

## EXPLORING RETRIBUTIVE SCHOOL DISCIPLINE PRACTICES

**EXPLORING RETRIBUTIVE SCHOOL DISCIPLINE PRACTICES IN  
ONTARIO: VOICES OF THE SUSPENDED AND EXPELLED**

by

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I would like to dedicate this graduate thesis to my Dad.

Thank you for always being my number one fan; for picking me up when I fell down and encouraging me to try again; for having faith in me, and for being proud of me - no matter what.

You knew that I could do this, you always did.

I love you, Dad.

Rest in peace

## ABSTRACT

Through an analysis of 7, semi-structured, one-on-one, open-ended interviews and relying on methodological principles from interpretive social science (ISS) and critical social sciences (CSS) this graduate thesis uncovers the voices of youth who have been suspended and/or expelled from a public secondary school in Ontario. Youth in this study spoke to the impact that being suspended and/or expelled had on school climate through describing the adverse changes that they experienced in regards to their relationships with their peers, and school professionals. A unique contribution from my study is a participant's description of an experience of suspension, which I interpreted as being caused by, the behavioural targeting of a student living with a disability. Many of the participants also explained how the use of disciplinary procedures that rely on sending a student home from school for  $x$  amount of days can affect students' academic progress and success. Furthermore, the similarities between the treatment of disciplined students in the education system, and the treatment of criminal offenders in the justice system found in this study, included: the use of punitive discipline, increased surveillance, and the involvement of the police in disciplinary processes. The youth in this study recognize that the use of suspension and expulsion does not dig beneath the surface and address the root of the problem, and agree that this approach to school discipline is ineffective in regards to correcting behaviour. Finally, all of the youth in this study suggested the development and implementation of more supportive approaches to addressing and preventing unsafe and inappropriate behaviour in schools that aim to keep students in school while resolving the problem.

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**Chapter 1: Introduction**

In considering a topic for this graduate thesis, I reflected on my experience as a social work practitioner, working with youth in school-based programs. In past professional roles, I have facilitated group-orientated workshops and counselling sessions where the focus was on helping students successfully navigate the transition from high school to college/university. Through this work, I found that, being a student often creates additional stressors for young people. The aim of many students in high school is ultimately, to get out (Casella, 2003). Casella (2003) suggests that students get out of school by either: graduating, passing the GED, or dropping out. In the school community, teachers and administrators are in a position of authority wherein, they can decide whether a student is granted approval to graduate, or denied, based on their behaviour (Casella, 2003).

Since the 1990s, the use of punitive, and exclusionary school discipline practices has increasingly become the relied upon response to the misbehaviour of students in schools (Wolf & Kupchik, 2017). One of the most commonly used methods is out-of-school suspension (OSS) (Cobb-Clark, Kassenboehmer, McVicar & Zhang, 2015; Mendez, Knoff & Ferron, 2002). OSS involves the removal of a student from the school environment for a specified period of time, as a form of punishment for an inappropriate act, or behaviour (Cobb-Clark et al., 2015; Mendez, et al., 2002). It is important to note that in this paper, I use the term ‘out-of-school suspension’ interchangeably with ‘suspension’. Another ‘popular’ method of school discipline is the use of expulsion (Casella, 2003; Daniel & Bondy, 2008; Wolf & Kupchik, 2017). Expulsion is different

from suspension, as students that are expelled, “are removed from school for an indefinite time period” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009, “What is expulsion?” para. 1).

In 2002-2003, 165, 289 students were suspended from schools across the province of Ontario (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010). This is the highest, total number of students suspended that is reported by the Ontario Ministry of Education (2010; 2017) in the last 17 years. In regards to expulsion on the other hand, this data reveals that in 2003-2004, 1, 909 students were expelled (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010). The overreliance on the use of suspension and expulsion during these years, had been clearly brought to the attention of the McGuinty government, because in 2005, the Safe Schools Action Team held public consultations in: Ottawa, London, Toronto, Sudbury and Thunder Bay, in order to discuss better ways of preventing and responding to unsafe and unacceptable behaviour in schools (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010). The Safe Schools Action Team (2005) claims that, students and other community members were invited to participate in these public discussions so as to, “Help make our schools safer by making your voice heard” (p. 3).

A report published by the Ministry of Education in 2006, suggests that the contributions of more than 700 parents, teachers, students, and other community members had been taken into consideration by the government in regards to, the development of a new approach to school safety in Ontario. However, the voices of youth are not represented in this report, or anywhere on the Ministry’s website where school safety, or the use of suspension and expulsion is reviewed (Ministry of Education, 2006; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010). As a result, I am skeptical of the claim that students had

been provided the opportunity to have their voices heard, and question whether their concerns and/or recommendations were validated. I therefore aim to uncover the voices of youth that have been suspended and/or expelled by carrying out a research study guided by the following inquiries: (1) What are the social and academic impacts of suspension and expulsion? (2) Do youth perceive the use of suspension and expulsion to be effective? (3) What do youth recommend as alternatives to the use of suspension and expulsion that might better meet the needs of students in high school?

The most recent data on suspensions and expulsions indicates that in 2014-2015, 85,557 students were suspended from schools across the province, and 426 students were reported expelled (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2017). Although the number of suspensions and expulsions has clearly decreased since 2000, my position on the issue is that one student out of school, is one too many. Removing a student from the learning environment through the use of disciplinary procedures like suspension and expulsion, in effect, renders education inaccessible. This is an issue that is of concern to me, as not only am I conscious of the value of education in today's society, and believe that everyone deserves the opportunity to get an education, but, education is also widely and extensively identified as a social determinant of health (Mahamoud, Roche & Homer, 2013; Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010; Subedi & Rosenberg, 2014).

As a result of the economic crisis that our province is still trying to recover from, the value of a 'good' education has clearly amplified. According to Josh Kolm from CBC News Canada (2013), a survey by Career Builder North America found that, "36 per cent of employers are now hiring college and university graduates for jobs that used to require

only a high school diploma” (“The value of an education”, para. 8). It is apparent then, that having a ‘good’ education helps to eliminate some of the barriers to obtaining employment (Hartnagel and Krahn, 1989). Furthermore, housing prices in Ontario have significantly increased over the years. Therefore, having a steady job with sufficient wages is necessary in order to afford the cost of owning, or renting, a ‘home’ in today’s society, as the housing market tends to discriminate against the poor and people with low-income (Belcher & DeForge, 2012). Mikkonen and Raphael (2010) state that, education, employment, income, and housing are social determinants of health that are said to have, “strong effects upon the health of Canadians” (p. 9).

Reflecting back on my own high school experience, I recognize that I may not have always been a ‘good’ student, but that is because I did not always receive the guidance or support from my teachers, or other members of the school community that I needed. I did not feel a sense of connection to my school, and as a result, I was not engaged nor involved, socially or academically. I would get into trouble for being late, for falling asleep in class, for not doing homework, etc., but until I graduated from high school, no one asked me what I needed.

It was while I was in high school that I also noticed that many of my peers were being suspended or expelled for a variety of different reasons. When I graduated, not every student was there to walk across the stage with me. To me, schools that implement a ‘zero tolerance policy’, and that rely on the use of suspension and expulsion to address student behaviour, are essentially implying that these youth are ‘a’ or ‘the’ problem, and that they are a threat to the school community. This mistreatment of students in schools,

and the failure to adequately meet the needs of all students, is what I believe is preventing youth from receiving a quality of education that they deserve, and is also what is pushing youth to leave school early.

I *genuinely* believe that all youth have unrealized potential, and that there are greater social, political and structural issues that are contributing to the marginalization and oppression of youth in the education system. As I, like many of those closest to me have had our voices silenced in the past, in my role as a social work practitioner, I am passionate about positioning myself as an ally of, and advocate for youth voice. I am therefore using this graduate thesis, to provide youth with the opportunity to share *their* side of *their* ‘story’ and have it validated as ‘truth’, because, like Lukas Graham (2015) sings in his song 7 Years, “*I know the smallest voices they can make it major*”.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### *2.1 'Zero Tolerance' and School Discipline*

The use of suspension and expulsion is the result of a shift in disciplinary procedures, toward the implementation of a 'zero tolerance policy' in schools (Wolf & Kupchik, 2017). Authors Daniel and Bondy (2008), describe the rationale for this shift as originating from the need to address school violence, and in effect, create a safe school environment. Those in support of a 'zero tolerance' approach to school discipline posit that, punishing students is a 'logical' approach to preventing school violence, as it seemingly sends a clear message to 'troublesome' youth and 'potential offenders' that certain behaviour will not be tolerated (Casella, 2003; Daniel & Bondy, 2008). According to Daniel and Bondy (2008), supporters claim that it is less likely for students to do something that is against the school's rules and regulations, if there is a 'zero' chance of getting away with it. Consequently, students are essentially taught that there is no other option but to obey the rules (Casella, 2003; Kupchik & Catlaw, 2015).

The use of suspension and expulsion became 'popular' in the United States as a result of the enactment of the *Guns Free Safe Schools Act* in 1995 (Wolf & Kupchik, 2017). This *Act* mandated schools to suspend and expel students that brought firearms onto school property (Casella, 2003; Wolf & Kupchik, 2017). Soon after the passing of this legislation however, an amendment was made, and the word 'firearms' was replaced with 'weapons', in order to include a wider range of items that could be used to inflict harm, such as knives and even nail-clippers (Casella, 2003; Wolf & Kupchik, 2017). Eventually, the use of a zero tolerance policy in schools started to extend beyond firearms

and weapons, to include drug and alcohol related offenses and ‘interpersonal violence’ as well as, more minor forms of misconduct such as repeated tardiness and dress code violations (Casella, 2003; Daniel & Bondy, 2008; Dupper, 1998; Wolf & Kupchik, 2017).

According to Casella (2003), zero tolerance policies and practices are meant to be consistent and universal. However, existing literature suggests otherwise (Casella, 2003; Daniel & Bondy, 2008; Dupper, 1998; Mendez et al., 2002; Wolf & Kupchik, 2017). For instance, despite ‘violence’ and ‘confrontation’ having very different meanings, school professionals often respond to incidents of ‘violence’ and ‘confrontation’ using the same punishment (Casella, 2003). A school professional’s personal biases have also been proven to influence the interpretation and application of disciplinary strategies (Mendez et al., 2002). Mendez and colleagues (2002) suggest that school administrators frequently employ OSS and expulsion in order to ‘push’ students with behavioural problems, that they may have a conflicting relationship with, out of the school.

In 2000, Harvard University published a report titled, “*Opportunities Suspended: The Devastating Consequences of Zero Tolerance and School Discipline*”, which looks at the disproportionate impact of a zero tolerance approach to school discipline on children in America. Based on research conducted by the Civil Rights Project (CRP) in collaboration with the Advancement Project (AP), it is stated in this report that African-American and Latino students “are more likely to be disciplined for minor misconduct and to receive punishment disproportionate to their conduct” (Harvard University, 2000, p. 8). In the U.S., laws like the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1997)*, are intended to protect students with disabilities from being, “punished for behavior that was



a characteristic of the child's disability" (Harvard University, 2000, p. 9). It is argued in this report however, that teachers and school administrators are ignoring these federal laws, as the study found that, "school officials often unfairly discipline children with disabilities" (Harvard University, 2000, p. 9).

## *2.2 The Use of Suspension and Expulsion in Ontario*

In 2000, Education Minister Janet Ecker introduced Bill 81 – the *Safe Schools Act* (SSA) in Ontario with the intent to, "increase respect and responsibility, to set standards for safe learning and safe teaching in schools and to amend the Teaching Profession Act" (Bill 81, 2000, p. 1). With the passing of this legislation in 2001, mandatory suspensions, police involvement, and expulsion, are considered to be appropriate strategies for dealing with students that violate a school board's *Code of Conduct* (Bill 81, 2000; Daniel & Bondy, 2008).

A mandatory suspension can range anywhere from a minimum of 1 day, to a maximum of 20 days, during which time the student is prohibited from entering the school, or being on the premises (Bill 81, 2000). Activities indicated in Bill 81 (2000), as warranting mandatory suspension include, but are not limited to: vandalism, possessing alcohol or illegal drugs, being under the influence of alcohol, and swearing at a teacher or at another person of authority (p. 5). This memorandum states that it is mandatory to expel a student, on the other hand, for: possessing a weapon, sexual assault, physical assault, or using a weapon to cause bodily harm to another person that requires attention from a medical practitioner (Bill 81, 2000, p. 8).

Findings from research by Daniel and Bondy (2008) indicate that school professionals in Ontario ‘like’ the *Safe Schools Act* because it provides a set of guidelines highlighting what is considered ‘unacceptable behaviour’ in schools, and it outlines ‘appropriate’ consequences for these incidents. However, even if the removal of disruptive students from the school environment has the potential to improve the educational outcomes of other students, it is apparent that it is doing so at the disciplined students’ expense (Cobb-Clark et al., 2015). Daniel and Bondy (2008) argue that, rather than supporting students by exploring the underlying factors that may have contributed to the incident, schools that rely on the use of exclusionary discipline methods are essentially applying a ‘blanket approach’ to addressing students’ behaviour.

In 2003, the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) published a report from Ken Bhattacharjee, a Human Rights Consultant, titled, “*The Ontario Safe Schools Act: School Discipline and Discrimination*”. It is stated in this report that, “racial minority students, particularly Black students, are much more likely than White students to perceive discrimination with respect to teacher treatment, school suspension practices, the use of police by school authorities, and police treatment at school” (Bhattacharjee, 2003, p. vi). Data collected and discussed in this report also indicates that the use of zero tolerance policies and practices in schools, “are having a disproportionate impact on students with disabilities, particularly students with emotional/behavioural disorders, intellectual and learning disabilities, autism, and Tourette’s Syndrome (including associate disorders such as attention deficit disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder and difficulties with impulse control)” (Bhattacharjee, 2003, p. vi). This information reaffirms

the findings in the report published by Harvard University (2000), as well as, echoes other existing literature that, a zero tolerance approach to school discipline has a disproportionate impact on students from minority status backgrounds and students with disabilities (Bhattacharjee, 2003; Cobb-Clark et al., 2015; Daniel & Bondy, 2008; Ruck & Wortley, 2002; Wolf & Kupchik, 2017).

In 2007, Bill 212 – the *Education Amendment Act (Progressive Discipline and School Safety)*, was introduced in Ontario in order to repeal sections of the *Education Act*, with respect to suspension and expulsion (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). With the passing of this legislation, all Ontario school boards were required to establish progressive discipline policies by the following year, in 2008 (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). The focus of progressive discipline policies is to help correct behaviour by taking a more supportive, rather than punitive, approach (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). As a result of the amendments made in Bill 212 (2007), school administrators must take into account a wide range of other factors before considering the suspension and expulsion of a student (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). Therefore, on the progressive discipline continuum, suspension and expulsion should be used infrequently and only as a last resort (Bill 212, 2007; Ryan & Zoldy, 2011).

### *2.3 Impacts of Retributive Discipline Practices*

Even if exclusionary disciplinary policies were nonbiased, and administered fairly, the use of suspensions is still proven to be counterproductive and at times, self-contradictory (Kupchik & Catlaw, 2015; Radin, 1988). Furthermore, the use of suspensions in schools is argued to be of considerable concern, due to the fact that this approach to discipline is unjustified, ineffective, and excludes students from valuable

educational opportunities while they are out of school (Dupper, 1998; Harvard University, 2000; Wolf & Kupchik, 2017).

Wolf and Kupchik (2017) state that, “exclusionary discipline can interrupt students’ educational progress [and] lead to disengagement from their school communities” (p. 408). According to the existing literature, students that are removed from the learning environment may find it difficult to recover academically after their return, and as a result, risk falling behind their peers (Lee et al., 2011; Wolf & Kupchik, 2017). In addition to poor academic success, the use of exclusionary discipline practices is also proven to be a causal factor of school dropout (Mendez, Knoff & Ferron, 2002). The high school dropout phenomenon, as it is discussed most commonly in existing literature, is argued to be a major indicator of the ineffectiveness of the educational services provided, in regards to, adequately meeting the needs of students (Kumar, Padro & Watson, 1980).

Existing literature also indicates that a zero tolerance approach to managing student behaviour can negatively impact school climate (Kupchik & Catlaw, 2015; Lee et al., 2011). Kupchik and Catlaw (2015) state that, “suspension tends to reduce student participation and contribute to *nonparticipatory, noninclusive* school climates” (p. 117). For instance, students may feel as though the use of suspension as a punishment in their given situation was unjust (Wolf & Kupchik, 2017). As a result, students may be less willing to make an effort to build a positive relationship with their teachers or school administrators after returning to school (Wolf & Kupchik, 2017).

According to Cobb-Clark and colleagues (2015), exclusionary discipline practices, such as the use of suspension, can exacerbate pre-existing inequalities. For instance, students that are removed from the school setting are subjected to a greater risk of experiencing the potential harms of social exclusion (Wolf & Kupchik, 2017). Teachers and school administrators are all informed of the situation, and the disciplined students' peers often acknowledge that their classmate is missing from school (Wolf & Kupchik, 2017). As a result, students that are suspended from school are often labelled as 'deviants' (Wolf & Kupchik, 2017). Wolf and Kupchik (2017) suggest that, if a student internalizes this ascribed label, it is possible that in effect, they may choose to govern themselves according to it.

The use of suspension and expulsion is also proven to have effects on the emotional and mental health of students (Daniel & Bondy, 2008; Wolf & Kupchik, 2017). In existing literature, it is argued that the use of exclusionary discipline approaches sends a message that 'troublesome' students are essentially 'not wanted', which in effect, can cause students to feel as though they have 'little social value' (Lee et al., 2011; Wolf & Kupchik, 2017, p. 413). This diminished sense of worth, is proven to decrease the likelihood that disciplined youth will participate in future civic and political activities (Kupchik & Catlaw, 2015). For example, Kupchik and Catlaw (2015) state that youth, "may be less likely to vote and volunteer because they see little opportunity to actively shape governance or community life" (p. 117). It is thus argued that, the use of exclusionary discipline methods in schools can also have a detrimental impact on the civic and political health of the nation (Kupchik & Catlaw, 2015).

Lastly, Wolf and Kupchik (2017) claim that, the use of exclusionary punishment in schools can inadvertently cause youth to fall into marginalized social and occupational roles later in life. Therefore, the implementation of a zero tolerance policy is also considered to have a negative impact on students' life chances (Daniel & Bondy, 2008). For instance, research shows that youth with limited education are more likely to experience difficulty obtaining employment (Hartnagel and Krahn, 1989).

