

**SAFETY IN SCHOOLS: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF POLICY AND  
PRINCIPALS' INTERPRETATIONS OF POLICY**

by

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## Abstract

Responsibility for school safety falls on the shoulders of school principals, yet few studies have undertaken the task of examining policy alongside how principals interpret policy to inform their school safety practices in British Columbia (BC), Canada. Research questions that guided this study include: How is school safety recontextualized in policy texts by the BC Ministry, school boards, and school codes of conduct?; How do principals interpret policy to inform their practices of school safety? This study used critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2003) to examine policy texts at distinct levels of schooling including: a) BC Ministry of Education policy texts, b) School Board texts, and c) School Codes of Conduct. The analysis of policy texts made visible the narrowing of a discourse of student, as well as an emphasis on suspension as the likely consequence for a variety of misbehaviors any of which might have been deemed an “incident.” In contrast, principals’ interpretations of policy varied and the school safety practices they described as emanating from policy varied as well. Four social practices were identified through which principals’ enacted their approach to school safety. These social practices were categorized into two discretionary styles that were evident in the principals’ descriptions of school safety practices: a proactive discretionary style and a diligent discretionary style. Implications of this research include the following: First, despite a language of safe and caring schools in legislation, implementation tools from the school board and codes of conduct focused on a formulaic application of consequences with minimal consideration of intent or the circumstances surrounding behaviours; Second, policy texts positioned students simultaneously as victims, offenders, and informants, yet principals used their discretion to consider repositioning students in a range of ways including, as youths who need to be punished or as kids who made mistakes.

In the disjuncture between policy texts and interviews, principals' discretion was identified as paramount for defining school safety and the consequences imposed on students' actions.

## **Lay Summary**

This study examined policy texts and interviews with principals to address two research questions: How is school safety recontextualized in policy texts by the BC Ministry, school boards, and school codes of conduct?; How do principals interpret policy to inform their practices of school safety? A critical discourse analysis of BC Ministry and School Board policy documents and Codes of Conduct was conducted with interviews with principals regarding their interpretations of policy. Four social practices were identified through which the principals maintained school safety. In addition, a proactive and a diligent discretionary style were identified. In the disjuncture between policy texts and interviews, principals' discretion was identified as paramount for defining school safety and the consequences imposed on students' actions.

## **Preface**

The research in this dissertation was proposed and executed by Renira E. Vellos with the guidance of her committee. The interview protocol was designed and piloted specifically for this study. The methodology and tools for the critical discourse analysis undertaken here were based upon Fairclough's (2003) scholarship. This study received approval from the Research Ethics Board at the University of British Columbia, approval number H13-00451.

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## **Dedication**

To Gabriella and Vanessa

My Blessing and My Gift

## Chapter 1 Introduction

Safety is a term used indiscriminately to shape education. Undefined, it is used to construct schools and students in specific and sometimes unfavorable ways. Students' reports of feeling safe at school have been linked to school engagement and academic success (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Peterson & Skiba, 2001). School safety is part of a larger school climate; one that can support student learning and also help improve academic achievement (e.g., Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009; Gray, Wilcox, & Nordstokke, 2017; Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Allessandro, 2013). School principals, as the public faces of schools, answer to a diverse range of educational stakeholders—including the British Columbia (BC) Ministry of Education, the school boards, teachers, students, parents, and the community—about all issues that take place in schools. While there is ample research focused on student aspects of school safety, schools are part of a wider structure of schooling—including Ministry and school board policies—that also need to be examined. Legislation and policies are one way through which the Ministry and school boards have an impact on what happens in schools in terms of school safety. As such, research on school safety can be conducted by examining how principals in schools interpret policy and use Ministry and school board policy implementation tools to inform their practices about school safety.

Many studies conflate discipline and safety and emphasize student misbehaviour and consequences for students (e.g., Davis, Darling-Hammond, & Findlay, 2012; Knobl, 2010; Lyons & Algozzine, 2006). There is, however, a gap in the research examining principals' perspectives, especially in Canada from 1996, when the *BC School Act* came in to effect, to the present. Based on a focused literature search from 1996 to the present in Canada, a

