense focus on fostering a child’s talents through organized activities—the *Parent as Cultivator* acknowledges the role that parents and families play in developing a child’s appreciation for the arts. Beyond guidance, the *Parent as Cultivator* takes an active role in constructing additional possible futures for their child through these extracurricular investments. Within the CAPA context, however, the *Parent as Cultivator* is further able to position herself or himself as the “good” parent who has made the “right” parental decisions, by mobilizing dominant discourses of the arts to produce CAPA as the “right” choice for families like them.

Throughout the next set of quotations, Ms. Cooper—the most critical and reflexive of the participants—invokes the *Parent as Cultivator* narrative when describing the types of parents that send their children to CAPA:

Once in a while I would meet somebody and go, ‘oh yeah, you work with my husband in the advertising industry; yeah, you’re one of the teachers I used to have down at Ryerson in the film department, right?’ You start going, ‘okay, this is the cultural class.’ (Interview, November 25, 2011)
As the interview progresses, Ms. Cooper repeatedly refers to CAPA parents as members of the “cultural class” or “creative class” (Florida, 2002b). While purporting to name a particular type of creative and talented worker with modern liberal social values (see Chapter 2), critics point to the fact that “creative class” as a signifier is incredibly vague and, as a result, is a misrecognition (Bourdieu, 1977) of individuals with high levels of education (Markusen, 2006) and high SES. Ms. Cooper, nevertheless, mobilizes this discourse to make claims about the relationship between SES and parental understanding of the important function that cultivating the arts plays in creating a desirable personhood:

I’m thinking that the odds are, that their parents are middle, upper to middle class—not middle—upper middle class Canadians who understand that, and have a passion for the arts itself and the role that the arts have to play in creating a whole, rounded person. (Interview, November 25, 2011)

Though she identifies the role of material resources in choosing to cultivate the arts, her narrative suggests that parents who choose CAPA are making better choices for their children because of a shared understanding of “whole, rounded” personhood, as well as the parenting choices that are required to create this desired personhood. More than simply establishing a link between SES and the ability to make good parenting decisions, however, Ms. Cooper also mobilizes this discourse so as to reproduce CAPA as the good parental choice, since it is the choice that is made by parents who “understand” how to create this ideal personhood. These value judgements echo Taylor and Woollard’s (2003) claim that school choice is a fundamentally class-based phenomenon since Ms. Cooper is linking a parent’s SES to their ability to “understand” how to be a good parent. While working class families are forced to make “choices of necessity,” socially advantaged families “may proactively engage with choice and cultivate risk as part of their construction of identity” (p. 623).
Ms. Cooper’s narrative defines the “whole rounded person” as the upper-middle class Canadian who chooses to cultivate the arts. In an attempt to account for CAPA’s disproportional representation, she reaffirms her own status as the “good” parent, while deeming immigrants and working class parents as “not understanding” how to create desirable personhood. Finally, her narrative implies that the “whole, rounded person” that she hopes to cultivate would make similar schooling choices for her or his own child. This cyclical idea will be taken up in further detail in Chapter 7.

Despite acknowledging CAPA’s overwhelmingly white student population as a problem that must be addressed—later asking, “How equitable is it?”—Ms. Cooper, who includes herself in the “creative class,” suggests that families are drawn to CAPA because they possess a “level of education and commitment to the school environment” (Interview, November 25, 2011). It should be stressed that, in expressing this belief, she is not appealing to a cultural deficit model understanding of school success/difficulties (Ford, 1993; Valenzuela, 1999); rather, she attempts to make clear the connection between SES and the ability, as a parent, to cultivate an appreciation for the arts in a child.

The Parent as Cultivator isn’t entirely focused on investing in the arts. As Lareau (2003) makes clear, the arts are just one example of concerted cultivation. For example, in the following exchange, Ms. Kanter explains how her family’s global travels have prepared her daughter for another ‘possible school choice option’—a competitive IB program:

Ms. Kanter: Alyssa is quite worldly. We’re travelers. We travel extensively so she has quite an understanding of the world in general.

Q: How do you think that connects with the IB program?
Ms. Kanter: With the IB program, she does a lot of political science in the history and in the world issues. I—so if you’ve traveled the world you would understand things a little bit better and could understand and implement—if you study history and you’ve seen gothic cathedrals, or you’ve seen, you know, the battle places in Dieppe, then you understand World War I, right? Or what a castle really looks like. It’s not Disney, right? I was so appalled when I went to Disney. It’s like, oh my god, this isn’t a castle; this is an aerostat piece of Styrofoam!

Q: I’ve never been to Disney.

Ms. Kanter: Oh, don’t ever go. It’s just hideous. It’s revolting. (Interview: November 25, 2011)

The above exchange points to the wide breath of material and symbolic investments that participants make in order to the minimize risks associated with getting a desirable education. While Ms. Kanter cultivated a worldly disposition for her child through travel, Ms. Cooper chose to enrol her daughter in Japanese language lessons, and Ms. Cassipi continues to support both her sons’ love of competitive sports. Within the educational marketplace (and later, the economic marketplace), these economic investments are misrecognized as intrinsic qualities—e.g. passion, talent, or creativity—and function to justify unequal opportunities.

**The Role of Academics**

Before exploring participant choice narratives through the lens of Teaching and Learning (Chapter 5), School Community (Chapter 6), and Student Futures (Chapter 7), this section will briefly touch on the role of CAPA’s academic reputation in participant narratives. As articulated in the above sections, parents tell their stories through the lens of the *Parent as Guide* and the *Parent as Cultivator*, thereby positioning their child as the active chooser. This focus, in turn, places little emphasis on CAPA’s non-arts offerings since, according to participants, their children place little explicit value on academics when making their school choice. Nevertheless, in numerous instances, parents note that CAPA’s strong academic reputation made the school choice a whole lot easier for them.
For instance, while Ms. Tate says that “it was definitely the arts” that had her son deciding on CAPA, the academics certainly made her feel good about his choice:

Academically, I think, along with its reputation, but that it has, it has really good academics. I think it probably has better academics statistically, I think, the academics are on par or better than most, you know, academically acclaimed schools that are public or private. (Interview, November 29, 2011)

By comparing CAPA’s academics to other “academically acclaimed schools,” Ms. Tate represents Ball’s (1996) notion of “goal oriented parents” who, he notes, “are more likely to take examination results seriously and work through them comparing school performances in particular subjects” (p. 95). Likewise, Ms. Schwartzman references statistics when explaining the role of CAPA’s academic reputation in their family choice making process:

Number one we care about academics. My husband is an academic. And there was a report that came out in terms of the academics of the school; we knew that my daughter was very interested in the arts and has been for a long time. She’s done a lot of stuff outside of school in the arts. But the academics were also important to us. When, you know, we were getting this good feedback in terms of how the students are doing going to university, the students that are going to university, all that sort of thing—that made us really excited about it. (Interview, November 30, 2011)

Concluding Thoughts

This chapter has explored how parent participants understand their own role in choosing CAPA. Identifying the child as the key chooser, participants take on the role of the Parent as Guide and the Parent as Cultivator, investing significant symbolic and material resources into making sure that their child has “good choices” to choose from. While these narratives differ significantly, more often than not, the Parent as Guide and Parent as Cultivator are mobilized together. In these instances, parents are able to minimize the risks associated with choosing a school, while solidifying their own identification as the “good” hands-off parent.
CHAPTER FIVE:

The Arts, Need, and Talent

It’s highly regarded. Because every time someone asks me when I’m walking my dog or something, they’ll say, you know, ‘where do your kids go?’ When I tell them, they’ll go, ‘oh that’s a good school.’ Some kind of reputation. And I know a lot of other schools want to be like CAPA, you know? They’re all knocking at the door. (Interview: Nicole Dawkins, mother of a grade 10 string major, November 24, 2011)

The majority of statements regarding the purpose of a specialized arts education in Canada and the United States follow two general lines of argument: 1) they provide a unique approach to teaching and learning for students who thrive in a creative environment and who might not do well in a traditional high school; and 2) they help talented students become artists (Gaztambide-Fernández et al., 2010). It should therefore come as no surprise that parent participants regularly invoke these two lines of argument when explaining why their family chose the School for the Creative and Performing Arts (CAPA) from the multitude of options in Toronto’s educational marketplace. Placing particular emphasis on the school’s artistic approach to teaching and learning, they claim that this artistic character enables CAPA to provide a unique and effective learning environment for those who need it, while, at the same time, nurturing students’ artistic talent.

This chapter will take a closer look at how participants mobilize these two lines of argument. First, it will take up the claim that certain children need CAPA’s distinct creative learning environment in order to survive the high school experience. While arguments built around the perceived needs of CAPA students will be examined in relation to the CAPA student community (see Chapter 6), this chapter will focus on how, according to parents, CAPA’s unique arts-infused learning environment enables students to survive academically and artistically. It will examine how parents juxtapose “thriving” at CAPA with “barely surviving” at a traditional
high school, as well as how particular discourses of the arts are mobilized to privilege certain students’ needs above others. The second section will examine the claim that CAPA possesses a unique ability to nurture a child’s artistic talent and the role this ability played in the parental choice making process. Attention will be paid to how discourses of the arts are constructed and mobilized to make specific claims about who is (and isn’t) talented, and therefore welcome, at CAPA.

A Place For Kids Who Need It

While parent participants claim that their children chose CAPA from a number of specialized schooling options, they also speak of CAPA as a place for students who have significant and unique needs. One may find the simultaneous mobilization of these two narratives peculiar. Why, for instance, would well “cultivated” students struggle so mightily in a traditional high school? Ms. Jansen addresses this point by suggesting that arts students are inherently different from their non-arts counterparts and, as a result, have alternative schooling needs:

Art students are wired differently anyway. They have—they are very, very emotional and it, I don’t know how to put it in words. You’re dealing with very high, needy kids. Needy kids who want to express themselves in so many ways. Think of a class of 30 all talking at once and nobody in that class is shy.

(Interview, November 25, 2011)

Ms. Kanter expresses a similar sentiment. She recalls how her daughter’s innate artistic disposition presented itself when Alyssa was only two years old, making clear the type of person that she would always be. Drawing on another prominent discourse of “the arts,” she contrasts the artist with the math major/engineer, the arts with the sciences, and creativity with rationality:

That’s who she is, you know? She’s not really a math major type. She is not an engineering type. She’s not the type of person who would take apart a Lego. She’s
Some participants, like Ms. Tate, invoke the idea of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983), and multiple learning styles (Hawk & Shah, 2007), suggesting that the artistic mind learns in different ways—e.g., tactile learning—and that these learning differences are not properly addressed in a traditional high school education:

Our very good friend’s son—we’ve known since before he was born—is also going to CAPA in Visual Arts. And he needs to be doing stuff creatively with his hands. By the same token, I don’t think he would be—he would not fit in a regular high school where he didn’t have that outlet. The same way our son kind of needs that outlet. (Interview, November 29, 2011)

The claim that arts students are “wired differently” resides at the core of participant narratives of need. Whether citing a student’s heightened emotional awareness, an increased need for self-expression, or unique learning strengths, participants speak of these traits as innate and fundamentally artistic. While a large portion of the needs of CAPA students are believed to be addressed through the school’s inclusive and accepting community, participants note that their child’s innate (artistic) intellectual differences can only be addressed through the school’s arts-infused approach to teaching and learning. Forced to attend a traditional public school, participants suggest that their child would become disinterested, unmotivated, and unhappy, thereby jeopardizing their chances to finish high school successfully.