#### *2.4 The Criminalization of Students and the 'School-to-Prison Pipeline'*

The 'school-to-prison pipeline' is a term used to refer to the association between schools and prisons, and is considered to be reinforced by the use of disciplinary procedures set within a discourse of 'zero tolerance' (Casella, 2003; Daniel & Bondy, 2008; Wolf & Kupchik, 2017). Research shows that students that are suspended from school are more likely to commit crime, be a victim of crime in the future, as well as, face incarceration (Daniel & Bondy, 2008; Wolf & Kupchik, 2017). Furthermore, findings from research on school dropout, although inconsistent, indicate a connection between school dropout and crime (Hartnagel & Krahn, 1989). Some research argues that school dropout, in regards to males particularly, is proven to contribute to a student's future 'criminal career', whereas other research argues the opposite, in that, criminal behaviour causes school dropout (Hartnagel & Krahn, 1989).

What I find important to note is that, research linking suspension and school dropout to crime, overtly names the problem of directionality of cause and effect. Some people may use this research to reaffirm their belief that the use of these disciplinary procedures creates 'safe schools' by removing 'criminals' from the school community.

However, it is argued in the existing literature that the use of a zero tolerance approach to school discipline has resulted in the increased criminalization of students (Bhattacharjee, 2003; Casella, 2003; Wolf & Kupchik, 2017). This supports my personal and professional opinion of the implementation of retributive discipline practices in schools, and the overreliance on suspension and expulsion. I will therefore be exploring an additional, fourth inquiry, in this paper: Are there any similarities between the treatment of disciplined students in public secondary schools, and the treatment of criminal offenders in the legal justice system?

Casella (2003) states that a, “zero tolerance policy institutionalizes criminal justice approaches to school discipline” (p. 884). In prisons and other correctional facilities, an inmate’s behaviour can either speed up, or slow down, the release process (Casella, 2003). Inmates receive tickets for misbehaving, or they are placed in solitary confinement (‘seg’) for a specified period of time (Casella, 2003). The more tickets, and ‘segs’, that an inmate has, decreases the likelihood that the inmate will be granted release (end of sentence – ‘EOS’) when their chance at parole comes up (Casella, 2003). In efforts to deter ‘misbehaviour’, the consequences of crime and punishment are often intensified so that, the ramifications of certain behaviour are considered to be, “not worth the risks” (Casella, 2003, p. 877). Similarly, the use of suspensions in schools is intended to decrease, or completely eradicate the likelihood that the student will commit the offense again (Cobb-Clark et al., 2015; Mendez, et al., 2002). A ‘zero tolerance policy’ is thus considered to be a form of crime policy based on ‘preventative detention’ (Casella, 2003).

The shift to a zero tolerance approach to school discipline also increased the use of more intense security measures such as, video surveillance, and armed police officer presence in schools (Wolf & Kupchik, 2017). In the city of Toronto for example, the School Resource Officer (SRO) program had been developed and implemented after a school shooting in 2007 resulted in the death of student, Jordan Manners (Gillis, 2017, May 27; Gillis, 2017, Aug. 25). Police officers are hired to respond to incidents between students, such as fights, as well as, arrest students that are criminally accused (Wolf & Kupchik, 2017). Wendy Gillis (2017, May 27), a news reporter for *The Toronto Star* states that, “The presence of an officer criminalizes situations once handled by teachers and school administrators, creating a ‘school to prison pipeline’” (para. 5). However, despite opposition to the presence of armed police officers in schools, it is reported that, 36 SROs have been assigned to work in 75 schools across the city of Toronto during the 2017-2018, school year (Gillis, 2017, May 27; Gillis, 2017, Aug. 25).

### *2.5 Alternatives to Suspension and Expulsion*

In addition to the literature on school discipline and the impact of exclusionary discipline practices, there is also a body of existing literature that focuses on alternatives to suspension and expulsion. In this section, I will briefly describe, and explain the steps and results of eight discipline response strategies which all share the same main objective of keeping students in school while they resolve the problem (Casella, 2003).

#### A. The Behaviour Education Plan (BEP)

The ‘behaviour education plan’ (BEP), or ‘check-in/check-out program’, as described by Ryan and Zoldy (2011), “involves meeting with at-risk students to check on



their conduct, offering counselling (restoration), teaching social skills and anger management techniques, and creating a behavior support plan with students” (p. 330). The BEP operates on a daily cycle, and includes four steps (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). The first step requires the student to meet with a staff member prior to the start of the school day in order to ‘check-in’ (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). It is not specified however, who the staff member must be (e.g., principal, teacher, guidance counsellor, etc.). The second step of the BEP is for the staff member to provide the student with a daily progress report (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). In this report, the student identifies their daily goals, so that throughout the day, teachers can provide either positive or corrective feedback (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). At the end of the day, the student is to take their progress report to a staff member to ‘check-out’, and have it signed (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). The student is also required to get their parent to sign their daily progress report each time (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011).

A ‘check-in/check-out program’ is an inexpensive alternative to out-of-school suspension, and because it does not require a lot of resources, Ryan and Zoldy (2011) claim that it can be easily implemented in schools. Furthermore, research shows that the BEP is effective in regards to decreasing student referrals to the office, as well as, reducing problem behaviour (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011).

#### B. The School Survival Group

Another alternative to suspension is the ‘school survival group’. The school survival group includes three phases that are comprised of 10 group sessions (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). Group sessions occur once a week, and can run as long as 50 minutes

(Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). Dupper (1998) states that, “The primary goal of the school survival group is to increase participants’ conscious awareness of the distorted social cognitions that underlie their unproductive school behavior” (p. 357). In the first phase, students are encouraged to analyze their behaviour and in effect, gain awareness of the underlying factors contributing to their ways of thinking and behaving (Dupper, 1998; Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). The second phase of the ‘school survival group’ focuses on problem solving and the notion of choice (Dupper, 1998; Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). In this phase, students learn that it is important to think first as there are always consequences to their actions, whether they be positive or negative (Dupper, 1998; Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). The third phase of the school survival group aims to teach students ‘school survival skills’ (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011, p. 332). Through the use of role-plays for instance, students learn different strategies for managing difficult situations (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). The school survival group therefore takes a more preventative approach to managing school discipline, rather than punitive (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011).

Ryan and Zoldy (2011) claim that, participation in the ‘school survival group’, “promotes empowerment, informed choice, and self-determination” (p. 332). Students that have participated in the school survival group have reported learning to take control over what happens by changing their unproductive ways of thinking and behaving (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011).

### C. Conflict Resolution Training: Behaviour Contracting and Social/Cognitive Skills

#### Training

Although more commonly used in elementary schools, ‘conflict resolution training’ is another alternative to suspension that emphasizes the importance of prevention and intervention (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). It is important to note that Ryan and Zoldy (2011) describe conflict resolution training as being a strategy that is implemented after a suspension. Significant to this approach is that, the family also plays a role in the process (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). After meeting with the principal, if the family and the student agree to participate in a skills-building program which consists of four, 90 minute sessions, then the suspension is reduced (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). Through the use of a 36-page skills manual, families and students that participate in the skills-building program, “learn about problem solving, anger management, negotiation, cognitive skills, and active listening” (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011, p. 333).

Research shows that students that have participated in the conflict resolution training program have reported fewer disciplinary incidents, as well as, little or no expulsion (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). A potential weakness of implementing a disciplinary strategy that includes the family as discussed by Radin (1988) is that, the student is then at risk of being subject to parental punishment, which may include physical punishment.

#### Behaviour Contracting

Another approach to conflict resolution training is, ‘behaviour contracting’. Behaviour contracting is a 5 step, collaborative process that involves the teacher and the student (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). There is no mention of requiring the involvement of

family in this approach. In the first step, the teacher addresses the student's behaviour and clearly explains to the student, why it is inappropriate (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). The second step involves a discussion between the teacher and the student regarding alternative behaviour and solutions (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). In the third step, Ryan and Zoldy (2011) state that, "both parties choose an alternative and a consequence" (p. 333). It is then agreed upon between the teacher and the student that the contract will be renegotiated at a later time (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). The final step of behaviour contracting is the writing of the contract, which both the teacher and the student then sign and receive a copy (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011).

'Behaviour contracting' has been proven to be an effective strategy in reducing suspensions (Radin, 1988). However, this approach is recognized as being more effective for students that have been suspended for violent behaviour (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011).

#### Social/Cognitive Skills Training

At the secondary school level, a 'social/cognitive skills training' approach is best used alongside other strategies (Radin, 1988). Ryan and Zoldy (2011) state that, "A central component of social cognitive skills training involves teaching students to control their impulses or negative behaviors" (p. 33). Therefore, sessions focus on understanding the underlying cause of one's behaviour, the effects, and the consequences (Radin, 1988). Through the use of role-plays for instance, students learn alternative responses to negative behaviour (Radin, 1988; Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). A social/cognitive skills training approach then, teaches self-management and emphasizes the importance of thinking out loud (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011).

#### D. Alternative Learning Programs and Schools

Ryan and Zoldy (2011) explain that, “The program includes both an alternative program and an alternative school for suspended or expelled court-involved juveniles” (p. 334). Students that are at risk of: problem behaviour, truancy, academic failure, and dropout, are placed in a different educational environment, where there is a low student-teacher ratio (Radin, 1988; Yearwood & Abdum-Muhaymin, 2007 as cited by Ryan, Zoldy, 2011). The curriculum in these school settings is tailored to accommodate the individual academic needs of the students (Radin, 1988).

Students that have participated in alternative learning programs and schools have reported improvements in academic performance, and attendance (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). This approach has also been proven to be effective in reducing problem behaviour (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). In addition, Ryan and Zoldy (2011) claim that, “suspension and expulsion rates decreased for students enrolled in alternative schools” (p. 334). Other reports show that students enrolled in an alternative learning program experience a positive change in attitude, and are also more likely to go on to graduate (Radin 1988; Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). However, despite the successes of this approach, Ryan and Zoldy (2011) state that, “results indicate problems with staffing, transportation, and financing” (p. 334).

#### E. Positive Discipline: The Saoi Program and Student Advisory Center

Ryan and Zoldy (2011) describe ‘positive discipline’ as, “a caring alternative to suspension” (p. 335). An important characteristic of positive discipline, is the emphasis

on praise, and rewards (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). Two strategies of positive discipline that Ryan and Zoldy (2011) discuss are: the Saoi program, and the student advisory centre.

### The Saoi Program

Ryan and Zoldy (2011) state that, “The Saoi program emphasizes academic connections with the community and focuses on team building and community service” (p. 335). In the Saoi program, teachers and students work collaboratively to solve the problem, with an emphasis on ‘purposeful talk’ (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). Through the use of ‘flow charts’ in morning meetings for example, teachers and students contemplate alternative ways of handling a particular situation (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). Teachers also hold morning meetings with students in preparation for the day’s events (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). In these meetings, teachers and students brainstorm different hypothetical situations, and discuss ways to resolve those (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). Also offered to students in the Saoi program, are community service assignments (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). The example of a community service assignment that the authors provide is, “helping the custodian or school grounds crew” (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011, p. 335).

Students that participate in the ‘Saoi program’, as Ryan and Zoldy (2011) discuss, “learn how to make better decisions and how to understand themselves” (p. 335). The Saoi program is most successful for students that are struggling with absenteeism, low grades, and discipline issues (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). Research shows that for these students, the Saoi program is effective in improving work habits, and reducing disciplinary incidents (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). Students that have participated in the Saoi program have also reported feeling more prepared to handle difficult challenges and

situations, as well as, an increased sense of belonging (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). Lastly, participation in the Saoi program has been proven to result in the development of more positive teacher-student relationships (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011).

#### The Student Advisory Center

The student advisory center is another strategy that focuses on teaching students to take responsibility for their actions, and to make better choices (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). Ryan and Zoldy (2011) add that, “This method aims to improve self-esteem and academic success” (p. 336). Like in the ‘Saoi program’, the teacher in charge of the student advisory center works with the student to solve the problem (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). An important characteristic of this model is the emphasis on positive reinforcement (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). In addition to academic assistance, Ryan and Zoldy (2011) state that, students who participate in the student advisory center, “receive counselling and individual instructions to correct their behavior” (p. 336).

#### F. Behaviourist and Diagnostic Approach

Ryan and Zoldy (2011) explain that a behaviourist approach “focuses on changing a student’s behaviour from undesirable to desirable” (p. 336). This approach involves three steps. The purpose of the first step is to identify the problem behaviour, and then identify what the appropriate way to behave is (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). With the use of rewards in the second step, the goal is to begin to reshape behaviour, to then reach the third step, being, the successful change in behaviour (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011).

A diagnostic approach, as discussed by Ryan and Zoldy (2011), “includes prevention and intervention strategies to correct misconduct” (p. 337). The authors then provide a number of prevention strategies for teachers, such as:

offering interesting and relevant activities for students, matching instructional work with students’ capabilities, believing that students can behave appropriately, establishing short- and long-term rules and routines with students, identifying problem times during the day, demonstrating respect for all students, feeling at ease with students and subject matter, as well as learning as much as possible about students from various sources of information (Parody, 1995 as cited by Ryan & Zoldy, 2011, p. 337).

Ryan and Zoldy (2011) also provide intervention strategies for teachers such as: “nonverbal techniques (eye contact, body posture, facial expressions, and silence), proximity control, removing the source of a disturbance, reminding students of consequences, and time-out or cooling off procedures” (p. 337). Although the authors do not provide a detailed description in regards to the implementation of these prevention and intervention strategies, they are fairly self-explanatory.

### G. Counselling

Counselling is a significant characteristic of the majority of the alternatives to suspension and expulsion that have been mentioned in this review. Ryan and Zoldy (2011) state that, “Counselling allows students opportunities to see the importance of their actions, and it offers corrective strategies for dealing with their behavior” (p. 337).

Drawing on literature by Neilson (1979), these authors briefly discuss a number of different counselling practices: (1) “Cooling-off rooms” (p. 337) are separate rooms within the school, where students that are feeling angry can go and receive counselling (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). (2) The “Behavior Clinic” (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011, p. 337) -



According to Ryan and Zoldy (2011), students that participate in the ‘behaviour clinic’ attend “3 hours of weekly group counselling” (p. 337). (3) Similar to the ‘behaviour clinic’ is what is referred to as, “Talk” (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011, p. 337). According to Ryan and Zoldy (2011), this approach is intended for ‘high-risk’ students. Students that take part in ‘talk’ attend either individual or group counselling on a weekly basis (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). (4) “Guided group interaction” (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011, p. 337) - The focus of this approach is on peer counselling (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). In ‘guided group interaction’, peer counselling sessions are facilitated by student leaders, and occur over a span of 12 weeks (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). Ryan and Zoldy (2011) state that, “Students graduate from the group when their behavior improves” (p. 337). (5) Another counselling strategy that is managed by students is referred to as the, “Student advocate” (Neilson, 1979 as cited by Ryan & Zoldy, 2011, p. 337). The intent of the ‘student advocate’ approach is to establish a council of students, whose aim is to, “help other students to resolve conflicts” (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011, p. 337). (6) The “Teacher advocate”, is a counselling method for teachers to assist students with resolving conflicts with other teachers (Neilson, 1979 as cited by Ryan & Zoldy, 2011, p. 337). For this strategy, one teacher chooses to counsel the same group of students for a number of years (Neilson, 1979 as cited by Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). (7) Ryan and Zoldy (2011) discuss the “Police referral center” (p. 337), as being an option for students that have been suspended from school (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). (8) The last counselling strategy that the authors discuss is, “Save one student (SOS)” (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011, p. 337). Like ‘talk’, SOS is intended for ‘high-risk’ students (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). Ryan and Zoldy (2011) state that, “Various

staff members choose one high-risk student to counsel and help throughout the year” (p. 337).

#### H. In-School Suspension

The last alternative that I will discuss is in-school suspension, which can be simply defined. Ryan and Zoldy (2011) state that, “The main purpose of in-school suspension is to keep students in school” (p. 338). For in-school suspension to be effective it must be supervised by an adult (Radin, 1988; Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). At the start of the day, the student reports to the specified room, where the focus is on academic work (Radin, 1988). In addition to an academic focus, in-school suspension also includes a restorative counselling component (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). Ryan and Zoldy (2011) explain that, “Students involved with in-school suspension reflect on their poor choices by completing worksheets about the event that led them to this suspension while communicating with concerned educators” (p. 338). Radin (1988) refers to these worksheets as, “self-help packets” (p. 479).

#### *2.6 Gaps in the Literature*

As schools are often diversely populated by hundreds, and sometimes thousands of students that interact with each other for hours on a daily basis, it is not uncommon for conflicts to arise, or for confrontations to occur (Casella, 2003). The bulk of existing research indicates however, that students from minority status backgrounds and students with disabilities are more increasingly being suspended and expelled for their behaviour (Bhattacharjee, 2003; Cobb-Clark et al., 2015; Daniel & Bondy, 2008; Harvard University, 2000; Ruck & Wortley, 2002; Wolf & Kupchik, 2017). What I have found

through a review of the literature on the disproportionate impact of a zero tolerance approach to school discipline is that, there is limited research exploring how these policies impact marginalized groups, such as, disabled, racialized, and indigenous peoples, from the perspectives of these youth, as well as, their families.

In regards to qualitative research that has included youth as participants, the voices of youth are either underrepresented or completely absent in the final report. I posit that the lack of analysis around youth narratives can be perceived as underestimating, and rejecting the power and significance of these ‘voices’ to contribute to knowledge creation and processes of change. I therefore believe that carrying out qualitative research with youth that have been directly affected by a ‘zero tolerance policy’ and the use of retributive school discipline practices, will strengthen the legitimacy of my research findings, and as a result, contribute positively to the body of literature that already exists.

### **Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework**

Mason (2002) explains epistemology as being, one's own theory of knowledge, "by which you decide whether and how social phenomena can be known, and how knowledge can be demonstrated" (p. 16). By this definition, my epistemological stance is that, knowledge is socially constructed, and each person's reality is unique. Therefore, I do not believe that there is a 'single truth'. From my understanding, my epistemological stance is consistent with the theoretical perspectives of social constructionism, and postmodernism.