tension was identified between three areas of research that might contribute to understanding school principals' policy interpretation and social practices. These areas include research about the need for policy reform (e.g., Dick, Rich, & Waters, 2016; Henderson, Urban, & Wolman, 2004; Zajda, 2010), research about policy articulation and implementation (e.g., Lackey & Huxbold, 2016; Papen, 2016; Scott, D'Silva, Hernandez, Villaluz, Martinez, & Matter, 2017), and research about how policy was experienced by different social actors (e.g., Desjardins, Melo, & Lee, 2016; Plaut & Sharkey, 2003; Shahjahan, 2011). Indeed, Coburn and Stein (2010) suggested a disconnect between research, policy, and practice. In the case of research on schooling, this disconnect might explain why a gamut of empirical research focused on identifying the negative effects of schooling (e.g., Gregory, Cornell, & Fan, 2011; Midlarsky & Klain, 2005; Skiba & Peterson, 2000), including negative policy effects, but less have focused on *how* policies were interpreted by principals in interviews and how policies inform their daily practices. In addition, the conflation of discipline and safety offered few clues about why this conflation exists and how this might reflect on policies about school safety, and in the interpretation and social practices of safety by principals in schools.

Fairclough (2003) wrote, “[t]he aim of critical social research is better understanding of how societies work and produce both beneficial and detrimental effects, and how the detrimental effects can be mitigated if not eliminated” (pp. 202-203). The objects of research in this study, policy texts and interviews with high school principals, required a focus on the study of discourse. Discourse, composed of various aspects of meaning-making including language, is important because “the language element has in certain key respects become more salient, more important than it used to be, and in fact a crucial aspect of the social

transformations which are going on” (p. 203). For this study, critical discourse analysis (CDA: Fairclough, 2003) was ideally suited. Though Fairclough (1989, 1993, 1995, 2001, 2003, 2010; Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999) has written extensively on CDA as theory and method, this study used Fairclough (2003) as an anchor text. CDA allowed an examination of language use in policies, like safe schools’ policies, and in interviews with principals, to examine *how* safety is utilized in policy to inform principals’ social practices and, therefore, how policy becomes practice in BC schools.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section provides a brief context for the work of principals in BC. The second section articulates the research questions for this study. The third section provides an overview of research, including the rationale and scope of the study. This chapter ends with a brief summary of the chapter and a sketch of the chapters that follow.

### **Principals in the BC Context**

The ability of principals in BC to make decisions about school discipline and school safety is impacted by how principals are positioned within schooling, and the legal powers they are provided by the *School Act* (1996). In terms of the former, how principals in BC are represented within schools today is affected by a historically antagonistic relationship between the government of BC and the BC Teacher’s Federation (BCTF). This relationship has influenced principals, most of whom began their careers as teachers, by situating them as separate from teachers, and more importantly, as “agents of the state [where] the government’s prevailing interest in the education of children should prevail” (Mackay & Sutherland, 2006, p. xviii). Thus, they are expected to act even if it is against the demands of teachers in their own schools in times of conflict between government and teachers (Fleming,

2003; Slinn, 2011). The *Safe Schools Act* (2006) was the first legislation specific to school safety and school discipline in BC. This act, described in more detail in Chapter 2, provides a framework for the implementation of the corresponding policy in school boards and schools across BC. The *School Act* (1996) states that all students up to the “end of the school year in which the person reaches the age of 19 years” (C-17) have the right to an education and cannot be expelled from school. Prior to this act, the BC *School Act* (1996 s. 76(3)) identified school discipline as the responsibility of school boards and principals, and although there was nothing specific to school safety, there appeared to be assumptions that discipline was a response to incidents of safety, and suspension was the ultimate consequence that could be applied to students. The *School Act* (1996), however, did not outline procedures for school boards’ and principals’ to implement, and relied on the discretion and judgment of school boards and principals to respond to student behaviours that made schools unsafe, and to apply the requisite consequences (BC Safe Schools Initiative, 1999).

The *Safe Schools Act* (2006) provided the framework for school boards across BC to use policy implementation tools like manuals for school safety and guides for the writing of school Codes of Conduct. In theory, the *Safe Schools Act* (2006) provided a basis for standardized processes associated with school safety and school discipline. A possible aim of standardization was to establish consistent responses by BC school boards and principals to incidents of school safety. This standardization might have also been intended to ensure that school board and principals responses were less dependent on the individual discretion of principals. In combination, the isolation of principals within their schools as agents of the state, along with Ministry standardized processes for interpreting policy on school safety,