The narratives of Ms. Jansen, Ms. Kanter, and Ms. Tate are grounded in a specific, yet dominant, conception of the artist, creativity, and genius. Gaztambide-Fernández (2008) titles this view, “the artist as exalted creator” and traces its genealogy back to the intellectual thought of the European Enlightenment, particularly to Immanuel Kant. In his Critique of Judgement (1790/2007), Kant describes talent as innate and natural, and genius as “a talent for producing
that for which no definite rule can be given,” rather than “an aptitude in the way of cleverness for what can be learned according to some rule” (p. 208). This juxtaposition of artistic genius (as innate) with rational logic (as learned), however, further obscures how concepts such as talent and genius are context-specific and discursively produced (Gaztambide-Fernandez et al., 2013).

“Surviving” vs. “Thriving”

Participants skilfully mobilize this discourse of need in order to obscure the ways that they use their social advantage to gain admittance to CAPA. For example, during the following exchange, Ms. Sandberg describes CAPA as allowing her son, Alexander, to survive high school. And yet, as the interviewer questions her, Ms. Sandberg is forced to re-examine whether “survival” is really what CAPA is offering:

Q: How do you think this school, and the arts programs specifically, will prepare Alexander for the future?

Ms. Sandberg: Well, I guess it will probably enable him to survive high school. So that’s kind of critical.

Q: Was there concern about that at the last school?

Ms. Sandberg: No, you see—about him being able to complete high school?

Q: Well, you used the word ‘survive’—

Ms. Sandberg: Survive. Yeah. I guess. How do I put it? Let’s make a distinction between surviving and thriving. So Alexander would survive any high school. He’s bright enough, even with his learning difference, to survive any high school. I don’t think he’d be able to thrive in any other high school unless they were similar. And even so, of the—we applied to one other arts high school that he also got into, and I think CAPA is probably the better place for him. (Interview, November 28, 2011)

The difference between “surviving” and “thriving” is significant in this instance as it exposes the social advantages hidden behind the discourse of need. Ms. Sandberg notes that Alexander could survive any high school; however, she draws on additional symbolic resources
within an educational marketplace that is anything but neutral in order to make CAPA—an exclusive school where he will thrive—an option. However, when asked why they selected CAPA over the alternative arts program, she returns to her role of *Parent as Guide*:

Alexander just assumed that the kids who would be at the other arts school would not be as serious. And he didn’t want to be in a drama class with someone who was taking it just for the hell of it. (Interview: Faye Sandberg, November 28, 2011)

In a similar case, Ms. Cooper believes that her son, along with many other CAPA students, needs to be surrounded by students who are academically driven:

I do think that these kids are so driven that they would have floundered in a regular program, in a regular high school. I think that I am thankful, when I think about it. I think, thank god my kids went there because I don’t think they could have tolerated being in a, a regular program among kids, who for one reason or another were not happy being there. That would have really disturbed them. And could’ve dragged them down. (Interview, November 25, 2011)

It is because of her economic and cultural capital that Ms. Cooper can define her son as a student with unique needs that CAPA is meant to address. She is therefore able to create space at CAPA for her son, away from students who “could’ve dragged them down,” in a way that parents with less cultural and economic capital cannot.

As Ball (1993) notes, the educational market “presumes certain skills, competencies and material possibilities (access to time, transport, child care facilities etc.), which are unevenly distributed across the population” (p. 13). The above narratives expand this argument by suggesting that skilled choosers like Ms. Cooper and Ms. Sandberg can mobilize particular discourses of the arts in order to create, and justify access to, an exclusive public schooling environment that, according to Ms. Cooper, is “like being in a private school in the public system.”
From Social Ties to Social Capital: Discovering CAPA

A significant portion of research literature on the educational marketplace identifies social networks as an important factor in the choice making process (Ball & Vincent, 1998; Ball, 1997; Coleman, 1988; 1990; Bowe, Ball, & Gerwitz, 1994; Butler, 1996; Coldron & Boulton, 1991; Wellman & Wortley, 1990). However, as Ball and Vincent (1998) note, the knowledge acquired through these networks—rather than through official releases by the school for public dissemination—“is distributed unevenly across, and used differently by, different social-class groups” (Ball & Vincent, 1998, p. 377). Based on “affective responses or direct experience” (p. 380), this ‘hot’ knowledge is used to “circumvent professional control over information and the resulting selective public presentation and gain a sense of the life of the school as experienced directly by the students” (p. 381).

According to participants, social ties, and the ‘hot’ knowledge that it produces, plays an essential role in parent discovery of CAPA. In a handful of cases, participants describe finding out about CAPA through contacts formed through their child’s school-based or extra-curricular activities. This reality conflicts with the prominent participant narrative that anyone can choose CAPA. For instance, at first, Mr. Dawkins claims that, “if you do a bit of research or whatever, you can find [CAPA].” And yet, he later contradicts this claim, explaining that their family found out about the school through his daughter’s music teacher’s contact at CAPA:

They were in public school. Their music teacher may have mentioned it, because my daughter was taking some private lesson, so she was a little step above some of the other students, and [the music teacher], one of her good friends was the head of the strings music at CAPA. (Interview, November 24, 2011)

In this instance, CAPA as the “good parenting choice” is made more probable by means of ‘hot’ knowledge acquired through a social network that is purchased. Likewise, Ms. Cooper, found out about CAPA through her daughter’s private ballet school. Some participants, like Ms.
Schwartzman and Ms. Jansen, had their children enrolled at specialized arts programs prior to CAPA. In these instances, the middle school made information related to CAPA easily accessible to members of the parent social network. Another popular source of ‘hot knowledge’ is the child’s friend’s parent. In addition to speaking with her son’s grade 8 teacher, Ms. Carpenter discussed CAPA with two school parents, while Ms. Cassipi found out about CAPA through her son’s friend’s mother.

According to Horvat et al. (2003), these networks of “intergenerational closure” (Coleman, 1988; Carbonaro, 1998; Teachman et al., 1996) are almost always formed among middle and upper-middle class parents with children in extracurricular activities (Lareau, 2003). They further note that the majority of social networks among working-class families do not include ties to school or their child’s extra-curricular activities (Horvat et al., 2003).

The third prominent way that participants describe finding out about CAPA is through family members who had attended CAPA in the past. While Ms. Sellers speaks of her son’s enjoyment of the arts, she makes it clear that her niece’s experience at CAPA was the deciding factor in their choice:

My niece actually went there many years ago and she loved the school. And Ryan’s always liked music and he’s been doing a few other programs as well. And he was involved at his grade 7/8 school a little bit in theatre. But I think because my niece had gone there and we knew the school had a very good reputation and we started to do some research and when the opportunity presented itself, we went to the open house. And I think that just kind of sealed the deal for him. When he saw that it was that’s where I want to go. (Interview, December 16, 2011)

A Place for the Talented

CAPA’s positioning as a place for the talented is predicated on the school’s artistic/academic offerings and, by way of this, its ability to attract and nurture a talented student body. The school's rigorous application process therefore becomes fundamental to the
construction, and re-inscription, of the school’s reputation. By requiring an audition and an interview, as well as the submission of past report cards and a writing assignment, CAPA is able to control precisely the type of students that walk its hallways, while reinforcing the understanding of CAPA as competitive, and the student body as deserving due to their talent. In this way, CAPA’s markers of distinction are similar to those of an elite private school (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009).

This relationship between CAPA’s application process and the prestige or institutional cultural capital gifted to successful applicants takes on added meaning within a geographical context that offers a variety of specialized arts programs. Fig. 4.3 and 4.4, from Chapter 4, clearly present the extent of participant awareness of this multiplicity of offerings, as well as their tendency to compare CAPA to other specialized arts programs available throughout Toronto. As Mr. Dawkins notes, however, it is the school’s audition process—rather than a unique approach to teaching and learning—that sets it apart from other arts programs in the city:

There’s [another arts school], but that’s a different school. I don’t think it’s an audition school. There’s not too many audition schools that are in the TDSB. There are some separate schools that are audition—I think this is the only TDSB audition school that’s an arts school. It would be good to have one in other sections of the city. And it would fill up quickly. (Interview, November 24, 2011)

Since there are, in fact, at least five other specialized arts programs in Toronto that require an audition, this narrative points to Mr. Dawkins’ investment in constructing CAPA as a place for the most talented students.

However, Mr. Dawkins isn’t the only parent to make this distinction. Although Ms. Kanter wanted her daughter, Alyssa, to go to another arts high school that was “truly a 10-minute walk from our house,” they decided on CAPA—an hour commute each way—because Alyssa was unimpressed by the other school’s no-audition policy:
She just didn’t feel that the musicianship of people who auditioned—it was not an audition; it was you write a letter and stuff. She didn’t feel the level was her level. And she fought us tooth and nail and said she wanted to go to CAPA … the kids that got in [to CAPA] from our neighbourhood were the crème de la crème. (Interview, November 25, 2011)

Despite a plethora of possible choices, Ms. Sandberg’s son, Alexander, focused on a link between CAPA’s audition process and the prestige associated with admission. “I think he felt that because there was an audition process, that made it more prestigious if you actually got in,” she says. In this context, CAPA’s audition serves as a symbolic boundary (Lamont & Molnár, 2002), used to mark a certain level of expertise, talent, and prestige.

Ms. Sandberg explains the importance of social networks in evaluating the prestige, value, or cultural capital attached to each program, mentioning what her son “had heard” about the different schools prior to applying. This type of knowledge, which Ball and Vincent (1988) call “grapevine knowledge,” serves to provide “a medium of social comparison with others ‘like us’ and ‘others’ not ‘like us’” (p. 393). For Ms. Kanter and Ms. Sandberg, acceptance to CAPA functions as a way to validate their child’s artistic identity in a way that positions them as talented and above other young artists at non-audition programs who are not “like us.” The result is a tautological model of reciprocity and re-inscription: students are deemed talented because they have been admitted. On the other hand, CAPA is deemed a place for the talented because its student body has been deemed talented.

The above narratives demonstrate how parents produce CAPA as an elite space in order to fortify their child’s identification as talented while simultaneously using those same students to strengthen their own production of CAPA as a place for the talented. At the core of this is the school’s competitive audition process. But what role does talent play in this context? If a fundamental aspect of participant choice making is the desire to be at a place for the talented, we
must investigate how particular notions of talent are understood, and become valued, at CAPA.

**Talent, Social Advantage, and the Economy of Cultural Goods**

A student is only deemed talented enough to attend CAPA when she demonstrates ability in a particular cultural discipline—dance, musical theatre, drama, film, or visual arts—in a very specific way. While each of these disciplines is diverse, containing an array of styles, forms, and approaches, CAPA conducts its evaluation of student hopefuls within an extremely narrow, traditional, and Eurocentric interpretation of what constitutes art, as well as talent, within that discipline. For instance, dance applicants are expected to audition in one of only four styles: Ballet, Contemporary, Jazz, or Lyrical. Without creating space for Hip-Hop, Latin, or Bollywood, for example, the school’s message is strikingly clear: at CAPA, the classically trained applicant is more talented than the applicant proficient at Popping and Locking.

This act of privileging certain cultural forms over others permeates CAPA’s audition process within all six of its artistic disciplines. By providing drama applicants a short list of acceptable monologues, requiring band majors to perform a piece by Mozart, or asking musical theatre hopefuls to sing a chorale part from the Broadway musical *The Wiz*, CAPA defines, from the onset, which cultural goods are welcome in their arts programs, and by way of this, which demonstrable skillsets signify talent. And yet, CAPA’s method of distinction isn’t unique; rather, it serves as a fairly sound microcosm of the treatment of culture in Canadian (and American) society at large. On a societal level, a similar process takes place through the canonization of cultural products as either art or popular culture or, alternatively, high or low culture (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2007).

Within this economy of cultural goods (Bourdieu, 1984), the distinction between economic and cultural capital is difficult to pinpoint. It is no coincidence that acquiring the skills
necessary to signify talent in the arts requires a rather hefty economic investment. At CAPA, dance applicants participate in a 30-minute group class and perform a ‘solo’ in which they demonstrate their training and technique; drama applicants perform a monologue and participate in an improvisational exercise, while music applicants perform two pieces, and complete ear training and sight-reading tests. The musical theatre audition demands proficiency in singing, ear training, and dance, while visual arts applicants are judged based on a portfolio of their work.