#### *3.1 Roots of Social Constructionism*

Social constructionism's multidisciplinary background makes it difficult to trace its origins back to one source (Burr, 2015; Houston, 2001). As a theoretical orientation, social constructionism has emerged from the work of many different psychologists, sociologists, and philosophers, such as: Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), Karl Marx (1818-1883), Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), Max Weber (1864-1920), Max Sheler (1874-1928), George Herbert Mead (1863-1931), Karl Mannheim (1893-1947), Alfred Schutz (1899-1959), Michel Foucault (1926-1984), Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), and Kenneth J. Gergen (Andrews, 2012; Berger & Luckmann, 1991; Burr, 2015; Hruby, 2001). It is important to note that this is by no means an exhaustive list, as the rise of social constructionism began over two to three hundred years ago (Burr, 2015). However, many authors have acknowledged sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann as having the most recent influence in its development (Andrew, 2012; Burr, 2015; Hacking, 1999; Hruby, 2001; Payne, 2014).

According to Hacking (1999), Berger and Luckmann's book, *The Social Construction of Reality*, which was published in 1966, had been the first book to have 'social construction' in the title. In this book, Berger and Luckmann (1991) focus on the reality of everyday life. More specifically they are concerned with the meaning of reality, and how it is constructed (Berger & Luckmann, 1991).

### *3.2 Social Constructionist Theory*

Social constructionism, as a theory of social science, challenges positivism and empiricism (Burr, 2015). According to Payne (2014), a social constructionist views the world as always changing. Therefore, from this stance, there are no certainties (Payne, 2014). Different people can have different views of the same social reality, and these views are dependent upon our different life experiences (Payne, 2014). This rejection of the notion of an "ultimate truth" is shared by the theory of postmodernism (Burr, 2015, p. 14). Postmodernists, as stated by Neuman (1997), "see knowledge as taking numerous forms and as unique to particular people or specific locales" (p. 81). It is thus evident that, social constructionism is associated with the theory of postmodernism (Burr, 2015).

### *3.3 Connecting Theory to Research*

From a social constructionist stance, research is viewed as a co-constituted account (Finlay, 2002). Thus, knowledge is created by both the researcher and the participant in the research process. As a result, the relationship and interaction between the researcher and the participant will influence the data that is generated (Bhattacharya, 2016). Therefore, as an academic researcher, it is important that I practice values such as: trust, honesty, and open communication, in order to build positive working relationships

with participants so that, they feel comfortable discussing their thoughts, feelings, and experiences with me (Pinto, McKay & Escobar, 2008).

From a postmodernist stance, Neuman (1997) states that, “research can never do more than describe, with all descriptions equally valid” (Neuman, 1997, p. 81). In a project aimed towards uncovering voices then, it is important that contributions by all participants are validated, credited, and honoured. It is therefore imperative that I take the necessary steps to make sure that I conduct equitable research and ensure the equal involvement of all youth voices in the final report.

Houston (2001) states that, “Postmodern constructionism will only ever achieve limited success [...] because it subjectivizes the impact of the ‘real’ social world” (p. 858). While critical theorists recognize the importance of subjective meaning, these thinkers also argue that, “there are real, objective relations that shape social relations” (Neuman, 1997, p. 75). Therefore, in this research, I take a mixed-theoretical stance that includes critical theory influences. Neuman (1997) states that, “Critical theory does more than describe the unseen mechanisms that account for observable reality; it also critiques conditions and implies a plan of change” (p. 77). The aim of this research is to explore the impact of suspension and expulsion from the perspectives of youth. Using a critical lens, this research will identify recommendations for policy and practice change in schools with respect to student behaviour. I will be discussing critical social science in more depth in Chapter 5, where I describe my methodological approach to my thesis-related research.

## **Chapter 4: Study Description**

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to explore the broader histories of youth and their experiences within the school community with respect to suspension and expulsion (Christopher, Watts, McCormick & Young, 2008), as well as, develop a greater understanding of these community members' perceptions, needs, and unique circumstances (Pinto et al., 2008). This research project is guided by the four following inquiries: (1) What are the social and academic impacts of suspension and expulsion? (2) Are there any similarities between the treatment of disciplined students in public secondary schools, and the treatment of criminal offenders in the legal justice system? (3) Do youth perceive the use of suspension and expulsion to be effective? (4) What do youth recommend as alternatives to the use of suspension and expulsion that might better meet the needs of students in high school?

I had anticipated that this study would require the involvement of approximately 4-10 participants. I decided that conducting focus group interviews would be a beneficial opportunity for youth to collectively appraise their social and political experiences. I therefore planned for focus group interviews to be approximately 2 hours, and include about 3-5 participants. However, as I did not want to discourage any potentially interested youth from taking part in this study by only offering the opportunity to share their experience in a group setting, I also presented the option of participating in a one-to-one interview.

From experience, I know that interviews can be anxiety provoking. Therefore, I wanted to ensure that the youth in this study felt comfortable. In effort to do so, I offered

to buy each participant a coffee, tea or other beverage to have during the interview.

Furthermore, in order to best accommodate participants' personal schedules, the location, day, and time, that each interview took place was mutually decided upon.



## **Chapter 5: Methodology**

My methodological approach to this qualitative research project was guided by both interpretive social science, and principles of critical social science.

### *5.1 Applying an Interpretive Lens*

The origins of interpretive social science can be traced back to German sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920), and German philosopher Wilhem Dilthey (1833-1911) (Neuman, 1997). According to Carter and Little (2007), “methodologies have epistemic content” (p. 1320).

A basic theoretical assumption behind an interpretive approach, is that social reality is not out there waiting to be discovered, but rather, it is socially constructed (Neuman, 1997). Therefore, people’s perceptions and interpretations of their daily life are derived through a social interaction whereby meaning is created (Neuman, 1997). An interpretivist researcher is thus concerned with, how people experience the world, and how they create and share meaning (Neuman, 1997). It is thus evident that, interpretivists and social constructionists, share similar goals in conducting research.

According to Neuman (1997), as interpretivist researchers study meaningful social action, it is important that they, “learn the personal reasons or motives that shape a person’s internal feelings and guide decisions to act in particular ways” (p. 68).

Therefore, as I read transcripts of interviews through an interpretive lens, I will take note of details of participants’ responses that help describe the underlying factors in which influenced their ways of thinking and behaving. In addition, I will look for details that express participants’ thoughts and feelings regarding their experience of suspension or

expulsion. Neuman (1997) states that, “This subjective sense of reality is crucial to grasp human social life” (p. 69).

Interpretive research also reads more like a novel, or a biography (Neuman, 1997). This point is valid in regards to my reasoning for taking this approach to research. As I have previously mentioned, the purpose of my study is to uncover the voices of youth by creating an opportunity for youth that have been suspended or expelled from school to share their ‘story’ and have it validated as ‘truth’. Furthermore, Neuman (1997) states that in regards to an interpretive approach to thinking, “Most behaviors or statements can have several meanings and can be interpreted in multiple ways” (p. 72). As I examine transcripts through an interpretive lens, I will seek answers to questions such as: What are the unique features of each participant’s individual experience? How do these youth define their experience? What do they hold to be relevant?

Bhattacharya (2016) states that, “interpreting is a power in itself” (p. 710). As an academic researcher, I can only make assumptions about what is ‘fact’, based on the information that I collect. According to Mason (2002), “a major challenge for interpretivist approaches centres on the question of how you can be sure that you are not simply inventing data, or misrepresenting your research participants’ perspectives” (p. 76). By drawing inappropriate conclusions as a result of misinterpreting the research results, or by making poorly thought-out suggestions for policy and practice change, it is possible for even the most well intentioned academic researchers to inadvertently cause harm (van der Mueler, 2011). Therefore, in interpreting participants’ accounts, it is important that I do not distort the meaning of their responses (Neuman, 1997)

In order to ensure that the information that I disseminate as fact is as close to the participants' 'primary account' as possible (Neuman, 1997), I have included the original language used by participants in the findings report. In addition, I will maintain an awareness of my own personal points of view and feelings throughout the research process by practicing reflexivity, which will allow me to separate my interpretations from those of the participants. The practice of reflexivity is consistent with an interpretivist approach to research, as well as, a social constructionist approach (Finlay, 2002; Neuman, 1997).

A limitation of an interpretive stance, as discussed by Neuman (1997), is that, interpretive researchers give emphasis to more micro-level interpersonal interactions, but do not go beyond this to place social situations in a larger, more macro-level historical context. Including critical social science (CSS) in combination with ISS as a methodological approach to research then, will help produce richer knowledge. Using a critical lens, I will identify how power, structures, and social relations, shape the experience of suspension and expulsion.

## *5.2 Integrating Principles of Critical Social Science (CSS)*

The origins of critical social science (CSS) can be traced back to Karl Marx (1818-1883), Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), Theodor Adorno (1903-1969), Erich Fromm (1900-1980), and Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979), and has emerged from influences of critical theory (Neuman, 1997). Critical theory was first developed by the Frankfurt School in Germany in 1930s (Neuman, 1997).

My personal stance regarding the use of retributive discipline practices in schools, and the inquiries that I am seeking to investigate through this research project, suggest that principles of critical theory have influenced the way that I conceptualize the issue that I am exploring in this paper. Payne (2014) states, “critical theory argues that social problems are created more by the structure of society and the cultural assumptions generated by dominant groups that oppress subordinate groups” (p. 319). I perceive the use of suspension and expulsion in schools, as creating the barriers that youth encounter in regards to accessing and receiving a ‘good’ education. I believe that the use of these disciplinary procedures that rely on the removal of a student from the classroom setting, in effect, construct ideas of the ‘troublesome’ student. Furthermore, I think that, the use of a zero tolerance approach to school discipline not only criminalizes students, but also, contributes to the discrimination of marginalized students.

A basic theoretical assumption behind critical social science, is that all people have ‘unrealized potential’ (Neuman, 1997). I am in agreement with this assumption, and I argue that some youth are not conscious of their potential, due to the lack of opportunities provided in public schools in Ontario, that would otherwise encourage, and initiate self-discovery. Furthermore, I find a critical social science approach compelling because it seeks to move from research to action (Neuman, 1997). According to Neuman (1997), critical researchers critique current conditions, seek how change can be made, and make implications regarding future possibilities. What this implies to me is that, critical research goes beyond just identifying and describing an issue, but also seeks to answer the question of, where do we go from here? In this research, I used a critical approach to

data analysis, in order to identify social and political changes that are needed in public secondary schools in Ontario.

Similar to interpretive researchers, critical researchers posit that knowledge is a type of power, and therefore recognize that as a result of the power of knowledge, what is depicted in research as ‘truth’, or ‘fact’, can have tangible effects on people’s lives (Neuman, 1997). I am confident in taking an approach to research that uses principles of critical social science however, as these thinkers view research as a moral-political activity, and thus question the morality of, “[taking] information from people without involving them or liberating them” (Neuman, 1997, p. 79).

## **Chapter 6: Methods**

For this research project, rather than imposing an ‘outsider view’, I am seeking an ‘insider view’ of the experience of suspension and expulsion (Mason, 2002). It is therefore imperative that I gather detailed information, in order to describe this experience in a way that allows others to see things through their eyes – the people being studied (Neuman, 1997). This aim is consistent with interpretive research (Neuman, 1997). This methods section will give details about the research process regarding: sampling and recruitment, data collection and data management, data analysis, and ethical considerations. At the end of this section, I briefly describe how I will acknowledge my presence and position in research.

### *6.1 Sampling and Recruitment*

Mason (2002) explains that a researcher, “may for example, see ‘people’ as data sources in the sense that they are repositories of knowledge, experiences, feelings or whatever, which are relevant to [their] research” (p. 51). That being said, I see youth who have experienced suspension or expulsion themselves, as being, sources of justification of knowledge (Carter & Little, 2007). Therefore in this research, I used purposive sampling methods, and will thus, be sampling for an investigative purpose (Mason, 2002).

For youth to participate in this study, they had to be between the ages of 17 and 30, and have a record of suspension or expulsion from a public secondary school in Ontario. Participants were recruited indirectly through the use of recruitment posters that I dispersed across the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) (see Appendix C). I put recruitment posters on public message boards (e.g., on the sides of streets, on bus shelters, and in

businesses), and sought permission to also put some up in libraries, community centres, and recreational centres. In addition, I reached out on social media to provide youth with information about my research and how to volunteer. I did this by sharing a digital version of the recruitment poster in popular Facebook groups for members of the GTA. Lastly, I contacted past colleagues, classmates, and supervisors who work with youth, and asked if they could pass along information about my study.

### *6.2 Data Collection and Data Management*

Instead of facilitating focus group interviews for this study, I conducted semi-structured, one-to-one, open-ended interviews with each participant. I will be addressing this decision in Chapter 10, where I provide a reflection on the research process. As a result of this change, I revised the focus group interview guide found on McMaster University's website to be relevant to individual interviews (see Appendix B). The interview questions included in the guide, focused on lived experience, which is consistent with qualitative interviewing (Carter & Little, 2007; Mason, 2002). However, Mason (2002) states, rather than, "taking a 'one-size-fits-all' structured approach you may want to give maximum opportunity for the construction of contextual knowledge by focusing on relevant specifics in each interview" (p. 64). Therefore, rather than sticking to a formal question and answer format, the interviews that I conducted with youth participants were more conversational.

In order to encourage participants to feel as though it was safe to share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences, it was important to establish a sense of security within the research space. Therefore, all of the interviews were held in a public location,

where the participants' confidentiality could be protected. With the permission of participants, all of the interviews were audio-recorded, and I also took handwritten notes.

### *6.3 Data Analysis*

The data analysis stage of this qualitative research project began with the process of transcribing the audio-recordings, to which I chose to take a 'naturalized' approach to transcription (Oliver, Serovich & Mason, 2005). Oliver and colleagues (2005) state that, in naturalized transcription, "utterances are transcribed in as much detail as possible" (p. 1275). Transcripts were then reviewed while listening to audio-recordings to ensure accuracy. Identifiable information, such as: names of schools, teachers, and other people or places that participants mentioned, were either removed or replaced with pseudonyms.

Mason (2002) states that in order to, "derive data in an interpretive manner, then you would be wanting to 'read' the interviews for what you think they mean or possibly for what you think you can infer about something outside of the interview interaction itself" (p. 76). As I read through the transcripts the first couple of times, I marked up the text with different coloured highlighters. Using the 'cutting and sorting' technique (Ryan & Bernard, 2003), I grouped excerpts from transcripts by similar meaning. From these groups emerged thematic categories. The practice of theme discovery is consistent with interpretive research (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). In looking for themes, I paid attention to: repetitions, metaphors and analogies, similarities and differences and linguistic connectors (Ryan & Bernard, 2003).



#### *6.4 Ethical Considerations*

This research project was reviewed by McMaster's Research Ethics Board (MREB). After minor revisions to the application, the MREB approved my research (see Appendix F). In this section I will discuss ethical considerations in regards to: consent, confidentiality, management of risks, and benefits of participation.

##### A. Consent

Youth that expressed interest in this study, were emailed the 'letter of information (LOI) and consent form' (see Appendix A), and encouraged to contact me, or my faculty research supervisor if they had any questions or concerns regarding the project or their participation. Prior to beginning the interviews, I reviewed the LOI with each participant. All of the participants signed two copies of the consent form – I kept one copy, and the participant kept the other. Voluntary participation in this study was ensured through transparency around withdrawal procedures. All of the participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point, as well as, made aware that if they chose to withdraw after participating in an interview that it would not impact the honorariums that they received.

##### B. Confidentiality

In accordance with the NASW *Code of Ethics*, a value of social work practice is the 'protection of confidentiality' (Hardina, 2004, p. 596). The 'protection of confidentiality' is significant to social work research, as it is possible for people to be identified through the information that they share, or the quotes used in a report. All of the participants were informed of the steps that would be taken to protect their

confidentiality prior to their participation in this study. In order to uphold the privacy of all participants', personal information was removed from all data collected.

Confidentiality was also ensured through the secure holding of paper and electronic files. In order to refrain from wrongfully assuming, as well as disclosing, the gender-identity of participants, I will use the pronouns 'they', 'their' and 'them' in this paper, and any future publications. To further protect participants' anonymity, I will use coded pseudonyms (e.g., Participant One, Two, Three, Four, etc...) in this paper, as well as, any future publications.

### C. Management of Risks

The risks of participating in this study were minimized as focus group interviews did not end up being the method of collecting data. However, participants were still informed of the potential risk of feeling embarrassed or becoming upset as they recount their experience(s) of suspension and/or expulsion during the interview. As it would not be appropriate for me to offer any form of counselling services to the participants, I offered all of the youth that were involved in this study, a list of resources that are available in the GTA if they were to be in need of support after the interview (see Appendix E).

### D. Benefits of Participation

Participating in this study is a chance for youth to represent a commonly underrepresented voice in literature that focuses on issues relevant to the youth community. Therefore, participants were informed that they may derive benefit from knowing that they are informing the research community about an important issue

impacting the well-being of youth. Furthermore, all of the participants in this study received a \$20.00 gift card of their choice to either: Tim Horton's, Indigo, Starbucks or Wal-Mart. As all of the interviews were held in the City of Toronto, I also provided participants that wished to be reimbursed for the cost of transportation with 2 Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) tokens. Although not all of the participants took one, each participant was offered a Certificate of Appreciation (see Appendix D).

#### *6.5 My Presence and Position in the Research*

Neuman (1997) states that in regards to postmodern research, "The researcher or author of a report should never be hidden when someone reads it; his or her presence needs to be unambiguously evident in the report" (p. 81). Therefore, in order to acknowledge my presence and position in the research process, I refer to myself in this report by using the pronouns: 'I', 'my' and 'me' throughout this paper.

## **Chapter 7: Findings**

Through an interpretive reading of participants' responses, I generated several themes that I believe help provide a deeper understanding of each of their individual experiences. These include: rationale for the use of suspension and expulsion, personal opinions and feelings about suspension and expulsion, and factors that shape the experience of suspension and expulsion. In this study, participants also spoke to the effectiveness of suspension and expulsion, made comments in regards to what youth need, and provided recommendations for alternative methods of school discipline.