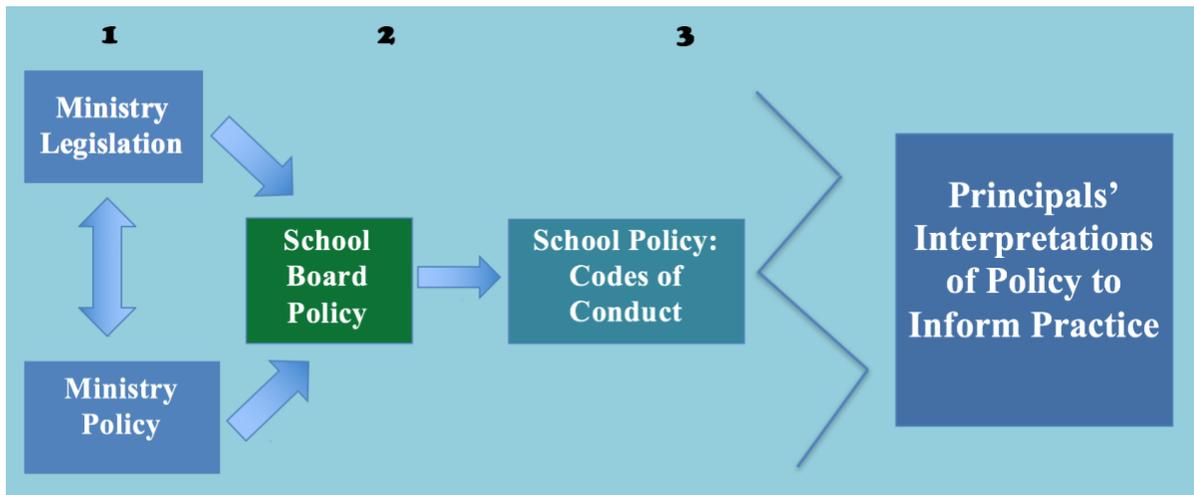
shape how principals use policy to inform their practices, in general, and more specifically for this research, their practices of school safety.

### **Research Questions**

To examine the link between policy and principals' interpretations of policy, this study developed research questions that began by examining discourses about school safety embedded in policies. In the educational context, "policy is conceived in terms of multilateral, national, state, or local directives that legislate institutional structures; proper Codes of Conduct, and academic standards for schools" (Sutton & Levinson, 2001, p. 5). Legislation and policy refer to Acts passed by the BC Legislature that are filtered down to school boards, schools, high school principals, teachers, parents and even students through policy implementation tools. In schools, policies may act as a "practice of power" (p. 1) that positions principals, parents, and students differently with more or less power. However, Sutton and Levinson (2001) also suggested that policy interpretation "highlights the way creative agents 'take in' elements of policy, thereby incorporating these discursive and institutional resources into their own schemes of interest, motivation, and action" (p. 3). Policy as it is taken up in practice "is constantly *negotiated* and reorganized in the ongoing flow of institutional life," and becomes a "political form 'disguised by the objective, neutral, legal-rational idioms in which [it is] portrayed'" (Shore & Wright 1997, as cited in Sutton & Levinson, 2001, p. 2, emphasis in original). Shore and Wright (1997) suggested that the appropriation of policy positions it as a form of governance, and brings policy into practice.

In this study, a genre chain of policy texts was analyzed in relation to principals' interpretations of policy and practice in interviews. Genres are forms of texts crafted with specific purposes and intended audiences that allow for specific kinds of action (Fairclough,

2003). Texts that belong to the same genre are similar in terms of their structure, semantics, “‘exchange’ (e.g., giving information, eliciting action)” (Fairclough 2003, p. 17), speech function and grammatical exchange. A genre chain is a group of texts, in this case, policy texts, that begin with legislation and that are taken up and rewritten by various educational actors with potentially different intentions and purposes. These purposes may be made visible by the variation of genres and discourses used in the chain of texts. Figure 1.1 illustrates a genre chain of policy texts that was linked with principals’ interpretations of policy. Policy flows from a) BC Ministry of Education policy texts, to b) School Board texts, and to c) school Codes of Conduct, and these are interpreted by principals as they use policy to inform their practices of safety in their schools.



**Figure 1.1 Policy Genre Chain linked to Principals’ Interpretations**

This study used critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2003) to analyze a genre chain of policy and link this with principal interviews. Central to the analysis taken here, Fairclough (2003) described three levels of social life: social structure, social events, and social practices. In this study, social structure was the macro level of schooling, in the form

of policy across Ministry, school boards, schools, and principals as actors in policy. Social events were concrete occurrences, like incidents that potentially make schools unsafe. Social practices were “relatively stabilized forms of social activity,” such as practices principals said they used as they interpreted policy (Fairclough, 2003, p. 205). These levels are described in more detail in Chapter 3. To examine the way policy was taken up in practice, the recontextualization or semiotic transformation of meaning—identified through changes in the representation of social actors and in concepts that shifted in meaning—was mapped across the genre chain. This analysis was then linked to interviews with principals.