As Ms. Cooper explains, applicants require advanced training in order to successfully demonstrate this discipline-specific knowledge at their CAPA audition:

The kids who are applying to CAPA are really good at what they do because they've had extra support. They've been able to go to these afterschool classes ... and that tends to develop young people who are highly skilled, playing at a very high level by the time they're fourteen. ... There aren't too many people going into CAPA who just want to learn how to play the flute. Well, that’s not the place for you darling; they’re not going to accept you. (Interview, November 25, 2011)

Similarly, Ms. Kanter believes that CAPA students’ impressive artistic talent indicates that they come from families that are “fairly bourgeois”:

All of those kids can play multiple instruments. So that’s the level there. Right? And so what I’m going to say is I believe that most of the kids there are fairly bourgeois, because they have been taking lessons. To be at that level vocally, or musically—like to play a grade 8 cello, or whatever—you have to have a little bit of money behind you. (Interview, November 25, 2011)

While a sufficient stock of cultural capital is essential to being deemed talented enough for CAPA, Ms. Cooper and Ms. Kanter remind us that the role of economic capital in the audition process should not be underestimated. The contrasting admissions narratives of Ms. Cooper’s two daughters clearly demonstrate the need for both forms of capital at CAPA.

Prior to applying to CAPA, Ms. Cooper’s eldest daughter Michelle, now a CAPA graduate, “had been a dancer and just had to go dance.” She had extensive formal training and, as a result, could perform all the standard dance manoeuvres to signify her talent. Ms. Cooper’s
youngest daughter Beth, on the other hand, simply “liked to draw.” Beth’s lack of formal training in painting worried Ms. Cooper, who remembers thinking, “Oh god! You haven’t done any painting” (Interview, November 25, 2011)! She consequently staged “an intervention,” investing in materials and a few classes, to help Beth prepare for the audition. After audition day, Beth was deemed talented enough for CAPA and accepted to the program. In Beth’s case, a love of drawing wasn’t enough. As a result, Ms. Cooper had to invest her economic capital—a decision informed by her cultural capital—in specific classes and materials in order to create a portfolio that would better signify talent at CAPA.

Conducting a similar analysis, Gaztambide-Fernández et al. (2013) use Bourdieu’s (1977) notion of misrecognition to make sense of the ways that students’ social advantages are misrecognized as talent in an elite specialized arts program. The above parent participant narratives support this conclusion, placing additional emphasis on the role that parents plays in this process. Taking on the Parent as Cultivator role, CAPA parents transfer cultural capital to their child in the form of culturally specific aesthetic tastes and distinctions, and purchase additional cultural capital with their economic capital. The Parent as Guide then helps the child select CAPA, a school that will recognize and reward this particular form of talent.

As Power (2001) notes, middle and upper-middle class families largely depend on cultural capital in the form of academic credentials in order to reproduce their social positioning in the next generation. For parent participants, then, the ability to conceptualize their child as talented grants them the faculty to justify unequal access, while simultaneously producing CAPA as an elite school with a tremendous reputation.

**Concluding Thoughts**

This chapter explored how CAPA parents mobilize two particular claims in their school
choice narratives: 1) that CAPA is a place for those who need it; and 2) that CAPA is a place for talented students. The analysis, however, reveals a significant tension between the school’s claims of inclusion (of students with creative learning needs) and exclusion (of those who are not artistically talented) and how certain socially advantaged parents can mobilize the “rhetoric of the creative genius” (Banaji & Burn, 2007), to capitalize on this tension, veiling their social advantages while justifying unequal access. To be clear, this analysis does not intend to suggest whether or not CAPA students have unique needs. Actually, their schooling needs are quite irrelevant to the argument. What is important, however, is how this need/talent narrative is only available to certain socially advantaged parents.
CHAPTER SIX:

The Arts and Inclusivity

I was at a party a while back and I had another parent—not a school parent—but a parent of a child whose daughter wants to come to CAPA and he said to me, ‘you know that school has a reputation of being bully-free?’ And I thought that’s such a wonderful reputation for them to have. (Interview: Gabrielle Sellers, December 16, 2011)

Specialized arts programs occupy a unique place within the plethora of Toronto secondary school options. Appealing to a particular discursive understanding of the arts, advocates tout the ability of these programs to catalyze integration from diverse urban districts, in the process disrupting racial and economic social divides (see Davis 2001, 2005; Gore, 2007; Graham, 1983; Nathan, 2010; Wilson, 2001). The communities within these schools are additionally viewed as safe spaces for the expression of diverse sexual orientations, and gender identities (Perrotti & Westheimer, 2001; Meyer, 2010; cf. Gaztambide-Fernández, Gladstone, & Rivière, 2012). These two different, yet interrelated, narratives contribute to the School for the Creative and Performing Arts’ (CAPA) reputation as “accepting,” “inclusive,” “bully-free,” and, ultimately, “safe.” In light of the ways in which race, social class, gender, and sexual orientation contribute to the ordering of social hierarchies in school communities, participants recount being drawn in by the prospect of a school where their child would be accepted for who she or he is.

This chapter will look at the role that this reputation of inclusivity plays in the choice narratives of CAPA parents. First, it will address how participants understand “inclusivity” at CAPA, and how this understanding factored into the decision to send their child to CAPA. It will then complicate this particular notion of inclusivity by examining participant narratives in light of the school’s homogenous student population. While Chapter 5 argued that discourses of the arts are at the core of CAPA’s exclusive admissions process, this chapter will look at how
parents mobilize similar discourses in order to make the CAPA community appear less desirable to particular students and their families, in the process justifying the school’s lack of diversity.

**An Inclusive Environment**

Since families approach school choice from a range of subject positions, with diverse lived experiences, the promise of an inclusive school environment can mean something different to each and every parent and child. While one family may see CAPA as a refuge from years of bullying and torment, another may view the school as a place that will provide a child the opportunity to blossom on her or his own terms. What becomes clear throughout participant interviews, however, is that the CAPA community is conceptualized as a more inclusive alternative to other potential school choices for students with diverse identities and ontologies.

**Introducing the Landsman family.** Ms. Landsman’s daughter Chrissie struggled with mental health challenges throughout grades 7 and 8. “There had been some self-harming done while she was in middle school,” her mother says, and she was recently diagnosed with anxiety and depression. During her interview, Ms. Landsman opts not to focus on her daughter’s past challenges; instead, she highlights Chrissie’s vastly improved mental health during her first few months at CAPA. “In the two months that she’s been there, she’s blossomed,” she says. “She’s been very accepted at the school for who she is, what she is, and what she does.” Ms. Landsman draws an explicit link between these positive developments and CAPA’s community environment and reveals that, “ever since starting at CAPA, there haven’t been any instances [of anxiety or cutting]” (Interview, November 11, 2011).

According to Ms. Landsman, these changes are the result of a school community that accepts and celebrates the very things—or differences—that were the cause of extreme anxiety in Chrissie’s middle school. “For her, [CAPA] was like home,” she says. “She felt welcomed.
She didn’t feel like she was different in a bad way. Her difference is accepted. You know, her quirkiness is accepted” (Interview: November 11, 2011).

Ms. Landsman mobilizes a common discourse of the “artist as cultural civilizer” (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2008), describing her daughter as “very expressive,” “a creative type of person,” “more mature than her friends around her,” and “show[ing] a lot of empathy and sympathy at a very young age.” By framing these traits as oppositional to what is normative, she works to reinforce the idea that CAPA is accepting of all differences and quirks. For Ms. Landsman, “differences” are a certainty; it’s up to the school environment to decide whether these are “good differences” or “bad differences.” According to Ms. Jansen, this culture of acceptance is common among specialized arts programs:

Most arts schools are very accepting of a child, of who you are. Even if you’re in—because all schools have types of cliques—and even if you’re in a clique [at an arts school] you’re gonna have the nerd, and the rocker and the, you know, all of them are in the same clique; it isn’t sort of determined by price brackets, or types of hair styles, or that kind of thing. It’s very very accepting of who you are. (Interview, November 25, 2011)

The above quotation suggests that at an arts school, cliques or groups of friends aren’t determined by traditional identity categories; instead, cliques are inclusive, accepting both “the nerd” and “the rocker,” as well as, presumably, an array of student “types” that would not typically associate with one another. Ms. Jansen finds this culture of inclusivity additionally impressive considering the competitive nature of CAPA students. “Even though it’s very competitive,” she says, the kids “really champion what each other do; they go to each others’ shows.” For instance, on the day of her interview, Ms. Jansen’s daughter, Talia, participated in a performance as part of her elective dance class. “The kids almost took up half the audience and they were just screaming for their friends,” Ms. Jansen proclaims. “And these would be some of the kids they’d be competing directly against” (Interview: November 25, 2011)!
Throughout the duration of their interviews, participants repeatedly elevate one explanation for CAPA’s inclusive and supporting environment. This narrative, which I will refer to as the *Talent as Currency* narrative, is premised on the belief that talent serves as the only significant form of currency or capital within the program. Legitimated and deemed talented by their very acceptance into CAPA, students buy into a meritocratic ideal where only student talent matters. “At CAPA you’re accepted for who you are,” explains Ms. Landsman. “There’s no ‘he’s popular, she’s popular so we’re going to choose them.’ It’s based on talent. Not on popularity” (Interview: November 11, 2011). The *Talent as Currency* narrative frames the arts as a civilizing force for equality, progress, and opportunity; CAPA, as an artistic space, transcends the politics of identity in order to focus on what presumably unites all people: talent and the arts. Built into the *Talent as Currency* narrative is the notion that the arts possess an *intrinsic* ability to shape students into inclusive and accepting social citizens (see Eisner, 2002).

The Landsman family serves as a fascinating case study in school choice because both their chosen school (CAPA) and the alternative school, Cherryhill, are specialized arts programs. And yet, despite its artistic focus, the Landsman family does not believe that Cherryhill offers as inclusive a community as CAPA. For Ms. Landsman, the differences between the two programs were evident from the beginning:

She auditioned for both Cherryhill and CAPA, and when she had gone for the audition and the open house night that they had, my daughter felt that CAPA was warm, friendly, inviting, more open. … Whereas when she went to Cherryhill, it was all ‘me, me, me.’ Very crypt, very cold, very unfriendly. (Interview, November 11, 2011)

This juxtaposition between warm and cold, friendly and unfriendly, and inviting and crypt, continued at both of Chrissie’s visual arts auditions:

Even the audition, she felt, with CAPA, they were very encouraging. One of her projects she had to bring in was a clay animation—clay thing. Well, it fell apart.
And they said, ‘hey, no problem. We’ll help you put it back together again.’ … They were so open and so friendly with her that she was praying to get into that school. And with Cherryhill, it was quite the opposite; very, sort of—she had a written test to do and the person monitoring them said to her personally that ‘this is taking a lot longer for you than it did for me.’ (Interview, November 11, 2011)

Chrissie’s response to these contrasting experiences was immediate. “I really just don’t want to go here,” Ms. Landsman remembers her saying. And when she finally received her acceptance letter from CAPA, Ms. Landsman recalls, “you could have heard her a mile away she was so happy” (Interview: November 11, 2011).

Ms. Landsman’s experience with the Cherryhill directly conflicts with her own mobilization of the Talent as Currency narrative. If each school holds a competitive admissions process, why doesn’t the Talent as Currency ideal hold true in both settings? How does one account for the stark differences in Ms. Landsman’s description of the two arts school communities? What purpose does the Talent as Currency narrative serve in the CAPA community? In order to begin to address these questions, this chapter will examine two particular claims of inclusivity at CAPA—CAPA as Accepting (of LGBTQ students) and CAPA as (racially and socioeconomically) Diverse.