### *7.1 Rationale for the Use of Suspension and Expulsion*

The most common reason that participants had been either suspended or expelled from schools that I found, is what I categorized in this section as being, 'acts of violence/physical confrontation'. Other incidents that participants mentioned that caused a suspension from school included: 'drawing 'rude' pictures or pictures that depicted violence, bullying and cyber-bullying, and truancy. Based on my understanding of Participant Seven's experience of expulsion, I included their story under the category, 'the biased opinion of a school professional'. Furthermore, in Participant Five's account, they described what I interpreted as being, 'behavioural targeting of a student living with a disability'.

#### A. Acts of Violence/Physical Confrontation

Participant One explained that while a student at School A they were expelled because they had, "fought somebody, but it was off school property". It was important for me to gain a better understanding of the personal reasons or motives underlying

Participant One's behaviour. In the process of reflecting on the situation Participant One had said, "I was defending myself but at the same time like I know I could have used more restraint". As I interpret it then, they had been in a situation at the time that they likely perceived to be a threat. In further explaining the incident, Participant One mentioned the involvement of the police. They had said:

... and then... um... cops were involved and that was about it. Like the last day... the last day before I got expelled I couldn't go to any classes, so I was stuck in the office. Um... I had to talk to like the police. I had to turn myself in, all of that.

I will be addressing police involvement in the discussion section of this paper. After their expulsion from School A, Participant One transferred to School B where they, "got called the 'N' word", and "fought someone on school campus". From my understanding, Participant One's behaviour had been a response to what I interpret as being, racist hate. As a result of this incident, Participant One had been suspended for 4 days.

During my conversation with Participant Five, they had mentioned that they had been suspended from school "about 10-15 times". While recounting one of their many experiences of suspension, Participant Five, like Participant One, described having been involved in a physical confrontation with another student. While reflecting on what essentially started the fight, Participant Five had explained:

... there was like this other guy [...] we didn't like each other or whatever. And uh, I had long hair at the time, and um, he, we were in a metal shop, or like a metal shop class I think it was, and um, I saw him walk past me, and then I felt like, water get flicked, like get flicked on the back of my hair, just like lightly, and I was like, "Oh what's that?" and I turn around and I saw him standing there and he was laughing with his friend and he had a wet paintbrush in his hand...

Acting on what I interpret as being an angry impulse, Participant Five shared details about the fight:

I just sort of started floating towards him, and I uh... pushed him into like uh, a stack of books, like uh a bookshelf, and then I don't remember anything that was happening after that, and then I woke up, and he had me in a headlock and I uh [...] had my hand like this [...] with my finger like [...] under his eyeball.

In describing the incident, Participant Five had stated, “and then I woke up”. To me, this indicates an involuntary response reaction. As it is also evident from Participant Five's account that the fight had escalated to a point where the safety of both of the students involved was at risk, I find it interesting that there had been no mention of police involvement. Participant Five did state however, that as a result of this fight, they had been suspended from school for 3 days.

Through the process of examining transcripts, I found that Participant Four had also been suspended from school for 3 days for their involvement in a physical confrontation with another student. However, despite the disciplinary consequence being the same, in validating each participant's individual experience, it is important to note the unique characteristics of Participant Four's account. While recounting their experience of suspension, Participant Four stated, “I got into a small altercation in front of the high school and yeah, principals came out and pushed us both aside and took care of business I guess”. In describing their experience further, Participant Four said, “Pretty much the whole thing was over... somebody was bad-mouthing somebody else and took kind of... took care of it I guess”. To me, the term to ‘bad-mouth’ means, to say negative things about someone or something. Although it is unclear who initiated the “small altercation”,

because of Participant Four's comment that they, "took care of it", it is to my understanding that these two had some sort of score to settle. Physical confrontation had thus been the method of resolving the conflict.

Participant Two had been willing to share details of more than one experience of suspension during their interview. While briefly commenting on their first experience of suspension in high school, Participant Two stated, "...it was through horse-play in grade 9, like uh, like punching people on the bus and stuff like that". Although 'horse-play' is not usually intended to be violent, I decided to include Participant Two's account here, because the term is commonly used to refer to rough ways of playing. In a school setting, "punching people" is more than likely to be considered confrontational behaviour rather than, 'playing'.

Although Participant Three's incident is unlike the rest in this category, I included it here because according to their account, it had been anonymously reported that they had "attacked" their peer, and "pushed her down a hill", which in effect, caused their friend to require medical attention. As a result of this anonymous report, Participant Three had been suspended from school for 3 days. As an 'outsider', this incident can easily be interpreted as an act of violence. Participant Three's 'insider' view of the scenario however, provides a very different perspective in regards to what had happened. They had explained:

...my friends and I were just like, hanging out in sort of the back area outside of the school and it like, the ground sloped like down, like away from the school, and... one of my friend's had just taken this self-defense class in gym and she was showing us like different self-defense moves and uh... so she was, and then we were just like goofing around and she went to like leg sweep for fun and she fell

backwards like down this incline, and she hit her head and she had like a concussion like a year before that, and it like, retriggered the concussion...

Here, Participant Three refers to the behaviour that caused their peer to become injured as, “goofing around”. This reminds me of the well-known saying: *It’s all fun and games until someone gets hurt*. After hearing Participant Three’s side of the story, which I accept as the ‘truth’, I think the incident that occurred, had been an accident.

#### B. Drawing ‘Rude’ Pictures or Pictures that Depict Violence

Participant Two had mentioned that at some point during their “scholastic career”, they had also been suspended for, “drawing rude pictures”. Although they did not share a lot of detail regarding this particular experience of suspension, providing an example of the pictures that they used to draw, Participant Two had explained that, “typically it was disfigured monsters and gore type stuff”. Participant Five had also shared an experience of having been suspended in high school for drawing certain pictures. They had explained that these drawings were, “just stick-men basically, uh... but like, it would be a war scene and they would be killing each other”. Drawings that depict aggression, or include weapons or blood, are often interpreted as threatening.

Through an interpretive reading of both Participant Two and Participant Five’s responses during their interview, I did not find any information indicating personal reasons or motives for drawing such pictures. However, I know that I used to doodle during class too, and not all of my drawings meant something. Sometimes I just drew something because that’s what I knew how to draw, or simply, wanted to draw. It is thus apparent from Participant Two and Participant Five’s accounts that in the school



community, it all comes down to how the professional educator interprets students' drawings.

### C. Bullying and Cyber-Bullying

#### Bullying

While recounting an experience of suspension from grade 10, Participant Two had said, "I... got suspended for bullying a girl on the bus every day to the point where she cried and I had to talk to the cops and stuff like that". As previously stated, I will be addressing police involvement in the discussion section. While examining the transcript from my interview with Participant Two, I found that they had initially spoke more broadly on behalf of other youth, in regards to the underlying reasons or motives for bullying. Participant Two had stated:

... there's more, more reasons for kids bullying than just because they're shitty kids. Like, kids aren't always, like some kids might be, but like, not all kids are just shitty because they're shitty. There's reasons behind what they're doing... whether it be trauma, whether it be any of these kinds of things.

It is apparent from Participant Two's account that they recognize that there is more going on in a student's life than what you can see on the surface, or what they choose to show.

In further explaining the "trauma" that they had referred to however, Participant Two had brought the discussion back to their personal experience. Participant Two had stated:

Like, I grew up in foster care which can really play with a kid's head. Like, you have people making decisions for you that don't understand you... or don't like you, so you end up acting out 'cause how do you deal with that?

As I understand it, Participant Two is implying here that the reason they behaved the way that they did in school, was because of what was happening outside of school, in their personal life.

### Cyber-Bullying

In today's society, it has become more common for youth to interact in a 'virtual' community (Moje, 2000). As I see it, the advancement of technology has created a constantly-connected generation. The Internet for instance, has made it possible to stay connected 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. As a result, 'cyber-bullying' has become a recurrent issue in the youth community. "Cyberbullying involves the use of communication technologies such as the Internet, social networking sites, websites, email, text messaging and instant messaging to repeatedly intimidate or harass others" (Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 2017). Participant Six had shared that, during high school, they had received a 3 day suspension for cyber-bullying. In further explaining the incident, they had mentioned:

...my friends and I, uh Facebook was popular, so we were posting some stuff about this girl, um, but there were no names mentioned so there wasn't any proof or anything, but uh, it was considered cyber-bullying because we were saying she walks funny, and it always looks like she has to pee.

Facebook is a social networking service that was launched in 2004, and continues to be quite popular today. Facebook is most young people's first introduction to online communication. When I was younger, prior to Facebook's release, MSN Messenger had been popular. I remember that at first, it seemed like, while behind a computer screen,

you could get away with anything. It is possible that Participant Six behaved this way online, unknowing of the consequences of their actions.

#### D. Truancy

In the context of this paper, ‘truancy’, refers to the intentional act of missing school. Although having been suspended many times throughout high school, Participant Two described their experience of suspension for truancy in the most detail. Participant Two explained:

I was skipping school a lot, ‘cause around that time I had uh... I moved into a group home, and there wasn’t really any motivation for me to go to school ‘cause the consequences there weren’t, like they weren’t really upholding anything. As well as, like when I finally, like a year after that I moved into my own apartment and there was nobody stopping me from going to school, so I was suspended from, for skipping school a lot...

As I understand it, there was a lack of adult supervision in the group home that Participant Two had been living in. In addition, knowing that Participant Two had then moved out of the group home and into their own apartment, when they said that, “there was nobody stopping me from going to school”, what I think Participant Two had actually meant to say was that, there was no one there to ensure that they attended school.

An important point generated from this research is that, the use of suspension and expulsion does not consider, or differentiate, from those whom would find themselves less supported, or more at risk at home. This is made evident in Participant Two's particular experience of suspension. The use of these exclusionary methods, may also not consider the impacts of removing someone from a structured school environment, and

placing them in one that is perhaps without structure, in the case where children are living alone, which is becoming more common (Campion-Smith, 2012, Sept. 20).

#### E. The Biased Opinion of a School Professional

Participant Seven's account of their experience of expulsion is particularly unique. While recounting their experience Participant Seven said, "...there was never really the exact conversation of, 'You are expelled' just like, 'You are not allowed back here for unknown reasons'". However, in describing the activities and events leading up to their expulsion, Participant Seven mentioned:

... I had to spend my photography class in the office for the last 2 months. And... I did start a food fight on my birthday that didn't really work out. And initially actually, I didn't even get in trouble for that. And um, I think it was because I was involved with a fight towards the end of the year. So I probably deserved it. But I never actually got in trouble for any of that but then I got suspended in the end, or expelled, sorry.

Although Participant Seven specified that at the time, they had not been given a definitive explanation as to why they were being expelled, they mentioned a few incidents of problem behaviour that did not have any consequences. In response to asking what they think influenced their expulsion, Participant Seven remarked, "Um, I probably would say it was more so the teacher like pushing for me to be expelled, like the one that I had to spend the class in the office for". I therefore included their story here, because to me, it seems like the teacher or school administrator had been biased against Participant Seven, and this bias, had influenced the decision to expel Participant Seven.

### F. Behavioural Targeting of a Student Living With a Disability

Participant Five had mentioned that during high school, the main reason that they were suspended had been a result of, "...talking back, um just not doing what I'm told kind of in class". Participant Five had shared, "I had a hard time uh.... concentrating... I was diagnosed with ADHD". ADHD is defined as, "a condition that includes developmentally inappropriate levels of inattention, impulsivity, and hyperactivity" (Fabiano et al., 2013, p. 88). From my understanding then, Participant Five's behaviour in school and in the classroom setting may have been influenced by the additional challenges that living with ADHD creates. As a result, it seems as though the use of suspension in this case had been a way of essentially, penalizing Participant Five for having ADHD, as they may not have had the ability to control the behaviour that the school professional considered unacceptable.

### *7.2 Personal Opinions and Feelings about Suspension and Expulsion*

As I conducted each interview, I was careful to provide plenty of opportunity for participants to express their feelings and opinions. Some of the participants in this study referred to the use of suspension as a 'punishment'. I will be addressing the use of this term more in the discussion section. I also found that more participants spoke negatively than positively about the use of suspension and expulsion. Lastly, some of the participants' opinions indicate what I interpreted as being that, these disciplinary procedures are a 'blanket approach' to managing student behaviour. This finding supports authors Daniel and Bondy (2008), who make the same claim.

### A. The Use of Suspension and Expulsion as a Punishment

Participant Two and Participant Six commented on the use of suspension as a ‘punishment’ from two unique perspectives. In Participant Two’s account, they had explained that the use of suspension, “was not a good punishment” for their particular behaviour. Participant Two had said, “Like if I’m skipping school and don’t have anybody to like uphold that punishment at home, because I am my own home, like what, what purpose does this serve?” In further explaining this Participant Two had stated:

I think it really uh, like a kid getting suspended all the time doesn’t want to be in school anyway, you’re just giving them what he wants, except for, on the hope that the parents will punish him.

I believe that Participant Two makes a very valid point here. Students should enjoy going to school, as it should be a safe and inclusive space. If a student does not want to go to school, there is likely something going on at school to make them want to avoid going. I argue then, that instead of contributing to the student’s absenteeism by sending them home for x amount of days, the job of the professional educator should be to address why they do not want to come to school, and work with the student, to help improve their attendance.

Participant Six had described why in their personal experience, a 3 day suspension had been a “harsh punishment”:

... ‘cause like I said I never got into trouble, I was never in the principal’s office, like I knew the principal, like, um, if I was late it was very seldom, all the teachers liked me, like kids liked me, I wasn’t the person that stuck out for being like a bad kid, so I feel like I could have got a warning and a couple of detentions. Like, even a week’s detention, right? Like afterschool for a bit... But um, no detentions,

never got sent to the principal's office, none of that, so I feel like suspension was pretty harsh.

From my understanding of Participant Six's story, the cyber-bullying incident had essentially been the first time that Participant Six had really displayed any sort of unacceptable behaviour as a student. I therefore have to agree with Participant Six's sentiment that a 3 day suspension was a "harsh punishment". I find it important to note that even though Participant Six did not agree that a suspension was the appropriate 'punishment' for their behaviour, it is implied here, that they recognize that there did have to be some form of consequence for their actions.

While stating their opinion in regards to the use of punitive discipline practices like, suspension and expulsion, Participant Three stated, "Well I am, um, like more generally, I am sort of like a believer in rehab over punishment". Participant Three further explained:

And uh... I think it's... it's really uh, I don't know the word. It's just... I want to say like, quixotic... to start that punishment at the high school level... I don't know. 'Cause you're still a kid right? Like, I was 15. So...

In being honest with myself, I was kind of unsure regarding what Participant Three meant by referring to the use of suspension as "quixotic". After looking up the definition of the term using Oxford Dictionaries' online website, I think what Participant Three meant is that, they feel it is 'impractical' to rely on the use of punitive discipline practices at the secondary school level.

### B. Negative Feelings and Opinions

In response to being asked how they felt about the use of suspension as a discipline strategy in their particular situation, Participant Two remarked, "...it didn't bother me any but it was kind of dumb". I included Participant Two's comment under negative feelings and opinions because to me, the word, 'dumb', has a negative connotation.

Participant Seven had referred to the use of expulsion as, "a little bit unnecessary". While recounting their experience Participant Seven described, "it was my last day of school and yeah, all that was left was the graduation ceremony and yearbook signing. It was almost kind of like spiteful in the end". Participant Seven's experience of expulsion did not affect their eligibility to graduate. Rather, the expulsion had resulted in a loss of privilege to participate in celebratory activities and events. To me, the use of expulsion in Participant Seven's case, exemplifies the imbalance of power within the education system, as well as, how this power is used to disadvantage youth.

In Participant Five's account, they had referred to the use of suspension as both "silly" and "ridiculous". Although the word 'silly' to me, is not usually used to describe something negative, when Participant Five said it, I think what they had meant was that their suspension had been foolish, which does have a negative connotation. Participant Five had been suspended from school for 1 day for drawing pictures that depicted violence. While expressing their feelings and opinions about this suspension, Participant Five stated, "...but um, I am at their place and uh, so I mean it's their rules. Although I'm not paying to be there, and I didn't want to be there, so I felt like it was kind of unjust".



What I think Participant Five means by “unjust” is that, they felt that being suspended had been unfair.

Although they did not say it in the same way, in interpreting Participant Three’s account, I think that because of the unique circumstances of their situation, they felt that their suspension had also been unfair. Participant Three had explained:

Like, they didn’t even talk to my friend who hit her head. She could have said like... that’s not how it happened. But they didn’t even talk to her. Um... so I think they should have done even like the smallest investigation before suspending me.

By jumping to conclusions without having all of the necessary information, Participant Three had been wrongfully accused of physically assaulting their peer. It is also important to note that it is implied in this account, that the school professional(s) did not look into the incident at all, before making the decision to suspend Participant Three. To me, this exemplifies how youth voices are silenced in the school community.

From my understanding of Participant One’s experience of expulsion, they felt that like Participant Three, they had also been wrongfully accused. Participant One explained:

Um... it wasn’t until like, a couple months later when I went through the court system that they found out that I should not have been... I shouldn’t have been prosecuted for what I did. So it was just like, I had to go through all of that just to find out what I already knew... that I was innocent, and I wish that like, if people had taken the time and looked at the case, and asked questions... like, life would have been different.

When Participant One’s incident had been taken to court, they had actually been proven innocent. As I understand it however, by that point, it was unfortunately too little, too late, as they had already been expelled from school, and had enrolled in a new school. It

is also apparent that Participant One's previous school, as well as the school board, did not take any accountability for the hardship that the use of expulsion, and police involvement had caused for Participant One.

While recounting their feelings about their suspension, Participant One had stated, "I felt I didn't deserve to be suspended", and then further explained why:

I mean um, it's just like... some things you just don't say to people and that was one of the lines that you shouldn't have crossed. I also feel like my school in general, I went to [...]... They didn't really handle it well, so they kind of like were looking for someone to blame and when it came down to it I got the short end of the stick.

I included Participant One's account here, because to get, "the short end of the stick", is an expression that commonly means to get the worst outcome. Although Participant Five did not say it in the same way, in interpreting their response I think that, Participant Five might have also felt like they got 'the short end of the stick'. While recounting their experience, Participant Five explained:

Uh... the fight, the fight one, I thought was even worse actually because he did start it by uh, flicking me with the water, and if he had never done that, I would have never done anything to him, and he got a 1 day suspension and I got 3 days.

Despite the fact that the other student was at fault for provoking Participant Five, Participant Five 'threw the first punch' so to speak. Often times, the person that 'throws the first punch' is most at a fault, even though this is not the most 'fair' way of thinking. From my understanding of Participant Five's response though, this seems to be what might have happened.