The research questions for this study were: *How is school safety recontextualized in policy texts by the BC Ministry, school boards, and school Codes of Conduct?* and *How do principals interpret policy to inform their practices of school safety?*

Sub-questions that helped guide the research included:

1. Which social actors are present across policy texts and interviews?
2. How are human and non-human social actors positioned in terms of school safety?
3. How are the different levels of social life implicated in principals’ descriptions of practices about school safety?

These sub-questions reflect, in part, my approach to analysis. Specifically, that when policy is represented across a genre chain, human and non-human social actors are recontextualized. Further, that principals, as policy implementers, use policy—as noted by Sutton and Levinson (2001)—as “creative agents” (p. 3).

## **Rationale**

In previous research, I investigated the experiences of youth in an alternative program, many of whom were re-engaging in schooling after being disciplined and/or suspended. I

wondered about the possible relationship between policies and how these were interpreted and enacted by principals. Curious about exploring the relationship between students, policy, and principals as enactors, led to this investigation of policy and how high school principals' interpretations of policy, to examine the policy-practice gap.

Principals who are assumed to have high levels of discretion to make decisions in school, are also legally bound by legislation. In this study, the pieces of legislation governing principals were the *BC Safe Schools Act* (2006) and the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* (2003). The *BC Safe Schools Act* (2006) is provincial legislation specific to school safety in British Columbia. The *Youth Criminal Justice Act* (YCJA; 2003) is a federal act governing the Canadian youth justice system that applies to youth between the ages of 12-18 and is referenced in the *BC Safe Schools Act* (2006). Principals' interpretations of policy are also shaped by the complexity of the school population, including, the socio-economic, racial, and ethnic diversity of the neighbourhood, parental participation, and access to transit. Specifically, the complexity of a school may have a bearing on how principals define safety, interpret policy, and how they use these interpretations of policy.

School boards translate policy into policy implementation tools, for example, manuals that articulate required legal course of action for specific situations. Both policy and policy implementation tools draw upon discourses, or different ways of representing social actors, that when interpreted by school principals, may lead to different responses to similar incidents. Accordingly, principals' interpretations require the context provided by an analysis of the policy texts they are interpreting. While complex, this sort of analysis—one that links policy to the interpretations of policy—is urgently needed. Inspired by Weis and Fine's (2012) notion of critical bifocality as a way to attend to the relationship between macrolevel

and microlevel dynamics, in this study policy texts, were analyzed alongside principals' interpretations of policy to address the policy-practice gap.

### **Overview of Research**

Fairclough (2003) suggested that “any analysis of texts which aims to be significant in social scientific terms has to connect with theoretical questions about discourse” (p. 2), and that “no real understanding of the social effects of discourse is possible without looking closely at what happens when people talk or write” (p. 2). In line with this broader framing of CDA, called “textually oriented discourse analysis” (p. 2), this study examined documents from each policy level—BC Ministry, school board, and school—and interviews with high school principals regarding their interpretations of policy and how policy informed their practices of school safety. Textual analysis was used to examine the relationship between human and non-human social actors, as well as assumptions about social actors as they appeared in the texts analyzed.

Linguistic tools, including social actor identification, collocation, and lexical choices provided insight into how meaning unfolded across a genre chain of documents that were logically and systematically linked together that included policies from different policy levels. These policies were then linked to interviews with principals regarding their interpretation of policy. Table 1.1 contains the list of documents analyzed in this study including where the document originated (Ministry, school board, individual school, and interview transcript), the name of the document, the length of the document, and dates of original release and last revision. The table also contains the date of the document that was analyzed for this study. These documents are described in detail in Chapter 3.