An Accepting Community

Listen dude: it’s eight girls to every two guys. And half the guys are gay. It’s, like, the best odds you can possibly ask for. (Interview: Tanya Cassipi, imitating her son, a grade 11 film student, November 17, 2011)

Across the interviews, participating parents praise CAPA’s accepting community while, at the same time, expressing differing opinions as to whether or not CAPA is diverse. At the core of this disagreement is the many ways that CAPA parents conceptualize diversity. Is a diverse student community simply the presence of a diverse student population? Or, rather, is it a
community that will accept and include a student population that is considered “diverse?”

Moreover, when CAPA parents speak about diverse students, to whom are they referring?

**LGBTQ students.** The overwhelming consensus among parent participants is that CAPA is a uniquely safe space for LGBTQ youth because of its arts focus. This characterization of arts programs is quite common among students and faculty throughout specialized arts high schools in Canada and the United States (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2010). Educators such as Perrotti and Westheimer (2001) note that LGBTQ students are often attracted to arts-focused educational contexts because these are the places where they feel most included and supported. Since these spaces possess, “a climate of creativity, performance, and [room for] exploring others’ identities, emotions, and experiences,” (Meyer, 2010, p. 74), students who don’t fit into the cultural mainstream are said to find themselves more comfortable in these contexts.

In addition to providing a safe environment for LGBTQ students, participants praise the CAPA community’s ability to shape students into anti-bullying advocates and LGBTQ allies. For Ms. Cooper, a recent student-run anti-bullying initiative exemplifies how passionate and driven some CAPA students are about these issues:

> It brought me to tears. I heard on the CBC, they said that they had an assembly today at the School for the Creative and Performing Arts. And the school council president, who is 17, organized a support video to be made by [American female singer] and was presented to the school at the second period assembly. And [Canadian comedian] apparently supported them to acknowledge how supportive they are of the LGBT community. And I was just, you know, it just caught me. I was so proud of them. (Interview, November 25, 2011)

Referring to CAPA as a school with a “turbulent vibe of drama and expression,” Ms. Cooper nevertheless admires students’ ability to organize and “stir the pot,” unsettling the culture of bullying, discrimination, and violence that permeates “traditional” Toronto high schools. Some participants highlight the fact that the community of acceptance that CAPA cultivates extends
beyond the school’s brick walls. Ms. Dawkins recalls a recent incident involving her daughters standing up for LGBTQ rights during a particularly uncomfortable family gathering:

Ms. Dawkins: They have a cousin who’s in grade ten and he makes all these cracks about, you know, gays and all that. And they’re just ready to clobber him. Don’t you say that! You know, because, that’s what they talk about. They use those terminologies. And that’s, like, a big joke. But they don’t—it’s the way they talk.

Q: Teenagers, you mean? Or in general?

Ms. Dawkins: Teenagers who don’t see a lot of that. Where I think at CAPA, it’s more of what’s inside the person. And their beliefs and more about, you know, it’s not about what’s outside; it’s what’s inside. And I think it’s given them a whole new perspective and is much better than what they had before. (Interview, November 24, 2011)

This notion that exposure translates into acceptance is key to CAPA’s reputation of inclusivity. However, Ms. Dawkins’ narrative also raises many questions: if “what’s inside” is all that counts at CAPA (rather than “what’s outside”), how does the CAPA community behave toward diverse “insides” in the form of different cultures, beliefs, and worldviews? Furthermore, does this disregard for “what’s outside” hold up within the school’s highly competitive artistic environment?

While Ms. Jansen concedes that there may be bullying in one form or another at CAPA, she rearticulates Ms. Dawkins’ claim that, at CAPA, student harassment isn’t aimed toward “what’s outside.” In particular, she says that bullying is never directed toward a student’s race, sexuality, or physical appearance:

You know how in traditional schools you would have, you know, if you’ve got a gay guy in the class he can often get brutalized? That kind of stuff doesn’t happen [at CAPA]. You might have, like, a girl being nasty, but it isn’t directed at a physical thing, or a racial thing, or a sexual thing. It’s just a girl being nasty. (Interview, November 24, 2011)
The above quotation contrasts a “safe” school that is doing important work for the LGBTQ community (CAPA), with the dangerous and homophobic “traditional” school community. As Gaztambide-Fernández et al. (2012) note in their study of how discourses of safety are produced at four specialized arts high schools,

the description of danger—real or perceived—serves to draw a boundary between the frightening “regular high school” and the safe specialized arts program. In the arts program, “everybody” is “happy and safe” because of the arts. Claiming that the presence of the arts is the cause of the safe environment obscures other factors, such as the affluence and relative privilege of the students. (pp. 22)

Ms. Jansen’s narrative also shows how discussions of LGBTQ acceptance at CAPA are extremely gendered. Whether referred to as “the gay boy,” “the gay guy,” or “a guy that is gay,” participants nearly always construct the accepted gay student as male. While the queer female is rendered invisible, the entire female student population is subject to gender-based discrimination, which Ms. Jansen identifies as “just a girl being nasty.” But what is “just a girl being nasty?” How is its gendered violence any different from that of homophobic bullying? And what role, if any, do the arts play in this distinction as well as in its prevalence at CAPA?

**The arts and gender.** Participants are keen to discuss the gender-based challenges that female students at CAPA face. According to Ms. Kanter, mother of a female musical theatre student, CAPA’s female student population is plagued with self-esteem issues:

I think that the culture [at CAPA] is very bad for self esteem in girls. Very good for gay boys. Really bad for girls. And it’s interesting, the more I talk to different parents, whom I know from my community and beyond, the number of kids who’ve fallen apart from self esteem issues. (Interview, November 25, 2011)

The reality of a school community that celebrates the queer male—often the target of school-based bullying—while tormenting female students is unusual in Toronto’s schooling landscape. As will become clear, however, this phenomenon is directly related to the mobilization of dominant discourses of the arts within CAPA’s school community.
The relationship between gender and low female student self-esteem at CAPA is particularly clear. As a result, Ms. Cassipi, mother of two male CAPA students, admits that she would be apprehensive about sending a daughter to CAPA:

If they’re a boy, I have no concerns. If they’re a girl, they really have to think about how the young woman’s sense of self and body image is. Is she strong enough to cope with a whole new layer of stress? (Interview, November 17, 2011)

During her interview, Ms. Cassipi draws a connection between CAPA, increased scrutiny of the female body, and female student stress. Her two sons, on the other hand, “are treated like demi-gods and adored by all the girls,” she says. “And all these beautiful young dancers and it’s like, wow, they hit the jackpot here. They love that.” In addition to rendering the queer male as accepted and the queer female as invisible, the god-like heterosexual male is contrasted with the constantly examined, insecure, and sexually ambiguous female. As Gaztambide-Fernández et al. (2011) note, the expression of safety at specialized arts programs often, “reinforces heteronormative stereotypes of females as either nurturers or monstrous [being “nasty” to one another, perhaps], and simultaneously erases the presence of lesbian students by assuming gay boys to be the only groups at the school who are homosexual and in danger of being bullied” (pp. 17).

In the following quotation, Ms. Cassipi begins to suggest a link between gender-based violence and the arts by elaborating the relationship between a student’s artistic discipline and the challenges they face at CAPA:

Being boys and being in film, they are—it’s so much less competitive. They’re not auditioning for roles, parts; they’re not putting their body under scrutiny in front of mirrors on a daily basis. I think being a girl in any of those majors, you have to have a really solid sense of self and be very grounded not to develop body issues. (Interview, November 17, 2011)
This gets to the crux of the differences in expectations and standards from one major—film, where the majority are boys and the emphasis is on creation—to the next—dance, where the majority are girls and the emphasis is on performance. As cultural goods become canonized as art, an accompanying dominant aesthetic is elevated as well. Though these associated aesthetic demands often inflict harm on their practitioners, the harm is hidden behind the discursive veil of the arts (Gaztambide-Fernández et al., 2013). Ms. Cassipi’s narrative demonstrates this discursive power: instead of identifying the unhealthy body demands that dance, as an art form, places on its practitioners (e.g., maintaining extremely low levels of body fat; repetitive strain injuries from over-repetition of particular techniques such as the plié\textsuperscript{8} or standing en pointe\textsuperscript{9}), Ms. Cassipi cautions that dancers must be “very grounded” and “have a really solid sense of self” in order to succeed at CAPA. Rather than criticizing the arts for what it requires of its practitioners, those who are unable to weather its pressures are viewed as weak, less driven, and, possibly, less talented.

This phenomenon is not unique to dance. Gaztambide-Fernández (2013) argues that many cultural products only achieve the status of art through these dominant, yet harmful, aesthetic demands:

The ballet is beautiful not despite but because many young dancers starve themselves to look the part; the orchestra sounds magnificent not despite but because of the militaristic regimes that rule how many musicians are trained; the Broadway show inspires not despite but because the roles performed satisfy our most pernicious stereotypes about strangers; naked female bodies abound in the history of painting not despite but because of the patriarchal gaze. (p. 214)

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\textsuperscript{8} A common ballet movement wherein a dancer bends the knees and straightens them again, with the feet turned out and heels planted firmly on the ground.

\textsuperscript{9} The technique wherein a ballet dancer supports their entire body weight on the tips of their toes with fully extended feet.
Ms. Kanter notes that the prominent relationship between dominant aesthetics, gender, student stress, and low self-esteem at CAPA was taken up in a recent survey by a grade 12 student. Though she fails to implicate the arts in these widespread student challenges, Ms. Kanter expresses her concern over the troubling research results:

What came out of [the study] was the level of self-esteem in, certainly the music theatre department, was way below the level of the average girl that age. Isn’t that interesting? It went the lowest, I think, it went this way, I could be wrong: music theatre, dance, drama, film; … I can’t remember where visual arts fell into that. (Interview, November 25, 2011)

These challenges are certainly magnified by CAPA’s unique gender split. While the gender distribution throughout the TDSB is 52% male to 48% female, at CAPA, it is 31% male to 69% female. As well, research suggests that, for a given body size, women with high SES are more dissatisfied with their bodies than women from low SES backgrounds (Mclaren & Kuh, 2004; Odgen & Thomas, 1999; Wardle & Griffith, 2001), and that “thinness serves as a marker of social distinction in industrialized societies” (Mclaren & Kuh, 2004, 1575).

Ms. Kanter believes that the school fosters a competitive environment that can be very intimidating for young girls, especially those in musical theatre:

The music theatre girls, now think, if you’ve been around that school, have you seen what those girls look like? Those girls are beautiful. My daughter is drop-dead gorgeous and she is one of 50 very beautiful girls there. … They can all sort of dance, they can all sing; like, of her whole class of lets say 50 girls, 48 can sing really well. If you heard them you’d say ‘wow,’ you know? And they’re beautiful and most of—like there’s a couple of chubby girls, but for the most part they’re really very pulled together, and they have way low self-esteem. What does that tell ya? (Interview, November 25, 2011)

While she identifies these issues as a serious problem, Ms. Kanter continues to mobilize the very same discourses of the arts that maintain and reproduce these body image issues. By focusing on what girls in music theatre look like—using adjectives like “beautiful and “drop-dead gorgeous”—and contrasting “beautiful” and “really well pulled-together” with “chubby,” she
reinforces the notion that beautiful dancing and acting requires a particular kind of (skinny, frequently unhealthy) body, and that any other female body shape signifies a girl who isn’t “well pulled together.”