### C. Positive Feelings and Opinions

Some of the youth in this study did not interpret having to stay home from school as a ‘punishment’. For instance, Participant Five’s opinion of their suspension was that it was, “a good time”, and Participant Two, “thought it was awesome”. It is evident that to these participants, being suspended was much like being given a mini-vacation from school.

Furthermore, Participant One had mentioned that they tried to focus on the positives of being expelled from School A. In explaining why their expulsion had been a positive experience, they said:

... ‘cause it made me turn my life around. Um... it’s just like a lot of different things that fell in to place I feel. Like I feel like I got more focus at school, it made me want to pursue stuff more, pursue interests, um... and it made me go to the second school, which was a really good school.

What I think Participant One meant by referring to the second school as “a really good school” is that, there was a more positive environment at School B than there had been at School A. This positive environment encouraged Participant One to re-engage with their learning after their expulsion.

During the interviewing process, it was important for me to remain open to all feelings and opinions about the use of suspension and expulsion, even if they conflicted with my own. While sharing their opinion of the use of suspension as a disciplinary approach in schools, Participant Two had said:

Like, like I know like secluding ch- like kids from other kids is usually a good thing especially if you’re fighting. Like in grade school I got suspended a lot for fighting and stuff like that. So that, that made sense at the time...

And, while reflecting on their experience of suspension, Participant Four had explained:

It was warranted. It was needed, so... I completely understand. Uh, 3 days was fair, for uh fighting. 'Cause you can't be doing that. If it was 1 day here, or a half day, everybody would be doing it and it would be a disaster after that, so...

From my understanding then, both Participant Two and Participant Four to some extent, agree with the use of suspension as a method for managing student behaviour in schools.

### C. Suspension and Expulsion is a 'Blanket Approach'

While recounting their school experience, with respect to discipline, Participant Two stated, "Any little thing that you did wrong it was just a suspension, suspension, suspension. Like it was, that was just their go-to". Explaining further, Participant Two said, "I didn't agree with the zero tolerancy policy then, because again, if you're just slapping down a blanket thing, a statement, like a blanket punishment you're not getting to the root of the problem".

Although they did not say it in the same way, from my understanding of some of the participants' responses, they too feel that suspension and expulsion is a 'blanket approach'. For instance, Participant Four stated, "I think everybody's just too lazy, and suspension is the easiest thing to do", and Participant One had described:

When you don't want to deal with something it's easy to dismiss it. So it's easy to say, "We're going to expel you", but, "How about we look at what makes the student act that way?" "What can we do as educators to help the student?"... So I just feel like the easiest answer, isn't always the best one. It's easier to just expel someone, but it's more worthwhile to see that person grow.

Through examining this account, I found that Participant One shares my view of the role of school professionals as being significant in the growth and development of students.

### *7.3 Factors that Shape the Experience of Suspension and Expulsion*

Participants in this study commented on a variety of different factors that had a part in shaping their experience of suspension or expulsion. These include: academic characteristics, peer relationships, teacher-student relationships, and family. In validating each participant's individual experience I also found it important to include Participant One's particular consequence of being expelled from school. This is included at the end of this section under the category 'additional consequences'.

#### A. Academic Characteristics

The majority of the participants in this study had commented on the impact that being removed from the school setting for  $x$  amount of days had on their academic progress. For instance, while reflecting on their experience of suspension, Participant Six had stated, "They didn't give me homework so I had to go back and get caught up with that. It would have been nice if I got it during those 3 days, but no". Participant Three had also indicated that they were not provided with any school work to focus on during their suspension. As Participant Three's suspension had been the 3 days leading up to the weekend, they mentioned that they then had to "catch up on Monday".

While explaining the academic impact of suspension, Participant One said, "... like it's really detrimental to the learning 'cause like, you come back you're obviously going to be behind". Participant One had also commented on the consequences of missing tests while out of school serving a suspension. They described, "it's kinda like, once you miss it, it's like a zero or... you know, it's your fault for missing them". While reflecting on their experience of expulsion, Participant One explained:

So... when I got expelled, that was kind of... that... those were the worst days I would say. I think it was a week before... like, another school really picked me up. So, I got expelled from [School A], and then, so... I waited a week, and I fell so far behind. Um... when [School B] picked me up, um... it was like, they kind of like... they were already in their year, so it was kind of like, “Yeah, we have to throw you into this class, these classes... and what-not”. So... I was even more behind, ‘cause the whole curriculum was different from different schools.

As I understand it, Participant One experienced an additional hindrance to their academic progress as a result of having to transfer to another school in the middle of the academic year.

In Participant Two’s account they had mentioned, “I ended up skipping most of my final exams ‘cause I’m like, ‘I’m not passing anyway, I haven’t been to the classes enough’”. From my understanding, Participant Two’s experience of repeated suspensions, and absenteeism had played a part in their disengagement from school. What I also find to be important to note is that, Participant Two had disclosed during the interview that they had dropped out of school when they were in grade 11.

Participant Three and Participant Six had made comments that I think, imply a concern for the impact that suspension could have after high school. Participant Three had stated, “I was worried that it would like, affect my university applications”, and Participant Six had expressed, “I was worried that the suspension would be on my record”. In telling their story, Participant Seven had mentioned that after graduating from high school, when they had wanted to begin applying for colleges, they did in fact encounter difficulty as a result of their expulsion. Participant Seven had explained:

So, when I went to actually get like, my high school diploma, they didn’t have it at that high school, they sent it away, so... I had to go all the way to like [Blue Subway Station] to go get it, and they didn’t have it so they had to get it like, sent

in. But there was something weird about when I asked them, they asked me if I came to that school in grade 10 or 11 because they no longer had my grade 9 or 10 files on record.

From what I know, schools are required to keep students' records for x amount of time after they graduate or leave the school. Therefore to me, it almost seems like the school that Participant Seven had been expelled from, just wiped their hands clean of any 'record' of them being a student there, after their expulsion.

It is important to note that not all of the participants in this study expressed having experienced an academic impact, as a result of being suspended. Rather, Participant Four commented on the role of academic characteristics from a different perspective.

Participant Four had explained, "I was doing okay in high school so I didn't really worry about 3 days". From my understanding then, Participant Four's academic standing had an influential part in shaping their experience of suspension. Participant Five also spoke to the influence of academic standing on the experience of suspension:

Uh, well if I was a student that was a little more academically inclined at the time, I would have felt that the suspension would have more, uh, would have done more damage than good for me, because then I'd be missing time to do my work and stuff, but, since I was a student that didn't do that anyway, I don't feel like it really affected me, or impacted me too much.

Although Participant Five acknowledges that while a student in high school, they personally did not attach any significant value to education, they understand that for students that do, suspension can be more damaging – academically speaking.

### B. Peer Relationships

Through examining the transcripts from an interpretive lens, I found that all of the youth in this study, from one perspective or another, commented on the role of their

peers, and their peer relationships in shaping their experience of suspension and/or expulsion.

Participant One and Participant Three had commented on the experience of being the subject of gossip and rumours circulating in school from two different perspectives. In describing their experience with gossip after returning to school from their suspension, Participant One stated:

Um... when I got suspended and I came back a lot of people knew, like a lot of students knew like, why I got suspended, so there was obviously that gossip that went around. And... I'm sort of like a person that... I like to keep my own stuff private. So like, I felt like they handled it terribly, 'cause like here's everybody that knows about my situation that shouldn't know, especially like why I fought, like I didn't want that to go out there. So... it was kind of weird, and it made me feel uneasy.

While recounting how they felt about returning to school after their suspension,

Participant Three described:

Um, I was really embarrassed, uh, 'cause I knew that... I kind of knew like, I didn't know the person that filed the complaint but I knew like, that group of people, and they were like the popular kids... so... I kind of felt like I was being ostracized and uh... and then after I returned there were rumours that like, I start fights and stuff, which isn't like, the person that I am.

From my understanding, both Participant One and Participant Three's peers played a role in shaping a negative experience of suspension.

While explaining what it was like to return to school after being suspended for 'cyber-bullying', Participant Six had described, what I interpret as being, a negative impact on their peer relationships. They stated:

Well, it was at the point where like some people decided to choose sides, right, so I lost probably like, two whole friends. Which kind of sucked, because you know,



it was obviously one of them that ratted me out, but whatever. But um, it was weird like having that sort of separation.

From my understanding, despite expressing that it “kind of sucked” Participant Six did not seem to be too bothered by the fact that they lost a few friends as a result of the ‘cyber-bullying’ incident.

Through an interpretive reading of Participant Two’s account, I found that they expressed the role of peer relationships in shaping their experience of suspension from a particularly unique perspective. Participant Two stated:

Frankly I didn’t really have much of a relationship with my peers. Uh, I didn’t really talk to them much, I didn’t care to. Uh, our situations were vastly different, we were always in different places, so I didn’t really bother to create those, uh, friendships. I didn’t really care what they thought.

I interpret Participant Two’s account as exemplifying a lack of social connectedness to the school community. While going into more detail about their school experience, Participant Two described:

...like I hated school. Like, sitting around with all these people talking about just like silly things, like, “Oh, we’re going to this concert” and I’m like, “I don’t know how I’m going to eat tonight” and so I just didn’t want to be in that environment, so I started skipping.

From my understanding then, a lack of positive peer relationships, may have contributed to Participant Two’s social, cognitive and behavioural disengagement from school.

As far as I understand Participant Four’s experience of suspension, their peer relationships were not negatively impacted. Rather, they commented on the role of peer relations in shaping their experience of suspension from a different perspective. While

recounting what it was like to return to school after being suspended for their involvement in a physical confrontation with another student, Participant Four explained:

...everybody was high fiving me because nobody liked the other gentleman at that point in time. But um, yeah, the whole gossiping thing was fine, it wasn't really... I can't really comment because I wasn't on the bad side of it. If anything I was kind of on the good side...

As Participant Four had stated that, “nobody liked the other gentleman”, and that they were “kind of on the good side”, I assume that for whatever the reason being, this student had a lower ‘social status’ than Participant Four within the school community. By stating that “everybody was high fiving me”, it is apparent that Participant Four’s peers had had a positive reaction to the situation and its outcome.

Participant Five had mentioned that when they returned to school from their suspension for fighting, their friends in their immediate ‘peer group’ did not treat them any differently. However, while recounting their relationship with the student that they got into the fight with, Participant Five stated:

...we never talked or anything. Like, you know, sometimes we'd see each other in the hallway and crash into each other or whatever, but we did that before and we did that after. Well, actually no. Actually, we stopped doing that afterwards because I think, I think my finger in his eye, actually kind of scared him. Yeah, so...

What I find to be noteworthy from Participant Five’s account is that they had described that the conflict between themselves and the other student “stopped” because they “scared” them. I interpret this as implying that Participant Five’s behaviour had an impact on the other student’s perception of them.

### C. Teacher-Student Relationships

Some of the youth in this study made comments that, to me, imply experiencing negative changes in regards to their teachers' perspectives of them. For instance, Participant One had stated, "I could see like certain people that knew about my file, they were like... looking at me differently. Um... some teachers were like... looked at me as if I was a problem". From my understanding, Participant One, had been ascribed a negative label based on their disciplinary record. The label here, being: "a problem". While recounting how they had been treated differently by school professionals after returning from their suspension, Participant One described:

... it was sort of like... I was monitored. Like I... like teachers would come up to me and tell me like, "Oh yeah we're supposed to keep an eye on you" like, and... like that... it was hurtful. 'Cause I feel like that one moment defined everything, which is just like a moment in time.

What I think Participant One meant when they said, "I feel like that one moment defined everything", is that, being suspended and expelled from school had a negative impact on their identity, and therefore reputation in the school community. Participant One became defined by their "file". In addition, what I find to be important to note is some of the specific language that Participant One used while describing how they were treated by their teachers. For instance, they stated that they felt "monitored". As I understand it then, Participant One experienced an increase in surveillance at school. I will be addressing surveillance in the discussion section of this paper.

Like Participant One, Participant Five had also been ascribed a 'deviant' label in school as a result of being known for having a history of problem behaviour. In

Participant Five's account, they make it very clear that they had been well aware of this label for quite some time. Participant Five stated:

I definitely, all from like grade 2 through high school, I was definitely a 'troublemaker', and I knew it. Like there were years, that I spent more than half of the time in the principal's office doing all my work and stuff.

As Participant Five had disclosed in the interview that they had been suspended from school multiple times, it is possible that as a result of being labelled a 'troublemaker' at such a young age, Participant Five had internalized this identity, and in effect, behaved accordingly over the years. This internalization of 'deviant' labels, and the influence that it has on student behaviour is discussed in the existing literature on the impact of exclusionary discipline practices (Wolf & Kupchik, 2017).

While recounting what it was like to return to school after being suspended, Participant Two stated, "It, it uh, it would feel like, they definitely viewed me as, 'This guy's trouble' or, 'He just doesn't care, so we're not going to bother'. So, it was kind of uncomfortable to be in school". In Participant Three's account, they had also commented on this feeling of discomfort. They had stated:

I felt really uncomfortable... especially like, around my friends, because I didn't know like, who was watching us now and uh, and I felt like teachers were like... watching me more. So I don't know if like, the principal like told them... told all of my teachers what he thought had happened and now they're like, on guard. Um... it was really weird, it was like going from like an average, popular... like a normal person, to uh... to like a criminal, it was weird.

From my understanding, Participant Three, like Participant One, experienced an increase in surveillance after returning to school from their suspension. It is important to note some of the language that Participant Three used while describing the treatment that they

experienced from school professionals, such as, feeling like their teachers were “watching”, and that they were “on guard”. I will be addressing this later on in the discussion section.

It is important to note that not all of the youth in this study experienced a negative impact on their relationship(s) with school professionals. For instance, Participant Four had stated, “I didn’t sense anything different. Nobody even brought it up” and Participant Six had claimed that, “...nothing really changed, they were still, like they treated me the same”.

Participant One and Participant Two spoke to the teacher-student relationship from two very unique perspectives. For instance, while reflecting on the use of suspension as a method of managing student behaviour, Participant One stated:

Um, I just feel... I feel like it’s more for the convenience of the teachers and like the staff rather than the students, and ultimately, your purpose is to shape the students into, into like, people in society, like make them great contributors to society.

I decided to include Participant One’s account here, because from my understanding, they had expressed what they understand the role of a teacher is supposed to be in a student’s life.

While reflecting on their school experience, in regards to the topic of ‘teacher-student relationships’, Participant Two had explained:

...nobody cared about the situation that was going on to make me want to skip, or what was going on in my own life. Like, it was just, like, they wanted to punish me but they didn’t care about to why. I don’t even think many of them knew my situation.

Although Participant Two expresses feeling like, “nobody cared”, I found that they later contradicted this when they explained the following:

I, uh, all throughout school even though I’ve had uh, really bad history with school and stuff like that, teachers were always telling me, “Oh like, you’re very smart. You can do this if you just applied yourself. I don’t understand why you’re not doing the work, like you show that you know... things” So, I always got the sense that teachers pitied me. And like, especially after suspensions and stuff like that, they’d see... they’d see that I could do the work but that I wasn’t, and I kept coming back after, off of, repetitive suspensions and stuff. It just felt like, there was a lot of pity...

Participant Two had stated “there was a lot of pity”. To me, to ‘pity’ someone means to feel sorry for someone. To feel sorry for someone, I think that, you have to care about them. Therefore, the school professionals may have cared, but may not have known how to show it or act accordingly.

#### D. Family

Through examining interview transcripts, I found that some of the participants spoke to the role that a student’s family has in shaping the experience of suspension and expulsion. I think the way that Participant Five explained this role, was very clear. They had said:

...it is dependent on what your parents are like, right? Because if your parents are strict then your suspension is going to be a bad time, but if your parents are, maybe aren’t there, or don’t care then, uh suspension is probably what you’re going to look for because then you get off school.

While recounting their own experience of suspension, Participant Five had stated, “I was just worried about what my Dad was going to do when I got home, kind of thing”.

Explaining this further, Participant Five said, “Um well... my Dad was kind of strict so

uh, if I was suspended I wasn't having any fun". Through interpreting Participant Six's account, I found that they had shared a similar concern as Participant Five, but in regards to how their Mom was going to react to finding out that they had been suspended.

Participant Five stated:

Yeah, like I didn't care at all about the suspension itself. Um, but it was like, 'Oh my God is my Mom going to freak out?' like, 'Is she going to be mad? Is she going to be okay with it? Is she going to lecture me? Am I going to have to listen to her?' like, 'What's going to happen? Am I going to get a curfew?'

Participant One however, had commented on the influence that the cultural background of a student's parents can have in shaping the experience of suspension. They stated:

I feel when... like when you send someone home, for like the littlest things, you have to take into demographic, you have to take into what their backgrounds are. 'Cause I know a lot of my friends, like when they got suspended, when they went home, like, it was brutal for them, you know? And then, like, they would have to come back to school in like a week. You can't, you don't just shake that off. Like, you're at home... I know like, Caribbean parents, like they probably like spank, or like... you know?

As I understand it then, all of these participants spoke to the consequences of being suspended in regards to parental punishment. This is echoed in the literature that discusses the potential risks of including a student's parents in the disciplinary process (Radin, 1988).

#### E. Additional Consequences

In validating the unique experiences of all participants in this findings report, I found it important to include Participant One's particular negative outcome of expulsion. They had mentioned:

... like in my case, like, I had scholarships, I had all that stuff riding on it so if I'm not performing and people aren't seeing me perform I can easily like lose what I've earned, what I've worked so hard to earn.

After which Participant One further explained that, "...that's what hurt the most from my expulsion. It was just like something that I had worked so hard for, I lost it". An athletic scholarship is a huge opportunity – it not only can help a student afford to continue their education, but it can provide the right kind of motivation for a student to want to as well.

#### *7.4 The Effectiveness of Suspension and Expulsion*

After examining the interview transcripts, I found that participants commented on the effectiveness of the use of suspension and expulsion in regards to addressing the problem, and correcting behaviour.

##### A. Addressing the Problem

In response to being asked whether they had the opportunity to speak with someone about the incident that they had been involved in that had caused their suspension from school, Participant Three remarked, "I didn't realize how weird it was until I like, said it out loud but it's really weird, they didn't say anything. Like... I didn't even have to talk to the school counsellor, like... anything". They then further stated:

... I don't think suspension like... solves problems. Um, because it doesn't like... even if I had pushed her and concussed her, you would want some sort of rehabilitation, right? Like, talking to a counsellor, figuring out why I did it. Instead, they gave me like 3 days in which I could just be like, a violent criminal, you know? They're just like, 'As long as you're not at school'.