Table 1.1 List of Documents for Analysis

<b>Origin</b>	<b>Document</b>	<b>Date (Original, Revised)</b>	<b>Document Analyzed</b>
<b>Ministry Legislation (8 pages)</b>	<i>Statement of Policy Order/Mandate for the School System</i>	1989/rev 2013	2013
<b>Ministry Policy (4 pages)</b>	<i>Safe and Caring School Communities Policy</i>	2004/rev 2012	2012
<b>Ministry Policy (82 pages)</b>	<i>Safe, Caring and Orderly Schools: A Guide</i>	2004/rev 2008	2008
<b>Ministry Legislation (4 pages)</b>	<i>Safe Schools Act</i>	2006	2006
<b>School Board Ocean (28 pages)</b>	<i>Safe Schools Handbook of Policies and Procedures</i>	2012	2012
<b>School Board Ocean (3 pages)</b>	<i>Safe and Caring District Code of Conduct</i>	1993 last revised 2012	2012
<b>School Board River (2 pages)</b>	<i>Keeping Schools a Safe Place to Learn: Our Policy on Weapons and Violence</i>	2013	2013
<b>School Board River (1 page)</b>	<i>SD 2 Code of Conduct</i>	2013	2013
<b>Individual School Codes of Conduct (23.5 pages total)</b>	Royal Roads (1.5 pages) Cherrylane (9 pages) Paddle Creek (2 pages) Hilltop (3.5 pages) Fernhill (6 pages) Montgomery (1.5 pages)	2013	2013
<b>Interview Transcripts (152 pages total)</b>	Mr. Richard (30 pages) Mr. Cahill (26 pages) Ms. Peters (16 pages) Mr. Holmes (22 pages) Mr. Frank (27 pages) Mr. Murphy (31 pages)	2013/2014	2013/2014

In this study, “textually oriented discourse analysis” (Fairclough, 2003) enabled the examination of the movement of meaning across policy texts and identified practices of school safety used by principals that were informed by their interpretation of policy texts. In addition, the use of linguistic tools with textual analysis addressed concerns of scholars who

highlighted problems of analyses that are limited to data summaries, rather than more extensive analysis (Antaki, Billig, Edwards, & Potter, 2003).

### **Scope of Study**

In Chapter 2, the literature review describes how perceptions of schools as unsafe are socially constructed and reveals links between broad concepts of inappropriate behaviour, discipline, zero tolerance, and safe schools. It also offers explanations about why safe schools and school discipline are dealt with as synonymous: both are based on common assumptions about school safety as being about student behaviour. In addition, the literature review demonstrates how media sensationalization of incidents of extreme school violence in the United States, make these incidents shocking and exciting, and elevate them to heightened levels of cultural, political and policy importance, a process referred to as mediatization (Muschert & Sumaila, 2015).

While acknowledging the impact of United States' mediatization of school violence on policy in Canada in general, for example, in Toronto, with the Ontario Safe Schools Act (2000), the focus of this study was specifically on safe schools' policy in BC and the BC *Safe Schools Act* (2006). This study also includes policy implementation tools that follow from this piece of legislation. Together, these policy texts comprised a genre chain that was examined alongside interviews with principals from two school boards in BC. While there are other texts related to safety in schools from other sources, the focus remains on the policy texts listed in Table 1.1.

In addition, two BC school districts provided approval for participation from a combined total of six principals from those school districts. One was a large urban school district and one was a medium sized urban school district. Both districts exhibited high levels

of student complexity associated with rapid, unprecedented growth in the districts, especially in the large school district. This complexity was noted through Statistics Canada reports on reported income levels, visible minority status, and high levels of new immigrants to Canada (Statistics Canada, 2011). It was also noted through school district reports on numbers of English Language Learners (ELL) in their district, and in reports of increased student enrollment.

### **Summary**

This chapter introduced the study, describing the BC context in general, articulating the research questions, and providing an overview of the research. It also provided a rationale for the research along with the scope of the study. This study used critical discourse analysis to analyze policy and examine how policy about school safety was interpreted and used to inform practice by principals. This analysis traced policy to practice through discourse and through the practices of principals about school safety.

The chapters that constitute this dissertation continue as follows. Chapter 2 provides a literature review of how schools are constructed as unsafe, the role of the media in driving policy, and some examples of policies that arose out of this fear of schools as unsafe. This literature review also shows a relationship between policy and principals, and offers alternatives to discipline and school safety based on research. Chapter 3 provides a discussion of my position as researcher and the methodology for this study, describes the role of discourse in policy, and provides a framework for how the analysis was conducted. Chapter 4 identifies the social actors present in and across the genre chain of policy texts, and highlights safety as a non-human social actor related to other social actors who need to be safe and from what they need to be kept safe from. Chapter 5 provides definitions of safety

and student from transcripts, along with a list of social practices principals employ in terms of school safety. Chapter 6 discussed a disconnect between policy texts and the social practices of high school principals and shows how principals use their discretion as they interpret policy to practice. Finally, Chapter 7 provides a concluding remarks, implications and limitations of this research, and potential directions for future research.