Considering parents’ concern over gender-based violence, why do parents choose CAPA? In order to address this question, it is useful to return to Ms. Dawkins’ claim that bullying doesn’t occur at CAPA. What the analysis shows, however, is that CAPA parents mobilize discourses of the arts in order to obscure gender-based violence as something else—specifically, “girls being nasty.” In the process, they reproduce CAPA as a safe place and as a good school choice so that parents, like them, will also choose CAPA. Parents are, thus, drawn in by the “safety mystique” of the arts high school (Gaztambide-Fernández et al., 2012) that they help maintain. Drawing on the “safety mystique,” parents are able to justify the absence of a range of female body types by pathologizing those who don’t look “look the part” as simply unable to meet the physical and emotional demands of their art form.

**Diversity and Selective Inclusivity**

While parents provide multiple definitions of diversity at CAPA, the school’s enrolment demographics—in relation to the district’s population—paint a picture of an unequivocally homogenous student community. More than three quarters of CAPA students identify as white, versus one-third district-wide; forty-five percent of CAPA parents were born in Canada as opposed to 19% in the district; over 60% of CAPA parents have university degrees, and 80% have professional and management level jobs. One of the most bizarre claims made by parent participants is that CAPA is accepting of diverse students without actually housing a diverse student population in its school.
Ms. Cooper notices the school’s racial makeup whenever she walks CAPA’s hallways, and describes a recent parent teacher meeting she attended as “pretty pale”:

The faces were all pretty white. And maybe then, you know, a lot of times in the band, you see quite a number of kids who come from maybe Asian families, we have, you know, very supportive in strings, and all that. But, you know, my girls, my daughter has the one black boy in her class for four years and a couple of girls who are African Canadians. (Interview, November 25, 2011)

While Ms. Cooper acknowledges the lack of racial diversity at the school, she emphasizes that her daughter’s absence of friends from different racial backgrounds is not her choice: “Most of Beth’s friends are not of colour and it’s not that that’s a choice for her; it’s just that’s who’s going to school there” (Interview, November 25, 2011). In this way, Ms. Cooper implies that her daughter would be accepting of all types of students, if only there was a more diverse student population at CAPA.

Ms. Schwartzman takes Ms. Cooper’s statement a step further, claiming that students at CAPA are so accepting, the only students they don’t accept are those who aren’t accepting:

If you’re a person who is comfortable with conformity, it’s not for you. Because you’re going to have examples in terms of artwork that you see, how people dress, colours of hair, lots of different situations where if you’re comfortable with conformity, you’re going to have that challenged on a daily basis. (Interview, November 30, 2011)

Ms. Schwartzman’s notion of diversity is different than some of the other participants. Focusing on where students come from within Toronto’s sprawling geography, she believes that CAPA is diverse because it is “a school with kids from all over.” As with her daughter Kelly’s middle school, CAPA maintains this geographical diversity through its status as a commuter school, drawing students from all over the district. “I think I really like that idea that you meet lots of different kids,” Ms. Schwartzman says. “Just in terms of diversity of background and
perspectives, and interests. You get that at CAPA. It’s quite a diverse environment” (Interview, November 30, 2011).

Another way that participants conceptualize diversity is through the lens of social class. Ms. Sandberg describes CAPA students as coming from a wide range of social class backgrounds:

You’ve got kids that come from very wealthy families; you’ve got kids that come from families that don’t have a lot; you have the ones in the middle. And they’re all very supportive of each other and I think it helps them to learn not to sort of be judgmental on those bases. (Interview, November 28, 2011)

This narrative gives the impression that CAPA educates an equal numbers of students from all along the socioeconomic spectrum. She reinforces this perception by looking toward the future and suggesting that CAPA will prepare her son “wonderfully because they have so much exposure to so many—I want to say different kids—but kids from all different walks of life.”

Mr. Dawkins echoes this belief, identifying the arts as a mechanism for bringing together a diverse student demographic:

Sometimes in local areas you might get certain either ethnic make up or certain financial makeup or something, whereas this school can kind of break that down and pull from any different areas that have to have the strength and interest in the arts. (Interview, November 24, 2011)

Both Mr. Dawkins and Ms. Sandberg’s understanding of diversity positions the arts as a key tool for reaching beyond typical socioeconomic and racial boundaries. However, LOI statistics highlight that the school’s population is heavily skewed toward more affluent families. As with the case of gender-based violence, parent participants appear anxious not to present the school as exclusive as the school’s narrative is founded on the notion that it is a public option for those who need it and those who are talented. While Mr. Dawkins suggests that the arts can work to attract all students with talent and interest, he is able to account for CAPA’s homogenous student
demographics by suggesting that certain social groups, cultures, and social classes are more likely than others to possess an interest in the arts:

You can look at certain arts or certain things and maybe there are certain financial or ethnic areas that don’t have to start to have the interest in the arts or the ability. Like for instance, if you were required to have to do private lessons that would be hard for someone without the money. And so, you know that’s maybe a slight disadvantage, that way. But I think that there is, you can get that mix with the way that the school is set up. (Interview, November 24, 2011)

Mr. Dawkins acknowledges the very important role of economic capital in cultivating talent in the arts. However, he simultaneously mobilizes the narrative that only certain sociocultural or ethnic groups have an interest in the arts, rather than questioning how the arts are defined in this context. By defining the arts in a very particular way, this narrative becomes validated and is used to account for CAPA’s exclusive admissions process. The arts are viewed as extending an invitation to everyone; however, only certain groups decide to engage and accept the invitation.

This contradiction is exemplified by Ms. Dawkins who, in the following interview segment, speaks of the arts as accommodating, and then, in the subsequent sentence identifies Muslim and Somali culture as antithetical to the arts:

Q: So why do you want the girls to have an education with a focus on the arts?

Ms. Dawkins: It wasn’t so much the arts as it was—well it was the arts but it was also the whole way the school is run. Very accommodating to kids of different backgrounds, different cultures, different sexuality. Whereas the school that they went to before, there was a lot of Muslim kids in both their schools, like their JK to 5 and 6,7,8, and we found, and they found, that they all kind of kept together in cliques. And there was a lot of—how do you say—like, the parents were immigrants so they’re first generation Canadians. So I find that with people that come from other countries, that the longer the generations go on, their attitudes change. But when the first generations come, their attitudes are like old world. And they don’t understand why we do things the way we do, because they’re used to different things. You know, like, you can’t dance. No music, this whole thing. … It’s part of the culture, because there are a lot of Somalis [sic] and they don’t do that in their cultures. So—
Q: They don’t play music? Or they don’t—

Ms. Dawkins: Oh god no. Music brings people close together and touchy and all this stuff. But as the, you know, as these kids have children, and the time goes on, that will all change. But most of these kids parents, who are right from Somalia, so they don’t understand. (Interview, November 24, 2011)

By making these claims, Ms. Dawkins constructs an Other that doesn’t understand how things are done at CAPA, thus justifying lack of access. This process is essential to the maintenance and reproduction of the dominant discourses of the arts that shape CAPA as an institution. The harm, however, extends beyond erasure; by framing the arts as a thing that is inclusive, accepting, and good, and Somalis and Muslims as counter to the arts, Ms. Dawkins is rendering Somalis and Muslims as oppositional and not ‘good.’ CAPA thus presents itself as truly civilized and democratic at the expense of those who do not fit acceptable forms of otherness. Finally, she is able to utilize this strategy to once again put the blame on these parents, characterizing them as bad parents who make bad parenting choices because they do not ‘understand’:

Q: And you see CAPA being a sort of different—

Ms. Dawkins: Well yeah they’re more understanding because, I mean, you know, in those cultures homosexuality and all that kind of stuff is like ‘oh my god.’ You know? And like at CAPA, that doesn’t even matter. Nobody cares. They don’t use those terms that they would use at the other school.

Q: Now is CAPA, would you say, is it culturally diverse?

Ms. Dawkins: No. Definitely not. But it’s accepting of I think, not so much cultures, as it is orientations and beliefs. Because, honestly, a lot of the people who come from other countries, arts isn’t as important as academics. Except for the Asian; they too tend to emphasize it. But you get a lot of people tend to believe that you have to be really smart and do well in school. (Interview, November 24, 2011)
Concluding Thoughts

How does this discussion of acceptance and diversity at CAPA relate to the Landsman family’s school choice narrative that was discussed earlier? To begin with, it disrupts Ms. Landsman’s usage of the Talent as Currency narrative to describe the CAPA community, instead replacing it with one of Selective Inclusivity. This narrative is constructed around CAPA as the safe alternative, open to everybody should they decide to apply. It emphasizes the presence of select identity categories—the gay male, for instance—in order to make these claims, while obscuring instances of symbolic gender violence behind discourses of the arts. When confronted with the community’s lack of diversity—along lines of social class and race—Selective Inclusivity constructs an Other that is disinterested in CAPA for cultural or economic reasons. In this way, social hierarchies are reproduced and the absence of diversity at CAPA is justified.
CHAPTER SEVEN:

The Arts, Social Reproduction, and the “Well-Rounded Individual”

We were talking about it last night: of his class of 30 drama students, only two are interested in going on to acting. Not all—the students aren’t all going, ‘oh I’m going to be an artist. I’m going to be a singer. I’m going to be an actor.’ You know? They’re enjoying what they have. (Interview: Danielle Tate, November 29, 2011)

A crucial question within the debates around school choice is what exactly an expanded educational marketplace means for student futures. Building on the argument that this shifting landscape of choice systematically disadvantages working class families, schools, and communities (see Ball & Vincent, 1998; Ball, 1993; Ball, 2003; Reay & Ball, 1998; Taylor & Woollard, 2003; Taylor & Mackay, 2008; Fuller & Elmore, 1996; Ball, Bowe, & Gerwitz, 1996), the previous three chapters have laid out how families from dominant socioeconomic backgrounds mobilize particular discourses of the arts to justify unequal opportunities at Toronto’s School for the Creative and Performing Arts (CAPA). While it has become clear that a family’s social positioning within Toronto’s structures of inequality delimits whether or not CAPA becomes available as a choice, I have yet to ask what role choosing the arts—and choosing CAPA, in particular—plays in shaping student futures.

Bringing into question the notion that specialized arts programs help talented students become artists, the first section of this chapter will document the social connections, unique arts-related opportunities, and related challenges that come with choosing CAPA. Despite the tendency of students to engage with these stressful opportunities, parents claim that most do so without the intention of pursuing a postsecondary or professional future in the arts. Drawing on Beck (1992) and Giddens’ (1999) notion of the “risk society,” this chapter will argue that participant families engage with CAPA’s stressful opportunities in particular ways in order to
assure that the “risks of social reproduction are to be minimized and control of the future maximized” (Ball, 1993, p. 166). The second part of this chapter will examine how parent participants imagine CAPA will prepare their child for the future. Focusing on the perceived “non-arts” effects of an arts education, this section will argue that these prominent discourses of the arts (and “creativity”) are fundamental to the justification of unequal futures and social inequality in Toronto.

Social Capital, Stressful Opportunities

As the vice-president of the school’s parent organization, Supports of Creative Talent (SCT), Ms. Jansen works with school administrators and teachers on a regular basis. According to her, a significant benefit of choosing CAPA is that the teachers, themselves, are artists and, as a result, better understand the needs and wants of their students. Students are further able to utilize their teachers’ connections within local arts communities to construct their desired futures. Ms. Jansen notes that,

all teachers have different connections. There are some teachers—for instance, the gentleman that works with the TSO [Toronto Symphony Orchestra] stuff and he has a connection with TSO. And there are other teachers that work with the Tarragon [Theatre], and they have connections with the Tarragon, and so I mean, I think that through being exposed to the different schools, you get different opportunities because you have people that have connections, and it filters down. (Interview, November 25, 2011)

Through one such connection, Ms. Jansen’s daughter had the opportunity to sing with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. Likewise, Ms. Tate’s son Daniel spent the past two years performing as part of the Sears Drama Festival, an opportunity only made available through CAPA’s network. Now, as a more experienced grade 11 student, he was recently offered a lead role in one of the festival productions, which, Ms. Tate says, is “a big deal for him” (Interview, November 29, 2011).
Ms. Schwartzman’s daughter, Kelly, is currently performing in a professional production at the Tarragon Theatre. Her story serves as a good example of how attending CAPA augments one’s social network in ways that make unique artistic opportunities available:

She was asked to audition. The Tarragon theatre—it’s a play called [title omitted] and there are four roles for teenagers in it, and they went through, sort of, the traditional agents and all of that, and they didn’t find the four kids. And so they went to some of the high schools and asked drama teachers to recommend some kids. So Kelly was recommended by [her drama teacher]. And then there were about five auditions before she got it. (Interview, November 30, 2011)

Uninterested in getting “twenty-somethings who look like teenagers,” the play’s director reached out into her own Toronto arts network hoping to fill the parts. This artistic circle included Ms. Switzer and, as a result, the audition opportunity became available to Kelly.