This opinion is shared with other participants in this study, like Participant Two, who explained:



I just feel like it's an effect... ineffective system, it doesn't make sense, especially for a lot of minor things. Like, if two kids get into a slap fight and they both get suspended, well, it doesn't solve the root of the problem of why they were there, and just like that, for me... the suspension wasn't getting to the root of the problem as to why I was being suspended, why I was skipping all the time.

Furthermore, Participant One had expressed, "I feel like in the school systems they're just so quick to like, dismiss the problem and kind of like be done with it and that doesn't really help the situation".

### B. Correcting Behaviour

When asked to recount how they felt about the use of suspension as a disciplinary response in their particular incident, Participant Five remarked:

Uh, I didn't feel like I really had learned... I didn't feel like, 'Oh I better never get suspended again'. Uh, because, uh definitely, uh especially with my experience of being suspended for drawing that picture, I just felt like 'Well, they'll just make something up and suspend me if they want to, and they won't if they don't want to. It's out of my control, so I'll just continue doing whatever I want I guess'.

To the same question, Participant Six had responded:

... I didn't learn anything other than, 'Don't get caught or else you're going to get suspended'. It wasn't like, 'Oh, I really shouldn't do this because this many people kill themselves a year due to cyber-bullying'. It was just like, 'Well, if I'm going to do something just don't get caught'.

Both Participant Five and Participant Six clearly stated that they did not learn anything through their experience of suspension. As I understand it then, the use of suspension did not effectively correct the behaviour that had caused Participant Five and Participant Six to be suspended.

At some point during each interview, I had asked participants to recount how they had spent their time during the *x* amount of days that they were not in school due to being

suspended, or expelled. The purpose of asking this question had been to gain an understanding of the activities that youth engaged in while not in school. Some of the youth in this study provided very brief descriptions. For instance, Participant One stated, “Um... when I was at home, it was honestly just... watching TV. Watching TV and playing video games. That was about it”, Participant Four had specified, “I actually picked up a Kijiji job for 3 days to make some extra money. I was working full-time in high school so I figured might as well”, and Participant Five said, “I would guess just sitting in my bedroom, doing dishes, uh, and that’s probably it. I mean, I probably had to do homework if I had any, and chores as a punishment kind of thing”.

Other participants in this study, however, provided a little bit more detail of the activities that they had engaged in while out of school serving a suspension. For example, Participant Two explained:

Uh, mostly I just stayed in my apartment. I uh, had this one little bedroom, bachelor apartment where I had a cat and not much else. I had an Xbox 360 and spent most of my time smoking weed and playing video games. Doing absolutely nothing. I could have been looking for jobs, I could have been, but like I didn’t know how to do that, because I didn’t know how to write a resume. Uh, I just... wasted a lot of time, and, I feel like, to a degree... the school system could have been there a little bit better to like, see that.

Participant Three described:

Um... well the first day I was sick, so I remember just like, napping and watching TV and napping. Um... and then... uh, the next day I think I went with my Dad to work... he works at like a warehouse so I got to help him out. And then uh, it was like a Wednesday, Thursday, Friday... and then the Friday, a couple of my friends uh... didn’t have class, just because of how their like spare classes and stuff worked out, so we like... hung out at the mall.

Lastly, Participant Six stated:

I remember reading. I read a lot of books. I'm sure I was re-reading Harry Potter. Um, I had to help out with more chores, just because I did get in trouble and my Mom was like, "Ok, you're home you can at least help with the dishes, vacuum, mow the lawn" that kind of stuff. But I never really did anything school-related.

It is evident from all of the participants' responses that, while out of school, their focus was on essentially anything other than school. I also found that, while describing the activities that they engaged in while out of school, not one of the participants mentioned doing any form of reflection on the incident that they were involved in, or their behaviour. To me, not finding this information is a finding in and of itself.

### C. Additional Considerations

I found that Participant One, Participant Two, and Participant Seven all shared very insightful opinions of current disciplinary procedures that I felt were also important to include in this report. Participant One had stated, "Um... I feel like, you definitely have to take a larger look at the *Safe Schools Act*. I feel like it's broken". While troubling this further, they stated:

I feel like, the model that we, that they follow is really out-dated, and it's hard when times are changing 'cause um... peoples' perceptions change, peoples' attitudes change, so what was happening in the early 2000s, like attitude-wise and students isn't necessarily what's happening now. So I feel like with stuff like that, you have to look at it, you have to change it, modify it, to the times that we live in. So like, the way you see something as zero tolerance back then... won't even come close to what's happening to these kids now. It's a different generation, it's a different age.

Participant Two had mentioned:

... it wasn't until like, like my out life, that I started doing more research on, on... the uh... the... zero tolerance thing, and it doesn't work. Like, it hasn't worked. People, kids just got better at hiding it. Like... like... or they're still bullying.

Like you can't monitor what kids do on the internet and that's something they never took into account.

Furthermore, Participant Seven explained:

Um... Well obviously there has to be some repercussions for people's actions sometimes, but a lot of the time it doesn't necessarily make sense. Um... I don't know if it's relevant but like you see all of those posts about girls who have to go home because their outfit isn't suitable for school and stuff, like I think that's stupid. A lot of them are getting suspended and stuff too. So I think a lot of what is happening now it's like, their only way of providing some kind of discipline and it's not really relevant to most situations.

### *7.5 What Youth Need*

Through examining the interview transcripts, I found that some of the participants in this study commented on the 'needs' of youth in school. These participants either did so by expressing what their own needs as a student had been, or by speaking more broadly, to what they perceive the needs of youth in high school to be. For instance, Participant One described:

I know my situation was different because I had a strong support system, but like for a child who doesn't have that it's easy for them to be like, "Well screw school I'm not gonna go if this is how they're going to treat me".

From my understanding then, Participant One is implying that youth need to have a "strong support system" that values education, and encourages school engagement.

Through explaining what their own needs had been as a student, Participant Two stated, "Like I didn't need to be suspended from school, I needed somebody to listen, and help me. Maybe help me with my engagement in school or even... or, anything".

Participant Two also commented on the needs of youth more broadly. For instance, they stated, "A lot of the kids that are getting suspended chronically, even myself, are going

through some serious shit, and they needed... help, guidance, therapy, or any sort of thing from the school”. In further explaining this, Participant Two had said:

Like, growing up in foster care I seen all of these, like the truant kids, all of the, the... ‘bad eggs’ end up pregnant or in prison before they wanted to be, or not at all, and without the help that they needed, because the school system just kind of lets kids slip through, uh, slip through the cracks. And the zero tolerance policy doesn’t do anything to help.

As I understand it, Participant Two has observed the reality of a ‘school-to-prison pipeline’, and is also conscious of the impact that a lack of education can have on an individual’s life chances. Later on in the interview, Participant Two had also commented on the need for youth in school to feel a sense of belonging. Participant Two stated:

One of the biggest things, I mean myself in high school, and I feel like I’ve seen this a lot from other people is feeling like you don’t belong. Giving a, giving these people who are having trouble a sense of belonging, probably could go a long way to help them, like turn around their behaviour. If they enjoy the people they’re around, they’ll enjoy coming to school, they won’t try and like, do all this other stuff. It’s the first step to try to fix a larger issue. I mean obviously some stuff needs to be fixed at home, you’ve got a bad home life, you’re going to have a bad school life but... making school a safe place for these kids to go to, instead of dreading it, might be a good first step in that direction instead of like, ‘Ugh, we’re done with you, out you go.’ Like, that doesn’t make you feel like you belong.

Here, Participant Two mentions the need for a “safe school”. To me, this implies that current school environments are not already ‘safe’. Thus, from my understanding of Participant Two’s account, the SSA in Ontario is not effectively achieving the goal it is intended to.

## *7.6 Alternative Recommendations*

In this study, participants were asked what they recommend to be a more effective approach to school discipline that is alternative to the use of suspension and expulsion. Many of the participants described variants of in-school suspension, as well as, what I understand as being afterschool detention. Other participants in this study described methods that I interpreted as being more progressive or restorative in nature.

#### A. In-School Suspension

Participant Two stated, "...the first suspension I ever got was an in-school suspension. If that had been monitored a little bit better, that would have been great". From this awareness of the need for in-school suspension to be supervised, Participant Two recommended the following:

...um... having all these kids that have been suspended, because there's probably like dozens of them every day... instead of sending them out of school to do whatever they want, keep them together, and then, I don't know... a guidance counsellor sits down and talks with them about why this has happened, why did they do the thing that they did. Yeah it's a bit more work, it's probably a lot of work, but taking an interest, and even... giving those people other kids to talk to that could share their, their experiences and stuff like that.

While recounting their experience of suspension, Participant Three had mentioned, "I think an in-school suspension might have been better". They then explained their idea of an in-school suspension:

So maybe just being like, in a room by yourself... But then you could at least like... talk to people, you can have like mandatory counsellor visits, you could do your work like your school work so you don't get left behind, um... still hang out with your friends at lunch and stuff. So... I think that would have been better.

Both Participant Two and Participant Three mention the inclusion of a counselling component in their descriptions of in-school suspension. Participant Four had also shared

that they would recommend the use of in-school suspension instead of out-of-school suspension. Participant Four explained their reasoning:

If you have the resources to separate the... especially if it's physical activity and they don't get over it... and they still have issues with each other, if you have the resources to separate them while doing in-school suspension that would make more sense. 'Cause it's kind of obviously not as fun, you know, you're not with your friends or anything, you're just in like a cafeteria or whatever by yourself just doing... just doing paper work and stuff. That would be a better, in my opinion... much better way to take care of it.

Like Participant Three, Participant Four indicates that there should be a focus on “paper work”. To me, this indicates that these youth recognize the importance of keeping up with academics. However, what I find unique about Participant Four's description of an in-school suspension is that, they acknowledge that this approach may require additional resources in order to be effectively implemented.

### B. Detention

When referring to school discipline, ‘detention’ commonly involves being kept in-school after hours. Participant Six described:

... if there was, instead of a suspension, if you did like a detention and had to have something done by the end of that detention based on what your detention is for, I feel like that would be a lot better suited for kids.

... Like if they did something wrong, I get it but, give them a detention and get them to do a project, and if it's not done then they have another detention and can do it during that time, right? Instead of going home and... giving the kids something to do that's for school, while they're away for 3 days, like it's not getting done, at all.

Participant Six emphasizes that the use of detention must also include a learning component. They also recognize that it is more productive to have students stay in school

while they resolve the problem, as it's more than likely not going to be their focus at home. Participant Seven had also recommended the use of detention instead of suspension. In describing their idea of a detention, Participant Seven stated:

... instead of taking the whole curriculum and stuff away from them and giving them space, you should be getting them to do extra-curricular things on the side.... As like a mandatory, not like... kind of like detention, instead of like keeping them in an office not doing anything, you actually get them to do something productive at least.

What I think Participant Seven means by “extra-curricular activities” is that it should be mandatory for students to take on additional duties and responsibilities in the school community, as a part of their detention. I do not think Participant Seven is using the term to refer to activities like joining a sports team for instance.

### C. Progressive Discipline and Restorative Approaches

While reflecting on their experience of suspension, Participant One had mentioned, “Um... I would have loved to see somebody like... you bring in someone who has been through stuff like that and have them talk to me”. In further describing this approach as an alternative to suspension, Participant One stated, “Like if I swear, to me, that shouldn't be like, ‘We're going to kick you out’ or ‘We're going to suspend you’. Instead, ‘We're going to talk to you’”. It is evident that Participant One places a significant emphasis on, ‘talk’. ‘Talk’ is a counselling strategy that is discussed in the literature that focuses on alternatives to suspension and expulsion (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011).

Participant Six shared several recommendations for alternative strategies to manage student behaviour. In speaking to their particular incident, Participant Six described:



Um, I feel like an essay actually would have been perfect to get into detail about what I said and how it could affect someone, um emotionally, um physically even, right? Uh, so if I had to do something, an essay or an information pamphlet with like saying how to prevent it and other alternatives like instead of saying something rude, like, just don't. And if there was an essay or something like that you could just describe like what you did and what you would change about it, how it's... like, the other person didn't do anything wrong, you just picked a fight with them for no reason and like I said, the effect that it has on people...

Participant Six also made recommendations based on what they think would work better for youth in high school more generally. They stated:

...if there were like workshops... or weekly assemblies or something, on anti-bullying and all this other stuff that could prevent suspension, and then prevent people from doing it in order to get there suspension, I feel like that would be a lot more effective for students, as well as the teachers, right? 'Cause then, you know, the teachers could feel like they're helping these students by letting them see what they did wrong, whereas, if you send a kid home, they don't care. Like, they're not going to think about it, they're not going to reflect.

Lastly, in response to this question during the interview, Participant Five remarked:

Um, I honestly don't know. That was one of the questions that I read, that I remember reading from your uh, through your thing, um... and I was trying to think. I was like, "I don't even know, like, what else can you do?" 'Cause I work with kids now at a camp, and um, and it's very hard to punish them. Um, you don't know, I mean, you know what's too far and what's not but like, some kids take stuff harder than others...

In further explaining why it had been difficult to come up with an alternative recommendation Participant Five stated:

I think that the variables of any incident, like there are so many, that you can't really have a plan set, you know, I don't think. I mean, you could have general ideas, but, on top of that, if emotions are high which they always are in incidents like that, that just overrides anything you learn, so it doesn't matter.

## **Chapter 8: Discussion**

In this discussion section I address this paper's four inquiries: (1) What are the social and academic impacts of suspension and expulsion? (2) Are there any similarities between the treatment of disciplined students in public secondary schools, and the treatment of criminal offenders in the legal justice system? (3) Do youth perceive the use of suspension and expulsion to be effective? (4) What do youth recommend as alternatives to the use of suspension and expulsion that might better meet the needs of students in high school? I then end this section with some additional considerations that I would like to address.

### *1. What are the social and academic impacts of suspension and expulsion?*

Within existing literature on the topic of school discipline, the use of retributive methods such as, suspension and expulsion, have been proven to have a negative impact on school climate (Kupchik & Catlaw, 2015; Lee et al., 2011). 'School climate' is a term that is used to refer to the quality of the learning environment and the nature of school relationships (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). Therefore, an educational institution with a 'positive school climate' is one wherein all members of the school community feel safe, respected, included, and supported (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014).

Participants in this study spoke to the impact that suspension and expulsion has on school climate through describing the adverse changes that they experienced in regards to their relationships with their peers, and school professionals. These social changes, in effect, negatively impacted some of the participants' perception of the school environment.

When a student is absent from school, it is common for their classmates to question their whereabouts. As a result, those with information tend to share details about the missing student's personal life. I consider this, 'gossiping'. In telling their story of suspension, Participant One had described how being the subject of "gossip" in school, had felt like an invasion of their privacy, which in effect, caused school to be an uncomfortable environment for them to be in. For Participant Six, the telling of their personal life in school had resulted in a "separation" in their peer group. From my experience, gossip often leads to the construction, and circulation of an inaccurate version of a person's reality. This is what I interpret as being a 'rumour'. In telling their story of suspension, Participant Three had described how being the subject of "rumours" had felt like a type of social rejection.

According to the Ontario Ministry of Education (2014), the construction of a 'positive school climate' in any educational institution, requires that professional educators model appropriate behaviour in the school, and in the classrooms. In telling their experience of retributive discipline, some of the participants in this study had described having been ascribed what I interpret as being a 'deviant' label within the school community. Participant One for instance, had stated that it had felt like the teachers at the school that they had transferred to after their expulsion, had viewed them as "a problem". Participant Two and Participant Five had described that, as a result of having multiple suspensions, they had been portrayed as, "a troublemaker". All of these participants were clear that these 'deviant' labels had had a negative impact on the way

that school professionals treated them. I will be discussing this treatment further as I address this paper's second inquiry.

It is apparent from this research that students are being penalized in school for indiscriminately responding to conflict. In telling their experience of suspension, Participant One described their behaviour as being a response to another student's racist hate. The use of a 'blanket approach' (Daniel & Bondy, 2008), like suspension, ignores the existence of greater social problems in the school community. Therefore I argue that, school discipline practices set within a discourse of zero tolerance can reproduce racism, and in effect, contribute to the discrimination of peoples of minority status backgrounds.

Furthermore, Participant Five had explained that the majority of their suspensions during high school may have been a result of what I interpreted as being the additional challenges that living with ADHD creates, especially in a classroom setting. It is possible that the professional educator may not have known how to, or may not have had the necessary resources to, appropriately support Participant Five. However, by penalizing Participant Five for behaviour that they may not have had the ability to control, I make the argument that a zero tolerance approach to school discipline disproportionately impacts students with disabilities, which in effect, contributes to the discrimination of peoples with disabilities.

It is stated on the Ministry of Education's website that, "Students who are suspended for one to five school days are expected to receive a homework package from the school" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009, "The Facts on Suspension and Expulsion"). However, it is evident from the descriptions of the activities participants had

engaged in while out of school during the duration of their suspension or expulsion that their focus had essentially been on anything other than school work. Following up with each participant, I had asked whether or not they had been sent home with any assignments to complete, to which, all of the youth in this study clearly stated that they had not been. I find this to be counterproductive to students' learning. Even the students in the movie, "The Breakfast Club", which was released in 1985, were expected to write an essay during their Saturday detention.

In existing literature on the topic of exclusionary discipline practices, it is proven that removing students from the learning environment is a contributing factor of poor academic success and school dropout (Dupper, 1998; Lee et al., 2011; Mendez et al., 2002; Wolf & Kupchik, 2017). Many of the participants in this study spoke to the academic hindrance that being suspended and expelled from school creates. In telling their story of suspension, both Participant Three and Participant Six had expressed what I interpret as being, the inconvenience of having to 'catch up' in their classes when they had returned to school. Participant One and Participant Two on the other hand, spoke to this academic impact by explaining that as a result of missing school, they 'fell behind' in their classes. Participant Two had shared that they fell so far behind, that they chose not to write their final exams, and instead, made the decision to drop out of high school in grade eleven.