## **Chapter 2 Literature Review**

The context of the work of BC principals concerning school safety hinges on two central features: first, the way schools have been constructed as unsafe by the media and through policy, and; second, the relationship of principals with policy in general, and specifically BC policies on school safety. Following Maxwell (2006), this literature review includes relevant works, specifically works that “have important implications for the design, conduct and interpretation of the study, not simply those that deal with the topic” (p. 28). Therefore, this review examined literature regarding principals and school safety, in particular, literature directly relevant to education in BC.

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section examines the relationship that has emerged between incidents of school violence and perceptions of school safety, specifically in the United States (US), and how this has led to the social construction of schools as unsafe, in ways that might impact other places in the world. The second section examines expectations of high school principals related to school safety, traces the effects of the decisions made by high school principals on students, and attends specifically to the BC context.

### **School Violence and Safety**

The influence of the media saturation of incidents of school violence, along with traces of policy borrowing from the US influence perceptions of safety in schools not only in the US, but in Canada as well. Though there are many kinds of incidents that can be related to school safety, from incidents of sexual assault (Bradenburg, 1997; Timmerman, 2003), homophobic bullying (Li, 2006), and in more recent years, cyberbullying (Law, Shapka, Hymel, Olson, & Waterhouse, 2012), these issues tend to be treated as about individuals, or

as private and personal issues in school, rather than whole school or public issues. In addition, media reports that tend to focus on guns and school shootings are incidents that draw higher public attention and tend to have higher mortality rates (Muschert & Sumiala, 2015). Incidents of violence in schools, especially those related to school shootings or “rampage” shootings—incidents that took place in schools, with an audience, involved multiple victims, and were perpetrated by students or former students of the schools where the incidents occurred—have become a global cultural phenomenon through wide spread media attention that has impacted public perceptions of school violence (Muschert & Sumiala, 2015; Roque, 2012).

Some highly-publicized examples of rampage shootings include: in the United States, Columbine, 1999 and Virginia Tech, 2007; in Canada, École Polytechnique, 1989 and W. R. Myers High School, 1999; in Germany, Winnendon, 2009, and; in Finland, Jokela, 2007. The impact of incidents carried out by youth who are or were at the schools, “threaten the sense of security and increase feelings of desperation” and require profound repair “to overcome the damage to the social fabric resulting from such tragedies” (Muschert & Sumiala, 2015, pp. xvi-xvii).<sup>1</sup> Studies of these types of school shootings overwhelmingly focus on the impact of the shootings on students and the community, but rarely account for how school administrators cope.

This section contains three sub-sections. The first sub-section examines how the perception of school safety has been shaped by the media both in the United States and in Canada. The second sub-section examines how perceptions of school safety have led to policies about school safety. The third sub-section traces the history of the safe schools’

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<sup>1</sup> While there are other highly publicized incidents of school shootings, some of those incidents involved intruders who were not related to the school and are not part of this literature review (e.g., United Kingdom, Dublane, 1996; United States, Sandy Hook, 2013, and; Canada, Dawson College, 2006).

policies in BC. Despite being different countries with different systems of government and education, the United States and Canada are geographical neighbours with media connections that traverse boundaries.

### **Perceptions of a Lack of School Safety in North American Media**

The United States reported the highest rates of deaths involving guns among OECD countries in 2010, an overall firearm death rate ten-times higher than other OECD countries, and a homicide rate 49% higher for 15-24 year olds (Grinshteyn & Hemenway, 2016). As Canada's closest neighbour, when incidents of violence in the United States unfold, the media keeps the Canadian audience well-informed. Two factors associated with school violence that lead to perceptions of schools as unsafe include: 1) mediatization of worst-case examples of school violence, such as rampage shootings (Roque, 2012), and 2) an increased number of violent incidents reportedly committed by youth or on youth in Canada (Naylor, 1999). These factors have contributed to a "hyperawareness of youth violence" (Jull, 2000) suggesting that any place where youth are found (i.e., schools) is potentially unsafe.