Parent participants underscore that these opportunities often involve a huge commitment from the student. When paired with CAPA’s weighty academic demands, these extracurricular commitments can result in extreme student stress. For instance, Ms. Schwartzman notes that Kelly’s role is so time-intensive, their family has been forced to devise a personalized study schedule with CAPA teachers and private tutors in order to keep Kelly up to date with her regular grade 10 school commitments:

On Wednesday they do double [performances]. They do a matinee and an evening performance. And on Thursday, what we, I’ve talked to the teachers, we’re going to let her sleep in and give her the afternoon to do homework. Because they have performances Tuesday through Sunday, on Wednesday they have two, and on Saturday they have two. So it’s not like there’s a lot of opportunity to have blocks of time to do work—certainly work out of school. And even just the fact that—getting run-down. So we’ve now arranged with her, she meets with a tutor now on Thursdays, to get one-on-one help with Math and Science. And then she also has hours in the afternoon to work on her other subjects, where she can be writing something, or studying for a test. (Interview, November 30, 2011)

Despite these challenges, the opportunity to act in this production is too good an opportunity to pass up. So while Ms. Schwartzman notes that this commitment disrupts Kelly’s ability to attend
regular classes, complete her homework, and study for exams, their family chooses to make the necessary sacrifices in order for Kelly to be part of the production.

A second major area where CAPA’s opportunity/stress nexus presents itself is through the school’s high stakes recruitment fairs. The most notable of these is Portfolio Day, a twice-annual event where CAPA invites professors and officials from visual arts schools and universities across the globe to advise students, scout talent, and offer lucrative scholarships to various postsecondary institutions. Last year, representatives from 20 schools attended, offering more than $1.6 million in student scholarships. On Portfolio Day, administrators, teachers, and parent volunteers draw on CAPA’s institutionalized social capital in order to make additional opportunities available for their students. As with the above narratives of CAPA-facilitated extracurricular arts opportunities, however, Portfolio Day is accompanied by extreme student stresses:

Beth was even shaking in her boots because she knew [the recruiters] were coming. She got a lovely spot to be, and her work was out there and she had people come up to her and talk to her about her work and offer her positions. Like, she didn’t think that anyone would look at her work. And I think that it was fantastic for that. Last year when they did it for the first time, I got to the point where I thought, if I hear you guys talk about one more time, about saying that there was one-some million dollars in scholarship offered, I think that I’m going to blow up! Because I just felt that it was causing a lot of strain in terms of expectations on the up-coming grads. (Interview: Heather Cooper, November 25, 2011)

When describing CAPA’s stressful opportunities, participants are caught between a desire to maximize their child’s success and parental concern over the negative psychological and physical effects of these opportunities. It is in this regard that Ms. Cooper refers to this phenomenon as the “double-edged sword.” This tension permeates narratives of student futures, and becomes additionally significant in light of the fact that nearly all participants do not believe their child will pursue postsecondary studies or a career in the arts. If not to prepare their child
for a future in the arts, what value do parents and students see in choosing stress-filled artistic opportunities? In the following section, I suggest that these decisions are directly related to maximizing the future success of the next generation.

**The Logic of the “Double Edged Sword”**

The perception of the artist as tortured, mad, struggling, and depressive permeates the public imagination (Wittkower & Wittkower, 1963). Though surely linked to the enormous number of pop culture icons who have died prematurely by their own hand or as a result of substance abuse, this image is reinforced through the continued reference to the prominent Enlightenment-era duality of the sane/rational mind and the creative/artistic mind (Kant, 1790/2007; Wittkower & Wittkower, 1963; Want & Klimowski, 1997). Over the past two decades, many researchers have sought to determine whether or not the relationship between creativity and mental illness has an empirical basis (e.g., Kaufman, 2001; Sandblom, 2009; Spaniol, 2001). While their conclusions are questionable (and problematic in their explicitly positivist ontological and epistemological orientations), the belief that the true artist must “struggle for their art” remains as prevalent—and tautological—a narrative as ever.

Adding to this particular mythology are the very real challenges associated with earning an income as a professional artist, as well as the enormous disparities between the clichéd “rich sell-out artist” and the “poor, yet authentic, artist.” For this reason, Ms. Kanter, someone who “knows a ton of people in the arts and people who are actors,” hopes that her daughter, Alyssa, will not pursue music theatre as a career. “It’s not a profession I would really wish upon anyone, let alone my child,” she says (Interview, November 25, 2011). Nevertheless, she explains that her daughter’s voice “is good enough to take her through university,” but it’s much more likely that “she’ll make a great educator, maybe do graduate work, do a Master’s in teaching.” This
characterization of a child as “talented enough to be a professional artist,” yet “disinterested in becoming a professional artist” is, I argue, the goal of the CAPA parent keen on cultivating upper-middle class personhood, since non-professional engagement with artistic opportunities can provide a huge stock of cultural capital without any of the material risks of an unpredictable career path in the arts. In this regard, the stress associated with being a teenager in a professional production is worth the stock of cultural capital that will aid in a future non-arts career.

This parental choice-making strategy can be understood through the lens of risk management. According to Beck (1992) and Giddens (1999), modern day societies (or “risk societies”) present individuals with a wide range of potential courses of action among which the individual must make choices, usually with the intention of minimizing risks. In this context, parents are making choices with the intention of minimizing the risks associated with social reproduction. For parent participants like Ms. Kanter, minimizing risk occurs through maximizing one’s stock of cultural capital through arts-related opportunities while, at the same time, going on to a career without economic risk—a future that will provide the child with the economic capital to continue taking part in social class reaffirming cultural offerings.

Participants support this idealized student future by highlighting the important—yet, non-professional—role the arts will play in their child’s life. At the same time, however, they struggle to articulate the specifics of this future and speak only in the most vague of terms. Ms. Carpenter, for instance, says that her son Kevin’s,

goal in life is not to be a musician. The pursuit of music for him—well, there were two reasons. His reason for wanting to do it was he’s always just really enjoyed music, and appreciated music, not just as a performer, but in fact maybe more so just as a listener. He enjoys ‘doing’ rather than studying and sees music as more something that he ‘does.’ (Interview, December 5, 2011)

Likewise, while Ms. Jansen claims that her daughter’s love of music theatre will continue to play
Ms. Jansen: She may always continue on doing it in some way shape or form, but she has no intention of pursuing it as a career, at this stage.

Q: So then, do you know what it is about that the arts that is driving her the way it is? Or what it is that—

Ms. Jansen: I think it’s the utter joy of doing it. (Interview, November 25, 2011)

And yet, these narratives are not anomalies. Rather, participants claim that CAPA is not a ‘career school.’ Elaborating on this, Mr. Dawkins explains that although CAPA can prepare a student for a career in the arts, it is by no means the school’s purpose:

It’s just that they basically foster their interest in the arts; well, no, I mean the students foster their own interests in the arts by going to the school and giving them that outlet. But they did not or may never have had an intention of making it a career. It’s not necessarily meant to be a career school focus. I think it gives you a heads up if that is your intention or desire but it doesn’t have to be, and it isn’t for the majority. (Interview, November 24, 2011)

Despite CAPA’s public school status, parents make huge material and symbolic investments in ensuring that the school is produced as an elite institution. These investments translate into large stocks of cultural and social capital that can be converted into elite stories of upper-middle class personhood (i.e., the whole rounded person) that are desirable to universities as students move into their post-CAPA lives. This further contributes to the reputation of CAPA as a good school, which leads to other parents like them choosing it.

**Stressful Opportunities and Student Self-Identification**

While parent participants strategically negotiate the tension of the “double-edged sword” by looking toward student futures, CAPA’s perceived *Talent as Currency* social hierarchy (see Chapter 6) forces students to make similar decisions in order to fortify their artistic identities in the present. Although these choices are made for altogether different reasons, they play a similar role in shaping elite futures. During her interview, Ms. Cooper explains that at CAPA, the
pressure to be an artist in the present is so intense, her daughter Beth is afraid to share with her classmates her desire to pursue postsecondary studies in a non-arts field:

She’s interested in modern languages and has always had an interest in other cultures. But she almost feels a little bit like a turncoat if she was to say, ‘well I’m not going to go on to art.’ Right? So and [head of visual arts] does not care; he thinks it’s wonderful. But, for example, the other day I heard some kids at the other table looking at some university [pamphlet] and saying, ‘look at that! Linguistics; who’d want to do that? Oh German studies, oh how boring.’ And, of course, Beth is very thinned-skin and she said, ‘how could they say that?’ And, I’d say, ‘Princess, they have no idea that’s your interest. And you’re in an arts school. There are going to be a lot of kids who that’s not going to be their calling. But you know, she feels like she can’t come out of the closet and say, you know, I love my art career, but you know what? I love languages and I’m going this way. That’s a very private thing for her. (Interview, November 25, 2011)

According to Ms. Cooper, Beth’s anxieties revolve around an external perception of whether or not she is an artist. In this narrative, she presents herself as a calming presence in her daughter’s life—a parent, whose duty it is to help her daughter with the inevitable stresses of the “double-edged sword.” The story, however, can also be seen as a way to justify the decision to go on to postsecondary life in a non-arts field. At CAPA, an environment constructed to serve students with particular “talents” and “needs,” the repercussions of such an admission can be dire: the revelation that the choice to attend CAPA has little to do with the arts. Ms. Cooper even compares these anxieties to the prospect of “com[ing] out of the closet,” and feels it necessary to explain to Kelly’s friends that someone can love languages and the arts at the same time, thereby justifying the choice of taking public funds for an arts education even though she will not pursue a career in the arts.

This tension permeates discussions of student futures and is further exemplified by Beth’s peculiar approach to postsecondary school choice. Though Ms. Cooper makes it clear that her daughter is uninterested in pursuing a degree in visual arts, according to her mother, Beth still wants to apply to various elite arts institutions in order to prove her worth as a visual artist:
She said, you know, I just don’t want to write the SATs and I know it’s really super expensive and I have to get really good scholarships to go to the States. But I think she just wants to apply. There’re a couple of them that don’t require SATs and she just wants to apply because there is such a vibe about it at the school, people applying to these American universities, that she feels, ‘well, I’ve got to apply to something. I just want to know that if I wanted to go, that they would accept me. And if they would accept me, I can say no. But I can say, Oh yeah I was accepted at Parsons [the New School for Design] but I didn’t go.’ (Interview, November 25, 2011)

In addition to applying to Canadian arts programs that she has no interest in, Ms. Cooper notes that Beth feels pressured to apply to American arts institutions that their family cannot afford. In these instances, acceptance to these elite programs would serve a symbolic purpose—a means of demonstrating the child’s artistic value, thereby justifying choosing CAPA in the first place.