*2. Are there any similarities between the treatment of disciplined students in public secondary schools, and the treatment of criminal offenders in the legal justice system?*

As participants did not speak to this question directly, I will be answering it based on my own interpretations of the information that I gathered. I have interpreted some of the language used by participants in this study, as implying that they had experienced criminalizing treatment of some degree while in high school. To me, it seems like teachers and school administrators that are in a position of authority over students at times use this power to essentially ‘police’ and control student behaviour. Through an interpretive reading of participants’ responses three themes emerged that I think, speak to this paper’s second inquiry. These include: punishment, surveillance, and police involvement.

A. Punishment

Participant Two, Participant Six and Participant Five all referred to the use of suspension as a ‘punishment’. To me, the term ‘punishment’ implies a negative connotation. I associate the term punishment with crime. In that, a punishment is a penalty that is imposed for the conviction of a crime. Students in high school are still young, and as I see it, making mistakes is an inevitable part of growing up. Through making mistakes we can learn important life lessons. However, not all people have the necessary skills to improve their own critical consciousness, or the ‘know-how’ to reflect. Sometimes, people need guidance in this process.

In correctional facilities in Ontario, adult inmates are provided services, as well as, the opportunity to participate in programs that teach skills to prevent them from

committing future crimes (Correctional Service Canada, 2014). The intent is to correct offenders' behaviour before release, in order to help ensure safer communities (Correctional Service Canada, 2014). As I have mentioned in this paper, the purpose of the enactment of the *SSA* in Ontario, had been to ensure the safety of students and teachers in schools (Bill 81, 2000). The use of punitive disciplinary methods, such as suspension and expulsion however, do not teach students more appropriate and productive ways of thinking and behaving. For this reason, I argue that the use of suspension and expulsion is ineffective in regards to creating safe schools.

### B. Surveillance

In the school community, it is the responsibility of teachers, school administrators and other staff members to supervise students. To me, 'supervision' means to watch over someone, or a group of students, for the purpose of ensuring their safety. Included in this role, is the expectation that the 'supervisor' provide support and guidance to those that they are supervising. As I understand it, the term 'surveillance' also has a core meaning of watching over someone, or a group of people, for the purpose of ensuring security. However to me, the motive behind 'surveillance' is different than that of 'supervision', and implies a much closer and stricter watch. Guards in prisons and officers in correctional facilities are 'watching over' inmates for instance, because they are known for exhibiting problem behaviour, and as a result, it is anticipated that they will act out.

Although it is expected that all students are supervised in school and in the classroom, as I understand it, not all students experience the same degree of 'surveillance'. In telling their story of suspension, both Participant One and Participant

Three described what I interpret as being, an increase in surveillance when they had returned to school. Participant One had explained that they had been informed by a teacher, that school professionals were supposed to keep an eye on them. As a result, they stated that it had felt like they were being monitored. After returning from their suspension, Participant Three explained that it felt like school professionals were, “on guard”, and thus, watching them more. Participant Three had clearly stated that as a result, they had felt like their identity in the school community had gone from being a student, to a criminal.

### C. Police Involvement

With the passing of the *Safe Schools Act* in 2001 school professionals’ are permitted to include the police in the disciplinary processes. While sharing their experience of expulsion, Participant One had explained that the school administrator had “passed” them to the police. Police involvement in Participant One’s incident had led to the situation being taken to court, wherein, Participant One was required to appear in front of a judge. In telling one of their stories of suspension, Participant Two had also mentioned police involvement. Participant Two however, did not share any further detail of their experience with the police.

It is important that I note that I do believe that in some situations, police involvement is necessary, as school professionals are not trained to effectively intervene, or manage certain degrees of violent behaviour. However, involving the police is not always in the best interest of the student, as the consequences can be harmful. In Canada, youth sentences in accordance with the *Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA)* can range



anywhere from two to ten years (Department of Justice Canada, 2015). Being convicted of a crime in Ontario creates additional barriers to obtaining employment. For instance, most employers ask applicants to disclose if they have a criminal record, as well as, some will require applicants to provide a recent police background check. Prison release, low-paying jobs and unemployment, are all factors (among the many others) that are connected to the potential causes of homelessness (Belcher & DeForge, 2012).

Fortunately, statistics from 2014-2015 report that, the youth incarceration rate in Canada had decreased from previous years (Statistics Canada, 2016). In these statistics, it is reported that Ontario experienced the most significant decrease from the previous year (Statistics Canada, 2016). I argue then, that the overreliance on police involvement in schools is counterproductive to the province's initiative to reduce youth incarceration rates, as well as, decreasing poverty and homelessness in Ontario.

### *3. Do youth perceive the use of suspension and expulsion to be effective?*

The majority of the youth in this study agree that the use of suspension and expulsion is not an effective disciplinary strategy. Ryan and Zoldy (2011) state that, “out-of-school suspension punishes the student so that the real issue is never addressed” (p. 338). All of the youth in this study had explained that the teacher and/or school administrator did not “investigate” the incident that they had been involved in, any further than what was considered ‘obvious’ to the school professional. Following up with each participant in order to clarify, I had asked whether they were provided the opportunity to meet with anyone before, during, or after being suspended or expelled, to discuss their behaviour, to which all of the youth in this study indicated that they were not.

While commenting on the use of suspension and expulsion, Participant Two and Participant Three had both clearly stated that this approach to school discipline, does not effectively solve problems. In expressing their opinion of school discipline further, Participant Two had referred to the use of suspension as a “blanket punishment”. This notion is echoed in existing literature, wherein authors Daniel and Bondy (2008) argue that, the use of suspension is a ‘blanket approach’ to managing student behaviour, as it does not address the underlying factors that may have influenced the student to act out. As I understand it then, this approach to school discipline places blame at the individual level, rather than, considering the greater social, political, and systemic factors that could be influencing the student’s behaviour.

While sharing their opinion of school discipline, Participant One and Participant Four had both implied what I interpret as being that, school professionals rely on suspension, because it is essentially the easiest thing to do. Furthermore, Participant Two and Participant Five had both mentioned having had a history of multiple suspensions. As a result, it is evident that the use of suspension is not an effective method of addressing problems in the school community or correcting students’ behaviour.

Ryan and Zoldy (2011) state that, “suspension has no value without an instructional component” (p. 338). Based on the activities that participants engaged in while out of school serving a suspension or expulsion, it is apparent that the youth in this study did not reflect on their behaviour during that time. In fact, in telling their experience of suspension, Participant Five and Participant Six had both clearly stated that they did not learn anything from being sent home for  $x$  amount of days. From my understanding

then, it is important that the disciplinary approach that is taken in schools is also a teaching tool.

*4. What do youth recommend as alternatives to the use of suspension and expulsion that might better meet the needs of students in high school?*

It is evident from participants' responses that they all recognize that changes need to be made in regards to the disciplinary procedures used in public secondary schools in Ontario. The most common recommendation by the youth in this study, regarding a strategy that is alternative to the use of suspension and expulsion, was that of in-school suspension. Radin (1988) states that in-school suspension, "does not deprive students of an educational experience" (p. 479). The participants that suggested the use of in-school suspension, all had unique perspectives regarding how this method should be implemented.

Participant Two had suggested that school guidance counsellors should facilitate group counselling sessions with students while they serve an in-school suspension. Participant Three had also suggested a counselling component. However, in their description of an in-school suspension they had implied that students should be placed in a room alone to focus on school work. I therefore interpret this as indicating that students would receive individual counselling, rather than participate in group counselling. Participant Four had also shared this idea of separating students during an in-school suspension, especially if the students had been involved in a physical confrontation. Although Participant Four did not mention a counselling component, they had also indicated that rather than just sitting in the room alone, students should work on

homework, complete assignments, etc. What I find to be particularly noteworthy is that Participant Two and Participant Four had both recognized that an in-school suspension requires more resources than what may be available to a particular school.

Another recommendation made by the youth in this study was what I interpreted as being, after-school detention. Participant Six and Participant Seven had shared two very unique perspectives on a detention. For instance, Participant Six suggested that students should be expected to spend their time completing an assignment that requires them to reflect on the behaviour that led to their detention in the first place. Rather than keeping students in an office, Participant Seven on the other hand, recommended that it should be mandatory for students to take part in what they had referred to as “extra-curricular activities”. I interpreted this as being like the community service assignments that are offered to students that participate in the ‘Saoi program’ (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011).

It is clear from the recommendations from the youth in this study, that they all agree that the aim should be to keep students in school. Although participants may not have known what to call it, some of the suggestions that they had made shared similar characteristics to that of the alternatives to suspension and expulsion that are discussed in existing literature. For instance, Participant One had indicated that disciplinary procedures in schools should have an emphasis on ‘talk’. ‘Talk’ is a counselling technique that I discussed in this paper’s literature review section (Neilson 1979 as cited by Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). In addition, Participant Six had mentioned that in efforts to reduce suspension, students should attend assemblies, or participate in workshops led by school professionals, in order to gain awareness of the issues in the school, and prevent

problem behaviour. To me, this seems similar to characteristics of the ‘school survival group’ (Dupper, 1998; Radin, 1988; Ryan & Zoldy, 2011).

Furthermore, through gaining a better understanding of participants’ personal reasons and motives underlying their ways of thinking and behaving, I found that many of the youth in this study would have benefitted more from participating in programs like, ‘social cognitive skills training’, ‘behaviour contracting’ and the ‘Saoi program’, as well as, if they had had the opportunity to participate in different counselling strategies such as: ‘guided group interaction’, ‘student advocate’ and ‘teacher advocate’ (Radin, 1988; Ryan & Zoldy, 2011).

Participant One, Participant Four, and Participant Five for instance, had all been suspended for their involvement in a physical confrontation with another student. Through examining each of their explanations as to what essentially caused the incident, it was made apparent to me that they had acted on an impulse, and therefore, sought to resolve the conflict at hand, by fighting. Feeling angry is not a ‘bad’ thing, but I do not believe that ‘fighting’ is a constructive way of resolving problems. Therefore, I believe that ‘social/cognitive skills training’ (Radin, 1988; Ryan & Zoldy, 2011), would have been a more effective approach to addressing these incidents.

Participant Two had explained having been suspended multiple times throughout high school for truancy. I therefore think that ‘the Saoi program’ (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011) would have helped to improve Participant Two’s absenteeism. In addition, as both Participant Five and Participant Seven had expressed having had a history of problem behaviour, I believe that ‘behaviour contracting’ (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011) would have been

a more effective strategy as opposed to suspension. Finally, as findings from this study indicate that peer relationships and teacher-student relationships are significant in shaping a student's school experience, I posit that counselling strategies such as 'guided group interaction', the 'student advocate' and the 'teacher advocate' (Ryan & Zoldy, 2011) could help create a positive school climate in educational institutions in Ontario.

#### *4. Additional considerations*

It is important to note that not all of the youth in this study commented on the impact of retributive discipline practices on school climate, or felt that being suspended or expelled from school affected their academic progress. I found that the participants that were not concerned about having to catch up after returning from their suspension, were also those that mentioned having been in 'good academic standing' at the time. It is thus evident that disciplinary procedures that rely on the removal of the student from the classroom impact all students differently; and that, there are many other factors that contribute to shaping the experience of suspension and expulsion. I therefore find it worth noting that another theme emerged in the transcripts that was beyond the scope of the study but, in the interests of respecting the participants' voices, seems important to acknowledge it here.

Some of the participants in this study commented on the role that a student's family has in shaping the experience of suspension and expulsion. When a student is suspended or expelled from school, it is possible that there are then additional consequences for this at home. As I did not feel it would have been ethical to ask participants to delve into their experiences of parental punishment in this particular study,

I did not explore this unforeseen theme any further. However, this finding reaffirms existing literature which posits that, the inclusion of the family in discipline strategies poses the potential risk of youth being subjected to parental discipline, which may include physical punishment (Radin, 1988).

In sharing their story, Participant Two had mentioned that they had grown up in foster care, and while in high school, had been living in a group home. I had acknowledged Participant Two's willingness to disclose this information but felt that it was important for me to ensure that Participant Two was aware of the risks of sharing details that they may be identified by. I therefore reminded Participant Two not to share anything that they are not comfortable sharing or would not share publicly. As Participant Two had said, "I won't say much more about that", it would not have been ethical, particularly in this study, for me to then ask Participant Two to discuss the reason that they had been in foster care, or why they were living in a group home. However, from what Participant Two was comfortable sharing, it is evident that they had been in need of more structure, adult supervision, and guidance in their life. This indicates to me, that additional resources may be required to support the unique needs of youth in foster care, in schools.

## **Chapter 9: Study Implications**

For this section, I will be discussing how this study's findings are connected to: the school community, the field of social work and the research community.

### A. The School Community

Casella (2003) states that, "Teachers and administrators cannot replace parents, but they cannot withhold the care that students need or be denied the resources that they need to support each child's educational, social, and emotional development" (p. 886). Through an interpretive reading of participants' comments regarding 'needs', I found that the majority of the participants in this study had acknowledged that youth in high school need help, guidance and support. This implies to me, that some teachers and school administrators are not adequately meeting the expectations that come with the role of being a professional educator in the school community.

Based on the findings from this research, I posit that teachers and school administrators need to make a genuine effort to get to know students on a more personal level, in order to develop a better understanding of their individual needs. In addition, it is evident that, rather than suspending and expelling students, there is a need for school professionals to implement strategies aimed towards keeping students in school. What works for one student however, may not work for all. I therefore argue that in order to effectively resolve problems in the school community, school professionals must work collaboratively with students, and include students in the problem-solving process.

It is important to note that I do not believe that all school professionals that rely on the use of suspension and expulsion, are doing so with malicious intent. However, Young



(2006) states, “structured social action and interaction often have collective results that no one intends, results that may even be counter to the best intentions of the actors” (p. 114). Through the lessons that they teach, and the knowledge that they share, professional educators in schools are in an ideal position to influence the lives of youth. I argue then, that the impact that teachers and school administrators can have on youth, goes far beyond the boundaries of the classroom.

Young (2006) states, “the ‘social connection model’ of responsibility says that all agents who contribute by their actions to the structural processes that produce injustice have responsibilities to work to remedy injustice” (p. 102-103). In this paper, my intention is not to shame and blame the education system in Ontario, but rather, bring attention to the need for school professionals to accept some responsibility in regards to creating social, political, and economic change. I argue that investing more time, effort, and resources into the education of youth, does not only benefit the youth population, but it can benefit the communities that they belong to as well.

### B. The Field of Social Work

This research topic is also a social issue that I believe social work can play an important role in contributing to change in pursuit of social justice.

After achieving a greater familiarity with the alternatives to retributive school discipline practices that are more progressive, and restorative in nature, I recognize that social workers can fulfill multiple roles in schools. As the majority of alternatives discussed in existing literature include a counselling component, the most obvious role, is that of a counsellor. Social workers in schools can fulfill the role of a mediator, as well as,

an advocate (Radin, 1988). In these roles, social workers would take on the duties and responsibilities of the adult supervisor in strategies such as the ‘school survival group’, the ‘student advisory centre’, and the ‘Saoi program’ (Dupper 1998; Radin, 1988; Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). Social workers can also be mentors for other professionals in the school community. For instance, Radin (1988) explains that, “School social workers in conjunction with other members of the pupil personnel staff [can] hold workshops for groups of teachers interested in exploring one or more of the alternatives suggested” (p. 489).

Furthermore, the aim of community organizing, in its briefest conception, is to build power for more marginal individuals and groups in society to recognize their rights, and to assert themselves in decision-making processes (Christens & Speer, 2015). Recent attention to youth organizing, more specifically, has proven that these initiatives are an effective method for positive youth development, and for facilitating changes in communities and schools (Christens & Speer, 2015). I argue then, that there is a need to see youth members of society as citizens, rather than as ‘problems’ (Dobbie & Richards-Schuster, 2008), and recognize the power of youth to contribute to social justice efforts (Christens & Speer, 2015). As a result, I suggest that, social worker practitioners who work with youth, should consider developing community-based organizing initiatives to address barriers to staying in school, and that would promote the need to support youth who are ‘at-risk’ of dropping out.

### C. The Research Community

The youth in this study clearly articulated their thoughts, feelings, and experiences regarding school discipline practices. As a result, youth participants positively contributed to knowledge creation. This research also demonstrated that youth do have the capacity to think critically and provide constructive recommendations to amend policies and practices in schools. As a result, the youth in this study effectively fulfilled the role of, agents of change. Furthermore, as youth organizing initiatives are proven to have such positive social and educational outcomes for those that participate (Christens & Speer, 2015), researchers that do community-based research, should consider including youth as both partners and participants in research regarding issues relevant to the youth population.

## **Chapter 10: Reflections on the Process**

I would first like to express that this research was a very rewarding experience, and that, I learned a lot from the youth whom I worked with. As an important part of carrying out critical research is to practice critical reflection (Daley, 2010), in this chapter, I discuss the strengths, challenges, and limitations of my research.

### *10.1 Strengths*

The purpose of practicing critical reflection in research, is to recognize the power relations between the researcher and the participant, in the interviewing the process (Daley, 2010). I found that participants trusted me, and as a result, were comfortable sharing their thoughts, feelings, and details of their experiences with me. I also found that being relatively close in age to the youth that I had interviewed for this project, had helped me to develop positive working relationships with participants. For instance, I had noticed that participants often looked to me while telling their story to see if I could relate to the experiences that they were describing. By building positive working relationships with the 7 youth that participated in this study, I believe that I was able to develop a better understanding of each of their individual experiences.

### *10.2 Challenges*

The time constraints of this graduate program created a lot of pressure to stick to a schedule. As a result, I found it difficult to have to make decisions regarding what to change from my original research design, in order to ensure the completion of this thesis by the deadline.

### A. Recruitment

In order to recruit participants, I spent a considerable amount of time commuting all over the GTA to put up recruitment posters. As I had only been in contact with one potential participant after almost 2 weeks, I decided to submit a change request form to the MREB to obtain permission to recruit participants through the use of social media. Although a number of youth contacted me expressing interest in participating in my study after doing so, recruiting participants had taken significantly more time than I had anticipated needing.

### B. Interviewing

When I had originally designed my study, I had planned to conduct focus group interviews. After communicating with the youth that expressed interest in participating in my study however, I quickly realized that organizing focus groups was not going to be feasible for this particular research project. Some of the youth that had contacted me for instance, expressed concerns about sharing their experiences in a group setting for they did not want to show up, and realize that another participant was someone that they had conflict with. All of the youth also had very different schedules, and were therefore only available certain days of the week at very specific times. As a result, finding a day, time, and place that worked for more than one participant was proving to be exceptionally difficult. Since time was a factor, rather than holding focus groups, I decided to conduct individual interviews with each participant.