**Mediatization of rampage shootings.** Mediatization is defined as "media saturation in contemporary social and cultural life" (Muschert & Sumiala, 2015, p. xvi). This is exemplified through incidents of media bombardment, when potentially distant cases are used to exemplify everyday incidents that threaten the mundane. For example, news about school rampage shootings flood Canadian homes through television reports for weeks after they occur (Roque, 2012). "Breaking news" coverage interrupts regular television programming and sensationalizes incidents of school shootings that heighten public awareness of these worst-case examples of school violence. As argued by Muschert and Sumiala (2015); the sensationalization of these incidents fuels fear among the public about

school safety. For example, the mediatization of incidents prolongs exposure to the violence of the incidents. This also positions everyone directly or indirectly within the incident: including persons directly involved—like the shooter/s, victims, witnesses, and audiences—as performers in these highly public spectacles (Muschert & Sumiala, 2015). For example, the shooter(s) is represented through their social media history. Victims are represented through a show of public mourning and commemoration that can last for days and weeks after the incident. Witnesses are represented through their participation in the incident by either posting videos of the events as they unfurled, or live streaming the incidents as they occurred. Even audiences from across the world are represented through their participation as they follow the reports, by the number of views to media streams of the incident, or through the number of times they share and comment about the incident. This public participation in the incident can be traced through social media platforms like blogs, posts, and by their online demonstrations of support.

In Canada, decades after the Montreal/ École Polytechnique incident of 1989, and the W. R. Myers High School incident of 1999, when there are reports of a school shooting, images and references to these previous events surface in news coverage. For example, in 2016, after a school shooting in La Loche, Saskatchewan, the sub-headlines in the National Post read “Four people are dead and two are in critical condition following the worst Canadian school shooting since the 1989 École Polytechnique massacre” (The National Post, January 22, 2016). Examples of “rampage shootings” (Roque, 2012) combined with sensationalized incidents that occurred in the United States, suggest to the public that they are perhaps more frequent than they are, and heighten fears about school safety. Fears about the likelihood of these incidents at neighbourhood schools are increased because these

incidents occurred in schools in middle-class neighbourhoods, and were conducted by middle-class young males who were related to the schools, were not in gangs, and who appeared to lack specific targets (Roque, 2012). The media, in the process of sensationalizing these incidents, often imply a wide variety of possible motivations for the incident, and contribute to wide-spread panic that this kind of violence can happen at any school without warning (Welch, Price, & Yankey, 2002).

Despite reports of other forms of violence that impact schools, for example gang-related violence and intruder violence, these incidents are often associated with social factors related to the neighbourhood: for example, poverty, immigration status, and race and ethnicity (CBC, 2003; National Crime Prevention Centre, 2007). When school shootings occur in schools from poorer neighbourhoods, they tend to be associated with gang violence and do not always make the mainstream media (Limbos & Casteel, 2008). These incidents are not sensationalized as public spectacles like shootings that occur in schools in middle-class neighbourhoods. The role of the media in deciding to highlight shootings as either rampage or gang-related incidents, constructs gang violence as normal for poorer neighbourhoods, but rampage shootings as symptomatic of a crisis of safety in schools in middle-class neighbourhoods.

**Increased incidents of violence and youth.** In Canada, statistics about school violence have also contributed to public perceptions of a crisis in school safety. For example, the report, *Violence in British Columbia schools: New research from Simon Fraser University and the British Columbia Teachers' Federation* (Naylor, 1999), noted increased violence in schools as experienced and reported by teachers throughout the country. This report included findings from a 1993 survey of Manitoba teachers in which they reported that

47% (up from 39% in 1990) had experienced physical and emotional abuse directed at them from students in schools. It also included reports from a 1994 study of Saskatchewan teachers who reported that 40% of respondents had experienced increased levels of abuse. Additionally, it included a 1994 Ontario report that suggested that only 67.8% of teacher respondents felt as safe in schools as they had five years previously. This report of violence against teachers—alongside a 1994 Solicitor-General Department’s report that cited Vancouver, BC as one of four cities in Canada with the highest incidence of weapons in Canadian schools—positions students as possible perpetrators. Additionally, the *Task Force on Violence in Schools* (1994) reported an increase in aggressive behaviours in younger children. This increase combined with reports of increased drug and alcohol use in youth, and higher reported incidents of bullying, suggest that young people in general are aggressive and possibly more violent than previous generations, thereby contributing to perceptions of schools in BC as unsafe (Naylor, 1999). It is worth noting that these reports are decades old, but have historical significance in the development of perceptions and policy about school safety.