While one can speculate as to the diverse sources of this pressure (e.g., students, teachers, and the media), Ms. Cooper makes clear that one source of pressure to go on to particular elite institutions is the CAPA parent community:

We were in a meeting in the spring and we were talking about it and parents were saying there’s such a push for, you know, American art colleges. Are there no art colleges in Canada that you think kind of rise above the others? And they said, ‘no.’ And I thought, like they said, if you want to go on to be a professional artists this is what you have to do. You have to go to the US. In fact they said, ‘you know what? The best schools are not in New York, but that’s where you should be.’ (Interview, November 25, 2011)

As noted in Chapter 4, parent participants emphasize CAPA’s strong academic reputation through postsecondary statistics during their choice-making process, some claiming that it boasts better academics than elite private schools. The above narrative shows the ways that parents work to maintain this reputation by guiding CAPA students into elite postsecondary institutions. This is one way in which parents continue to produce this image of CAPA as a good choice.
(Re)producing the Whole Rounded Person

So far, this chapter has shown that while the arts play a fundamental role in the ability of CAPA parents to construct elite futures for their children, the arts actually play quite an insignificant role in these imagined futures. Rather than preparing CAPA students for a career in the arts, CAPA functions as a mechanism for developing upper-middle class personhood. While a large component of this process is securing admission to the elite non-arts postsecondary institution, parent participants also highlight how CAPA develops a number of less quantifiable—yet no less important—traits in its students. An arts education is thus viewed as essential to the development of what Ms. Cooper calls the “whole rounded person.” According to Ball (2003), this set of goals is grounded in a particular kind of middle class parenting strategy:

For the middle class the future is a trajectory of the development of personhood. Middle-class ontologies are founded upon incompleteness, they are about becoming, about the developmental self, about making something of yourself, realising yourself, realising your potential. This is an essential feature of a liberal identity—the unfinished self. (p. 172)

While parent narratives are admittedly vague and disjointed when dealing with how an arts education will develop their child into a whole rounded person, they do tend to revolve around three particular discourses of the arts: 1) The Arts and Personal Growth; 2) The Arts and Intelligence; and 3) The Arts and the Neoliberal Economy. This section will explore how parent participants invoke these discourses in relation to the project of achieving upper-middle class personhood. At the same time, it will examine how these concepts function to justify social inequality in society at large.

The arts and personal growth. The first of these discourses presents an arts education as something that “contribute[s] to the growth of the mind” (Eisner, 2002, p. xi) in a specific non-quantifiable artistic way. When mobilizing this discourse, participants focus on the effect of
both artistic content and method within the classroom. Looking at drama at CAPA, for instance, Ms. Schwartzman says that the specific material that students are encouraged to think and write about leads to valuable and unique “personal growth”:

A lot of the things that they do in the program as part of their training is the kind of thing that will help them be much more aware human beings. So if you want to look at it from the standpoint of personal growth and development, a lot of what they do, you know, a lot of the exercises that they do, the things they have to think about, write about, it all is beneficial for one’s personal growth. And I think it’s a kind of personal growth—the potential personal growth outcomes that kids in that program will be getting are the kind of outcomes I think all children should have as part of their education. (Interview, November 30, 2011)

Interestingly, in the above narrative, Ms. Schwartzman makes the argument that she chose the arts for reasons that are good for every kid, not just those for those who are talented. Likewise, after one year at CAPA, Ms. Dawkins’ claims that her daughter now “understands people, if people have different outlooks in life, whereas where she came from before, anything that was out of the norm was like, you know, really picked on” (Interview, November 25, 2011). Both parents emphasize how the arts classroom helps students grow into more “aware” and “understanding” people, traits possessed by their notion of the complete or whole rounded person. What makes these two similar claims interesting, however, is that they originate from two very different artistic disciplines: Ms. Schwartzman’s daughter majors in drama, while Ms. Dawkins’ majors in strings. The suggestion that both majors provide the student with a similar growth trajectory indicates that the arts, irrespective of specifics, are a thing—an educational elixir—that can be injected into an educational space with predictable outcomes (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013).

Ms. Cooper frames this discourse in a slightly different way. Focusing on how an arts education challenges students on an emotional level, she praises the way students are required to be self-reflexive. This emphasis, she maintains, is altogether absent in the traditional education
That’s the main thing: it’s challenged her right to the edge of her. Because it’s really—because you’re doing art, you know? You’re really opening up your coat and exposing your soft under belly. And, sometimes that’s really hard. … They have the opportunity through their teenage life, to express themselves and do this self-searching through their art. (Interview, November 25, 2011)

Based on the above narratives, engagement in the arts is believed to facilitate the student’s journey toward a particular type of upper-middle class personhood. But when Ms. Schwartzman says that, “the arts add a richness to our education … in terms of just being a person,” what does she mean? Specifically, how do CAPA parents conceptualize the whole-rounded person?

**The arts and academic achievement.** This second discourse relies on the relationship between learning in the arts and the development of measurable cognitive skills and capacities useful in other school subjects. Though educational researchers generally present this advocacy argument and the above argument (the arts and personal growth) as contradictory, (see Winner & Hetland, 2000), parent participants often mobilize these two discourses simultaneously. Moreover, because they tend to draw on anecdotal evidence, relying on word of mouth, personal anecdotes, and gut instinct, participants demonstrate uncertainty in these convictions and frequently look toward the interviewer for confirmation:

Ms. Kanter: Engineering and music they go together right?

Q: Well, that’s what a lot of people are saying. And a lot of parents are sort of making the connection between science and music.

Ms. Kanter: Or math and music.

Q: Math and music, for sure. When I ask that question about, you know, how do you see [CAPA] preparing them for the future, I hear that a lot.

MS. Kanter: I think it’s the discipline too. I mean maybe it’s part of the brain they say math and music. But also to be able to play music right, you have to be able to read, you then have to take in your auditory, what you’re hearing and process it. And then you have to be able to have memory, right? So it involves all the different
cortices of the brain simultaneously. And then if you sing on top of that, if you play the piano and then sing on top of that, and then that’s your vocal elements as well. So in order to process that three dimensionally it’s very good for the brain. (Interview, November 25, 2011)

As a former university professor, Ms. Schwartzman believes that she has witnessed the clear connection between students gifted in math and science, and those talented in music:

Ms. Schwartzman: In a former life, my name used to be on grade reports at a university, in the faculty of science, and I was always struck by the number of my very good students who also were musical.

Q: Oh. Who were also musical?

Ms. Schwartzman: Very musical. There was definitely a correlation in music training and mathematical science, computational—and so what do we do when we cut out the arts? We’re cutting out nurturing that kind of talent. (November 30, 2011)

The arts and the neoliberal economy. In Chapter 4, I briefly touched on, and critiqued, parent participants’ use of the term “creative class.” The term was used as a way to identify certain parenting styles as better or preferable to others. Value judgments were made, solidifying the belief that parents with high SES makes better choices within a supposedly neutral educational marketplace than parents with low SES. Here, parents use this concept in a similar way in order to speak about student futures and the production of the whole rounded person. This discourse moves beyond the connection between the whole rounded person and “artistic habits of mind” (Eisner, 2002), instead drawing a connection between creativity, the arts, and success in the neoliberal marketplace.

Though disinterested in pursuing a career in the arts, the whole rounded individual enters the job market able to demonstrate “creativity” in desirable ways. Ms. Cassipi’s sons, for instance, are keen on pursuing a career where they can be “creative”:

I don’t think either of them see themselves in film as a career. But they will enjoy and certainly view films completely differently. They will engage with all kinds of
cultural offerings. They will have a creative element to what they do and they’ll want a creative element in what they choose to do. (Interview, November 17, 2011)

Similarly, while Ms. Sandberg’s son doesn’t know where he will be when he “grows up,” she believes that he will end up in a career that allows him to be engaged in a specific, “creative” way:

The other night he was saying that he has no clue what he will be when he grows up. Certainly, if he can make it in the arts, that would be great. But at this point, I think the thing that’s clear to me is that he will have to do something that allows him to be interpersonally engaged and experientially engaged in some way. I’m not quite sure what the options that will allow him to do that are. (Interview, November 28, 2011)

While seemingly benign when articulated by caring parents, these three discourses of the arts, I argue, reside at the centre of the complex relationship between the arts and social inequality in society. When mobilized in relation to the idealized whole rounded person, they work to construct particular discursive understandings of personhood and intelligence that are founded on, and reproduce, racist, classist, sexist, homophobic, and ableist social hierarchies. As a result, these discourses function to justify societal disparities beyond CAPA’s walls as well.

**Concluding Thoughts**

Throughout this chapter, I have argued that the choice process extends beyond graduation, as families continue to work to produce CAPA as an elite school and a good school choice for parents through their child’s futures and the futures of CAPA alumni. Part of this process involves the construction of a particular kind of personhood, which CAPA prides itself on creating. However, discourses of the arts are mobilized to create a particular understanding of this whole rounded person, in the process defining particular people as fully human and others as less-than human. Because the individual with high SES is deemed more human and more intelligent than low SES students, their high social standing becomes viewed as the natural order
of things both within the educational marketplace, and within the neoliberal marketplace at large. The individual displaying “creativity” and consuming culture in a particular way becomes the ideal upper-middle class person.

This process of producing CAPA as a particular kind of school is additionally dependent on the narrative that the school is for the talented. This creates a tension in the discussion of student futures, since a career in the arts is “risky business.” Therefore, when speaking about their child’s futures, participants work to further emphasize how CAPA creates well-rounded and well cultured creative citizens who will contribute to society economically, socially, and culturally through their professional and personal lives. Without this piece, the school parents are at risk of revealing an unacceptable truth: socially advantaged children in the TDSB are given an enriched education in order to foster skills in a field—the arts—that they will not pursue as a career.
CHAPTER EIGHT:

Conclusion

Despite the complexities and contradictions that shape school settings, parents at Toronto’s School for the Creative and Performing Arts (CAPA) effortlessly and enthusiastically list off glowing descriptors for the well-known public arts high school:

“La crème de la crème!”

“A private school in the public system!”

“The best arts school in Canada!”

“The best of the best!”

This characterization of the school as an elite arts high school figures prominently in CAPA parent narratives and, as I have argued, plays an important role in producing and reinforcing the school’s positioning within the de facto segregated landscape of Toronto secondary schools.

Beginning as a general investigation into why a particular group of parents choose an arts education for their children, this study has revealed the complex ways in which the arts are used to justify inequality in a public specialized arts program and, by way of this, the educational marketplace at large. Before addressing the implications of this analysis, however, it is worthwhile to return to, and briefly address, the research questions that have guided this study.

Revisiting the Research Questions

As explained in Chapter 3, I approached this study in two separate stages. The first stage consisted of an exploration into how parent participants make meaning of their school choice decision. Here, I focused on why participants chose CAPA for their child, as well as the relationship between parents and children during the school choice process. While expressing varying levels of critique, at the most basic level, participants understand CAPA as a good
school choice, and their narratives are structured around producing the school as a good choice. Whether referencing CAPA’s ability to foster talent or address unique learning needs, to accept and include diverse students, or to prepare a child for a desired future, parents describe choosing CAPA for what the school—and its artistic character, in particular—will do for their child.

The key tension in this act of production, of course, is the fact that CAPA is an extremely exclusive institution. Housing a student demographic that is largely white and upper-middle class, access to CAPA is constrained by a family’s symbolic and material resources. This reality conflicts with prominent arts advocacy narratives that assert equal opportunity, tolerance, and social wellbeing as expected outcomes of arts education experiences. As a result, the second stage of this study began with the examination of participant narratives through a Neo-Marxist lens in order to draw out the ways in which certain parents mobilize their economic, cultural, and social capital to make the exclusive CAPA available as a choice. While the educational marketplace operates according to an ideology of neutrality where “good” parents are rewarded for “good” choices,” this stage highlighted the significant material and symbolic investments that parents must make in order to cultivate the arts in particular ways that will signify their child’s talent, thereby making CAPA available. These socioeconomic constraints disrupt the foundations upon which CAPA’s reputation—and understandings of the arts in education, in general—are founded (e.g., equality, universalism, progressivism, and humanism).