### *10.3 Limitations*

The time constraints of this project also limited the number of participants that I could recruit, and therefore, interview for this study. As a result, included in this research are just 7 voices of the thousands of students that have been suspended or expelled from public secondary schools in the GTA. Furthermore, as youth generally begin high school at the age of 14, I had originally planned to recruit participants between the ages of 14 and 25 years old for this study. However, after submitting my first ethics application form to the MREB, the concern had been raised in regards to the recruitment of participants under the age of 17 years old. Therefore, missing from this research are the voices of youth 16 years old and younger.

**Chapter 11: Conclusion**

This graduate thesis uncovers the voices of 7 youth who have been suspended and/or expelled from a public secondary school in Ontario. After looking at all the data collected, my analyses, and the implications that were generated from this work, I recognize that the findings from this research raise numerous considerations, in regards to, directions for future research.

This research shows that the use of suspension and expulsion as a disciplinary approach is inconsistent as the effects vary depending on the student. It is also evident that there are many factors that contribute to the school experience, and the impact of suspension and expulsion. Therefore, future research on school discipline, should take into consideration characteristics such as: students' academic standing, disciplinary history, the role of the family, as well as, the students' social relations within the school community. I also posit that future research could include a specific focus on expulsion and the particular challenges that students that are expelled from school experience.

In addition, many factors such as budget, time constraints, ethical restrictions, and the availability of resources, in effect, limited the scope of this research. As this research is exploring the impact of disciplinary practices in schools in the province of Ontario, future research should have a broader scope. For instance, the participants in this study were recruited from the GTA, which is just one part of the province of Ontario. Therefore, future research should aim to uncover the voices of youth in all of the other cities across the province. In addition, as suspension and expulsion is also a disciplinary

approach used in elementary schools, future research should include the voices of youth and children under the age of 17, which I was unable to do so in this study.

It is stated in the report published by the OHRC that, “The failure of the *Act* to incorporate an Aboriginal perspective, such as collective decision-making and community response, is also cited as evidence of systemic factors leading to the disproportionate impact on Aboriginal students” (Bhattacharjee, 2003, p. viii). The recruitment criteria for my research did not include either Canadian Aboriginal identity or membership in an Aboriginal community as a factor for the study. As a result, another limitation of the scope of this research is that, the perspectives of Aboriginal students are not included, and therefore, the voices of these youth are missing.

Future research plans should be shared with members of Aboriginal communities, in order to discuss the benefits and risks of conducting research on the topic of school discipline with Aboriginal students. Furthermore, to explore the phenomenon that is, the ‘school-to-prison pipeline’ in more depth, I posit that future research should include youth that are incarcerated or have been incarcerated. As the disclosure of sensitive information can cause marginalized individuals and peoples to be more vulnerable to further discrimination and oppression, it is important that researchers take the necessary steps, in order to ensure that future research is both equitable, and ethical.

Although this graduate thesis provides great insight into the experience of suspension and expulsion, the directions for future research that I discussed, could assist in the development of a more in-depth understanding of the impact of a zero tolerance approach to school discipline, and the use of punitive, exclusionary methods of



addressing student behaviour. Future research could also provide further recommendations for policy and practice change in schools that will more adequately accommodate the unique needs of all youth.

**APPENDIX A:****LETTER OF INFORMATION & CONSENT****Exploring the Impact of School Discipline Policies and Practices in Ontario: Voices of the Suspended, and Expelled****Student Investigator:**

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(905) 525-9140 ext. 23792

**What am I trying to discover?**

You are invited to take part in this study about school discipline policies and practices in Ontario. I am hoping to learn how suspension and expulsion impact youth in high school. I am doing this research for my Master's thesis at McMaster University. I want to hear your personal story regarding out-of-school suspension and/or expulsion, and know how you felt during and after your experience(s). I am hoping to learn how these discipline policies and practices in Ontario influence the social and academic development and success of youth. I also hope to find out what youth in Ontario recommend might be a more effective policy or practice as an alternative to suspension and expulsion that would better meet the needs of students in high school.

**What will happen during the study?**

You will be invited to participate in 1 focus group or 1 one-on-one interview.

The first focus group will consist of approximately 3-5 youth between the ages of 17 and 30 who are willing to reflect in detail on their experience(s) with suspension and/or expulsion. We will collectively explore the impact that being suspended and/or expelled has on youth in high school. I will ask you to reflect on how you felt as a result of your experience(s). I will also ask you to recount how you spent your time out of school, and what your relationships were like with teachers and peers when you returned to school. With your permission, I would like to take both handwritten notes, as well as audio-record the discussion.

The focus group interview will take approximately 2 hours, with a break part-way through and will take place in a secure/private room at public location that all participants feel comfortable being and where your confidentiality can be protected such as a public library, local community centre (e.g., LongBranch Public Library or LAMP Community Health Centre), or the Etobicoke Civic Centre.

If you do not feel like you will be comfortable discussing the above in a group environment, but would still like to participate in the study, please let me or my faculty research supervisor Dr. Ameil Joseph know and we can arrange a 1 one-on-one interview instead. This interview will be approximately 45 minutes-1 hour and will take place at a public location that you feel comfortable, and where your confidentiality can be secured (e.g., a public library or local community centre). I will ask similar questions as those that will be asked in

the focus group. With your permission, I would like to take handwritten notes, and audio-record the interview.

Some of the kinds of questions you can expect to be asked to share your responses to are:

- **What was the reason that you were suspended/expelled from school?**
- **Did you meet with any one and talk about what happened or were you provided any resources to help support you after you were suspended/expelled?**
- **What did you spend your time doing while you were out of school?**
- **How do you feel about the use of suspension/expulsion in your case?**
- **What do you think might be a better practice/policy as an alternative to suspension and expulsion?**

#### **Are there any risks to doing this study?**

The risks involved in participating in this study are minimal. You may feel uncomfortable with answering some of the questions. If you choose to participate in the focus group sessions, you may feel embarrassed to talk about your experiences with other youth as you may worry about how others will react to what you say. In addition to psychological risks, there are also social risks relating to loss of privacy and loss of status that are inherent to focus group participation due to the fact that participants are sharing their personal thoughts and opinions with the researcher and other research participants in a group setting.

You do not need to answer questions that you do not want to answer or that make you feel uncomfortable. I describe below the steps I am taking to protect your privacy, and to reduce/address the above risks:

- We will review rules around confidentiality, as well as, my duty to report as an academic researcher at the start of the focus group, and as a group we will develop a Code of Respect. Each participant is to respect the rules outlined (e.g., negative comments targeting other members are not acceptable)
- What is discussed in the focus group sessions will be asked to remain confidential. Participants will be asked that nothing is to be repeated outside of the study
- I will be providing participants with a handout that lists appropriate resources available that can be accessed if needed (e.g., if you are feeling stressed, anxious, emotional, etc.).

#### **Are there any benefits to doing this study?**

While the research may not benefit you directly, participating in this study is a chance to share your experience and have your voice heard. I hope that what is learned as a result of this study will help us to better understand the impact that current school discipline policies and practices have on youth in high school. This could help influence changes, and the development of policies/programs that will better meet the needs of students.

#### **Payment or Reimbursement:**

I will be offering participants a \$20 gift card of their choice to either: Tim Horton's, Starbucks, Indigo, or Wal-Mart. I will also provide you with coffee, tea, or hot chocolate during the interview. In addition, you will receive two TTC tokens for your involvement to reimburse your cost of travel.

**Who will know what I said or did in the study?**

Every effort will be made to protect your confidentiality and privacy. I will not use your name or any information that would allow you to be identified. However, we are often identifiable through the stories we tell.

I will take all necessary steps to safeguard the confidentiality of the discussion. No one outside of this study will have access to the room while the focus group is happening. I will ask the other members of the focus group to keep what you say confidential, but I cannot guarantee that they will do so.

The paper information/data you provide/I collect will be kept in a locked cabinet. Only Dr. Ameil Joseph and I will have access to this information/data. Digital files will be encrypted, and protected by a password. Only Dr. Ameil Joseph and I will have access to this information/data. Once the study is complete, an archive of the data, without identifying information, will be maintained for approximately 2 years. 2 years after the study has been completed, any paper information/data will be shredded, and any audio recordings and digital files will be encrypted and erased/deleted.

**b) Legally Required Disclosure:**

I will protect your privacy as outlined above. I would like to note however, that as an academic researcher, I have a duty to report any harm or intention to harm one's self or any other individual. As a researcher, I also have a duty to report any disclosure of abuse by participants' under the age of 18. I will review my duty to report as an academic research prior to the start of each focus group and interview.

**What if I change my mind about being in the study?**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is your choice to be part of the study or not. If you decide to be part of the study, you can stop (withdraw), from the focus group session(s) and/or one-on-one interview for whatever reason, even after signing the consent form or part-way through. If you decide to withdraw, there will be no consequences to you. In cases of withdrawal, any paper information/data you have provided/I have collected will be shredded and discarded unless you indicate otherwise. Audio-recordings of individual interviews will be erased, and audio files will be encrypted and deleted. If you do not want to answer some of the questions you do not have to, but you can still be in the study. In regards to focus group participation, you may withdraw from the study by refraining from speaking or leaving the group, but any data collected during the group session prior to your withdrawal will not be possible to remove due to the nature of the group environment and discussion.

**How do I find out what was learned in this study?**

I expect to have this study completed by the end of **August, 2017**. A summary of the results will be posted at the public library/local community centre where the focus group was held by **October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017** after I have defended my thesis. This location will be confirmed with participants prior to the end of the study. If you would like to receive a summary of the results in plain language personally, please let me know how you would like me to send it to you (email, mail, meet with you and provide you with a copy, etc).

**Questions about the Study:**

If you have questions or need more information about the study itself, please contact me or Dr. Ameil Joseph at:

Teagan Rooney  
Master's Candidate in School of Social Work  
McMaster University  
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada  
E-mail: roonet1@mcmaster.ca

Dr. Ameil Joseph  
School of Social Work  
McMaster University  
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada  
E-mail: ameilj@mcmaster.ca  
(905) 525-9140 ext. 23792

This study has been reviewed by the McMaster University Research Ethics Board and received ethics clearance. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, please contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Secretariat  
Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142  
C/o Research Office for Administrative Development and Support  
E-mail: [ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca](mailto:ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca)

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### CONSENT

- I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by **Teagan Rooney**, of McMaster University.
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study and to receive additional details I requested.
- I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I may withdraw from the study, even after signing the consent form or part-way through
- I have been given a copy of this form.
- I agree to participate in the study.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Participant (Printed) \_\_\_\_\_

1. I agree that the focus group session(s)/one-on-one interview can be audio recorded.

... Yes.

... No.

2. ...Yes, I would like to receive a summary of the study's results.

Please send them to me at this email address \_\_\_\_\_

Or to this mailing address: \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

... No, I do not want to receive a summary of the study's results.

**APPENDIX B:**  
**INTERVIEW GUIDE**

**Exploring the Impact of School Discipline Policies and Practices in Ontario: Voices  
of the Suspended, and Expelled**

**Researcher: Teagan Rooney**

***NOTE: TEXT WRITTEN IN ITALICIZED BOLD CAPITAL LETTERS CONSTITUTES  
ADDITIONAL REMINDERS MEANT TO GUIDE THE FOCUS GROUP FACILITATOR  
ONLY.***

***[THE COMPLETION OF THE INTRODUCTORY SECTION OF THE FOCUS  
GROUP SHOULD TAKE APPROXIMATELY 10-15 MINUTES]***

**D) INTRODUCTION AND INSTRUCTIONS:**

Hello, my name is Teagan Rooney. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. Just as a reminder, in this study I am looking at the impact of school discipline policies and practices that are currently in place in Ontario schools. In this interview I will be asking you to describe your experience(s) with suspension and/or expulsion for the purpose of exploring how discipline policies and practices that involve the removal of students from school impact youth in this area of Ontario.

Before we begin the interview I would like to walk you through the consent form that is in front of you.

***[FOR FACILITATOR: REVIEW INFORMED CONSENT FORM AND ANSWER  
ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT IT. COLLECT SIGNED CONSENT FORMS AND  
ENSURE THAT PARTICIPANTS HAVE A COPY OF THE LETTER OF  
INFORMATION TO TAKE WITH THEM (IF APPROPRIATE FOR THE TOPIC  
AND GROUP).***

**Confidentiality:**

Before we begin our discussion about the impact that school discipline policies and practices have on youth, I want to spend a few moments **talking about confidentiality:**

- People are often identifiable to some degree by their views and opinions.

- Having said this, I am asking you to make only those comments that you would be comfortable making in a public setting; and to hold back making comments that you would not say publicly.
- I would also like to go over my **duty to report** as an academic researcher. [Review “*The Duty to Report under the Child and Family Services Act*” provided by the OCSWSSW. Explain my duty to report disclosure of harm or abuse by participants 18 years old and under].

### Use of Tape Recorder

- This interview will be recorded to increase accuracy and to reduce the chance of misinterpreting what participants say.
- All tapes and transcripts will be password protected.
- Names will be removed from transcripts, and participants will have coded numbers attached to their name which only I will know.
- Only I and my faculty research supervisor Dr. Ameil Joseph will have access to transcripts (with personal names removed) of interviews.
- I ask that when using abbreviations or acronyms, you say the full name at least once to aid transcription.
- I may also take handwritten notes of key points during the interview that I would like to revisit.

## II. INTERVIEW

- **Interview questions:**
  - What was the reason that you were suspended/expelled from school? Will you please explain your experience? (e.g., at what age or in what grade were you suspended/expelled, for how many days were you suspended/how long was it before you started at a new school after being expelled from the last one?)
  - How did you feel about being suspended/expelled?
  - Did you have a chance to meet with someone and talk about what happened and were you provided with any resources to support you through this experience?
  - What did you spend your time doing when you were not in school?
  - When you returned from your suspension, how did you feel about being back in school?
  - Can you describe what your relationships at school are like with your teachers/peers?
  - How do you feel about the use of suspension/expulsion in your case?

- What do you think might be a better practice/policy as an alternative to suspension/expulsion?
- Is there anything I forgot or something important that I should know about?

**Wrap-up:**

- Thank the participants and hand out the certificates of appreciation



[illegible]

APPENDIX D:



# Certificate of Appreciation

This certificate is awarded to:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Name

Without your participation and your willingness to share your story, this study would not have been possible. Your voice is important, and I would like to thank you for allowing me the opportunity to listen.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Participation

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's Signature



**Appendix E:  
List of Available Resources**

**LAMP Community Health Centre**

**Location:** 185 Fifth Street, Etobicoke, ON. M8V 2Z5

**Telephone #:** 416-252-6471

**Website:** <http://www.lampchc.org/>

**Social Work Programs/Counselling Services** (confidential sessions for individuals dealing with stressful life changes, family conflict, feelings of depression and/or anxiety, separation/divorce, relationship issues, abuse)

**Drop-in Hours (No appointment needed):** Mondays 1pm-4pm and Thursdays 4pm-7pm  
(For more information contact Melissa at 416-252-9701 ext. 235)

**Kids Help Phone Canada (for ages 20 and under)**

**Telephone #:** 1-800-668-6868

**Website:** <http://www.kidshelpphone.ca/Teens/Home.aspx>

Call to speak to a counsellor (anonymous, free, confidential, professional)

**Hours of operation:** 24/7

**Youthspace (for youth and young people under 30)**

**Website:** <http://youthspace.ca/>

**SMS Text Chat:** 778-783-0177

**Chat hours:** 6pm-Midnight

You can access this service through online chat or by text messaging (a community of volunteers who are there to support you – all volunteers are trained in emotional support, crisis response, and ASIST Suicide First Aid, no judgements, confidential).

You might find further assistance at one of the following agencies:

**Distress and Crisis Ontario**

416-486-2242

[www.dcontario.org](http://www.dcontario.org)

**211 Toronto**

[www.211toronto.ca](http://www.211toronto.ca)

**211 Ontario**

[www.211ontario.ca](http://www.211ontario.ca)



**Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention**

[www.suicideprevention.ca](http://www.suicideprevention.ca)

## Appendix F: MREB Certificate of Ethics Clearance

MREB Clearance Certificate

[https://ethics.mcmaster.ca/mreb/print\\_approval\\_steve.cfm?ID=4050](https://ethics.mcmaster.ca/mreb/print_approval_steve.cfm?ID=4050)

 <small>REPORTING INTRANSPARENCY AND DISCLOSURE</small>	<b>McMaster University Research Ethics Board (MREB)</b> <small>c/o Research Office for Administrative Development and Support, MREB Secretariat, GH-305, e-mail: <a href="mailto:ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca">ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca</a></small> <b>CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS CLEARANCE TO INVOLVE HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH</b>		
<b>Application Status:</b> New <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Addendum <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Project Number:</b> 2017 048			
<b>TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT:</b> Exploring Alternatives to Retributive Justice Policies and Practices in Ontario Schools: Voices of the Suspended and Expelled			
<b>Faculty Investigator(s)/ Supervisor(s)</b>	<b>Dept./Address</b>	<b>Phone</b>	<b>E-Mail</b>
A. Joseph	Social Work	23792	ameij@mcmaster.ca
<b>Co-Investigators/ Students</b>	<b>Dept./Address</b>	<b>Phone</b>	<b>E-Mail</b>
T. Rooney	Social Work	4163180241	roonet1@mcmaster.ca
The application in support of the above research project has been reviewed by the MREB to ensure compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement and the McMaster University Policies and Guidelines for Research Involving Human Participants. The following ethics certification is provided by the MREB: <input type="checkbox"/> The application protocol is cleared as presented without questions or requests for modification. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The application protocol is cleared as revised without questions or requests for modification. <input type="checkbox"/> The application protocol is cleared subject to clarification and/or modification as appended or identified below.			
<b>COMMENTS AND CONDITIONS:</b> Ongoing clearance is contingent on completing the annual completed/status report. A "Change Request" or amendment must be made and cleared before any alterations are made to the research.			
<b>Reporting Frequency:</b>		<b>Annual:</b> Apr-18-2018	<b>Other:</b>
<b>Date:</b> Apr-18-2017		Chair, Dr. S. Bray 	

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