The second component of this stage involved a critical discourse analysis of parent narratives, which exposed the ways in which parents mobilize discourses of the arts to produce CAPA as a good choice, and to justify the school’s exclusionary nature. To reiterate: in this study, I have utilized a reconceptualised understanding of the arts as a discursive construct. Such an understanding requires a clear distinction between cultural products/production (e.g., a dance
or dancing) and arts (e.g., a dance or dancing, produced in line with particular aesthetics informed by specific artistic discourses). It is this socially constructed distinction that separates art from popular culture, and elevates particular cultural products and practices to the status of art in specific social contexts such as CAPA. Beyond defining which cultural practices and products are beautiful or artistic, dominant discourses of the arts also specify what kinds of people can produce art at CAPA and, as a result, which kinds of people are “cultured” and which kinds of people are Othered. This process, in turn, reinforces and justifies oppressive social hierarchies where one type of student (e.g., the thin, white, upper-middle class, “cultured,” Canadian) is elevated above another type of student (e.g., the overweight, racialized, working-class, “uncultured,” immigrant).

It is precisely these dominant discourses of the arts that are at the core of the justification and maintenance of inequality at CAPA. In order to continue to produce CAPA as a good school choice, parents mobilize discourses of the arts to justify the school’s exclusionary practices. Explaining the school’s lack of diversity, parents assert that working class parents and parents of colour aren’t interested in the arts. As Mr. Dawkins proclaims, “It’s their decision to audition and audition successfully” (Interview, November 24, 2011). These declarations target parents with low SES, labelling them bad parents who do not understand how to create desirable personhood. Likewise, parent construction of need as linked to talent, helps explain how CAPA can be viewed as a school for students with unique needs while, at the same time, failing to provide space for students with needs related to their low SES (e.g., English Language Learners, recent immigrants, students with disabilities, and students living in poverty). In a similar way, discourses of the arts are mobilized to justify the gender-based violence that occurs at CAPA. The arts are used to rename bullying as something else (e.g., “being nasty”), because dominant
arts aesthetics serve as the major catalyst for this gendered violence. In this way, discourses of
the arts reinforce inequality at CAPA while, at the same time, allowing parents to justify this
inequality to continue producing CAPA as the good school choice.

Despite the diverse claims they make about the arts and an arts education, parents reveal
that the goal of CAPA isn’t to produce artists; rather, CAPA is chosen in order to cultivate a
particular kind of (upper-middle class) personhood. CAPA’s elite status plays an important role
in minimizing the risks associated with achieving this personhood. As a result, in the end, CAPA
is not about the arts; it is about ensuring a child’s future success. Essential to this success is
CAPA’s reputation—which must be continuously produced by parents and students—and the
fostering of the type of person who will choose CAPA for their own children. While this process
is complex, it reveals how, within Toronto’s educational marketplace, the arts function to
reproduce and justify unequal educational opportunities.

**Toward Future Research and Policymaking**

This study provides an example of why a discursive understanding of the arts is necessary
for researchers and educators who see cultural production as a potential tool for disrupting
unequal power relations in society. By highlighting the role of discourses of the arts in the
production of a school’s elite status, this conceptual turn helps bolster the existing critical
literature on the educational marketplace while, at the same time, disrupting the positivist
foundations of current arts education research. As such, there are numerous implications that
arise from this study.

**The conceptual shift.** This study makes a clear case for why arts education researchers
must move beyond the positivist understanding of the arts as a *thing* that *does*. Rather than *doing*,
the arts—as a set of discourses—are *used to do*. Researchers investigating the arts in education,
therefore, must ask: who is using the arts, and what are they using them to do? At CAPA, for instance, parents use the arts to maintain and justify the school’s exclusivity. I contend that this conceptual reframing of the arts, drawn from the work of Gaztambide-Fernández (2013), should be used in informal educational spaces as well. The arts play a major role in many cutting-edge research sites, within social movements, and other cultural spaces where learning takes place. We must, then, ask: what role are discourses of the arts playing in these settings? Will a conceptual reframing expose the reproduction of unequal power relations in these setting? Can this shift help us in our work to challenge social inequality through cultural/creative practices?

**Discourse and the specialized educational marketplace.** As the educational marketplace expands to include more and more specialized programs and alternative schooling options (e.g., specialized arts programs, and science and technology programs), researchers must alter their analytical toolbox to include a critical discursive analysis. While an understanding of the neoliberal ideology of the marketplace is indeed essential to understanding CAPA as a school choice, it nevertheless fails to account for the important role that arts discourses play in shaping CAPA experiences and justify unequal access. Likewise, an educational marketplace like Toronto’s that offers a range of schooling options is shaped by other dominant discourses as well. Therefore, it is up to researchers to investigate how these discourses shape these alternative options, as well as the market as a whole, in individual schooling landscapes. For instance, what discourses structure French Immersion programs, International Baccalaureate programs, and Special Education programs? How do these discourses reproduce or challenge existing social hierarchies? How do they relate to the educational marketplace and the current distribution of schooling opportunities?
School choice and inequality. There is a growing field of research that argues that the expansion of educational markets leads to the expansion of unequal schooling opportunities. This study shows that the arts, specifically, provides additional avenues for socially advantaged families to “work the system” in covert ways. If choice equals inequity, should the TDSB eliminate specialized programs? On the other hand, parents, like Ms. Jansen, highlight the importance of specialized programs, noting, “if you get them in the door with something they enjoy doing you are 95% of the way there.” (Interview, November 25, 2011). The ability to “get them in the door” should be a priority of educational policymakers. With this in mind, should all programs in the TDSB be specialized?

Re-examining our assumptions. Although Toronto is home to the second largest amount of specialized arts high schools in North America (behind New York City), demographic homogeneity spans across all of its programs. If specialized arts programs are exclusive because of the arts, and yet not about creating future artists and cultural workers, policymakers must ask themselves: what are specialized arts programs for? If, as Ms. Jansen says, arts programs are about getting kids excited about school and learning, policymakers must consider the importance of funding extracurricular programs in all public schools. Is there a way for specialized arts programs to alter their admissions processes and curriculum to assure more diversity in their student population? For instance, if CAPA was to alter its understanding of the arts to include alternative forms of culture, would this solve their glaring diversity issue? If CAPA is about cultivating a particular kind of (white, upper-middle class) personhood, is this form of homogeneous education desirable? While these questions and this study demands more research, it points to the fact that the arts, left unexamined, reproduce and justify the status quo. As a result, arts education policymakers cannot develop new policy without a thorough re-
examination of the many assumptions that we hold about the arts.
APPENDIX A

Urban Arts High Schools Project
Parent Interview Consent Form

Dear Parents:
We are conducting a study of arts-focused specialized programs available in public high schools across cities in North America. The purpose of the project is to understand the character of these programs, including how they are implemented, the approaches to teaching and learning they offer, the communities they serve, and their histories. We are also interested in better understanding how and why parents choose to send their children to a specialized arts program.

As a parent at the School for the Creative and Performing Arts, we would like you to participate in this project by allowing us to conduct an interview with you. It will take approximately 30-45 minutes, either in person or over the phone, and it will be audio-recorded. We will conduct the interview at your convenience and based on your availability. The data collected for this study will be used for scholarly publications, conference presentations, and future research associated with the Urban Arts High Schools (UAHS) Project. We will not use your name or anything else that might identify you or your child(ren) in the written work, oral presentations, or publications. The data will remain confidential and secure. You are free to change your mind at any time and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may decline to answer any specific questions. There are no known risks to you for assisting in the project.

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this study, you may email or call me (see contact information below), or the University of Toronto Ethics Review Office at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-5763. You can also find more information about our project online at our website:
http://cus.oise.utoronto.ca/Research/The_Urban_Arts_High_Schools_Project/index.html or on facebook.com/pages/Urban-Arts-High-Schools-Research-Project/231864486867052

If you agree to participate in this study, please sign the attached form. The second copy is for your records. Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely,
Dr. Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández, Associate Professor
OISE/University of Toronto
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
rgaztambide@oise.utoronto.ca / uahs.oise@utoronto.ca
416-978-0194
APPENDIX B

Urban Arts High Schools Project /School for the Creative and Performing Arts
Parent Interview Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this research has been explained to me and that any question that I have asked has been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Dr. Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández and agree to participate in an interview for the purpose described. I agree to allow this interview to be audio recorded.

I understand that this recording will be transcribed to ensure accuracy and that the recording will remain confidential and secure. I understand that if I choose to withdraw from this study once the interview is transcribed, I will not be quoted directly in any project reports, but the interview will remain as part of the research data.

Signature:__________________________________
Name (printed): _______________________________
Email:________________________________________
Phone:_____________________________
Date: ______________

Dr. Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández, Associate Professor
OISE/University of Toronto
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning

Please return this form via email to: uahs.oise@utoronto.ca
You can also find more information about our project online at our website: http://cus.oise.utoronto.ca/Research/The_Urban_Arts_High_Schools_Project/index.html
or on facebook.com/pages/Urban-Arts-High-Schools-Research-Project/231864486867052

For office use only:
Date interviewed:
Interviewer:
Notes:
APPENDIX C

Urban Arts High Schools Project
Interview Protocol for Parents

Introduction
Thank you for agreeing to speak with me. I appreciate your time. This interview will take about 30-45 minutes, but you may ask to stop the interview at any point. The purpose of this conversation is to talk about your perspectives and experiences at the School for the Creative and Performing Arts and how you came to choose CAPA. This interview is part of a study of specialized arts programs in Canada and the United States. I’d like to ask you a few questions about your experiences as a parent at CAPA. Is that okay?

I’d like to ask for your permission to record our conversation. This will help me to give you my full attention now and return to our conversation later. The interview is confidential, and only the research team and I will have access to this recording, which we will transcribe. If you want me to stop at any time, just let me know. Is this okay with you?

Do you have any questions before we get started?

Please state your name and your child’s name, grade, and major.

Thank you.

To start, can you tell me what it is like for you to be a parent at CAPA?

Journey and History:
How did you and your son/daughter first learn about the program?

Prompts:
What attracted you to this program?
How did you and your child decide to apply?
Can you describe to me your experience with the admissions process?
How did you prepare your child for the audition/portfolio process?
How is this school/program different from your child’s previous school?
How do you think this school/program will prepare your child for the future?
Can you describe any extra-curricular activities that your child is involved in?
How involved are you in this process (e.g. do you carpool your child and other children to practices? Do you attend recitals?)

Teaching and Learning
Why do you want your daughter/son to have an education with a focus on the arts?

Prompts:
How would you describe the academics at CAPA?
What is your impression of the teachers at CAPA?
How would you describe your daughter/son as a student?
Can you give me an example of how this school has benefited your daughter/son?
Can you give me an example of how this school has challenged your daughter/son?
How do you see your role in your child’s academic education?
How do you see your role in your child’s artistic education?

**Community**
How would you describe the school to another parent?

**Prompts:**
Are you involved officially or unofficially with any parent organizations or committees at this school?
Can you tell me about your relationship with the teachers and administrators?
Can you tell me about your relationship to other parents?
How do you see the school’s role in the larger community and in Toronto?

**Demographics**
The last three questions are about your background, and for the purposes of helping us contextualize the analysis.

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

What is your current occupation?

What is your home postal code/zip code?

How would you describe yourself, if at all, in terms of ethnic or racial background?

How would you describe your family composition?

**Wrap**
Is there anything else that you'd like to tell me about your experiences at CAPA?
Do you have any questions for me?

Thanks again for giving me your time, and for sharing your experiences. I really appreciate your willingness to participate in this study.
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