Statistics also indicate, however, that youth in Canada between the ages of 15-24 are 15 times more likely than people over the age of 65 to be victims of violence (Perreault & Brennan, 2010). This suggests that alongside being perpetrators of violence, youth are also victims. Furthermore, Furlong and Morrison (2000) suggested that in communities that report higher crime rates, schools can become a “physical location for violence that has roots in the community and ‘school’ is a system that causes or exacerbates problems the individuals within it experience” (p. 71). This suggests that schools in communities with higher reports of crime and violence may be at higher risk for violence in schools. This risk, in combination

with reports of increased aggressive behaviours by children, gives credibility to a political rhetoric where “schools are essentially dangerous places” (p. 73), and positions students as both perpetrators and victims of violence in schools.

**Schools as unsafe.** The mediatization of school violence suggests that incidents of violence are endemic and this has made the issue politically useful (Muschert & Sumiala, 2015). Despite the fact that incidents of school shootings are a “relatively low occurrence event” (Barbieri & Connell, 2015, p. 23), the moral panic portrayed by the media positions schools as unsafe by focusing on individual student responsibility for this violence and plays a role in public outcries for policy changes to make schools safe (Barbieri & Connell, 2015). Other types of school violence that have been reported include, for example, teacher on student violence and intruder on student violence (Zeidler, 2016).

Notwithstanding the root of violence, moral panic increases when the media—under the guise of reporting factual information—misrepresents or distorts research findings. For example, Furlong and Morrison (2000) identified two historic examples where the media’s role in misrepresenting information had far reaching implications for school policy in the United States. In the first example, the “Youth Risk Behaviour Surveillance Survey” (YRBS), a survey distributed to high school students across the United States since 1990, originally included a question to youth about having a weapon in their possession in the last 30 days. The surveys were conducted at school, but the question did not specify if the possession of the weapon occurred while at school. Twenty percent of youth reported having had a weapon in their possession in the last 30 days. The media reported that 20% of youth who were in schools in the United States had weapons at school within the last 30 days. This misrepresentation of the findings was presented to the United States Congress as evidence of

the relationship between weapons and school violence. In the second example, a 1980's policy initiative in California required that all schools report incidents of "school crime" (Furlong & Morrison, 2000). While the intention of the policy was to help reduce incidents of criminal behaviour in schools, the media instead reported on the prevalence of crime in schools. Media reports identified schools with the highest "crime rates." In both instances, media reports fed public perceptions of schools as unsafe, and of students as active participants in incidents of school violence. These examples contribute to a "hyperawareness of youth violence, reinforcing the notion that youth are armed and out-of-control" (Jull, 2000, paragraph 3), and contribute to public fear of unsafe schools as a social crisis with political power (Anderson, 2009). This public perception allows politicians to use school safety as a political issue to gain political ground, and to increase calls for policies to ensure school safety.

### **Policies on School Safety**

The political utility of the term "school violence" stems from the idea that schools "should be a special place of refuge and nurturance for youth" (Furlong & Morrison, 2000, p. 73). Rowelles (2010) recognized the "use of media to stage or portray crises in education... and to promote the need for specific policies" and highlighted "the steering that media involvement can have on national policies and reform efforts" (p. 21) that can translate to direct media input into the kinds of national policies or policy reforms that take place. While not all educational policy can be linked to the media, Rowelles (2010) warned that it "would be unwise to ignore the effect that media has on the strategies of education policy agents" (p. 21). In the case of school safety, policy and media appear invariably linked and can be followed through the policies about school safety. In addition, two other factors that can be

linked to policies about school safety include: 1) the discursive construction of misbehaviour as school violence, and 2) the relationship between misbehaviour, discipline, and zero tolerance policies.

**Discursive construction of misbehaviour.** The discursive construction of schools as unsafe can be traced through changes, expansions, and redefinitions of words associated with student behaviour in schools. Each change has brought the term “misbehaviour” closer to “violence.” As these words became associated, the reasons for why school safety is a present-day issue becomes evident.

First, the definition of “school misbehaviour” has evolved since the early 1900’s. For example, in the United States, Wells (1927) identified six common reasons that would lead to student school exclusion through suspension. These behaviours included: acts based on student choice of study area, connections to any secret society, failure to pay for damaging school property, failure to perform manual labor, misconduct, and for “acts committed by the pupil after the relation of teacher and pupil has ceased” (p. 573). By the 1940’s, Denmark, Krauss, Wesner, Midlarsky, and Gielen (2005) listed issues of student behaviours reported by teachers as excessive noise, littering, and gum chewing. By the 1970’s, Phay and Cummings (1970) compiled a handbook for the processes of dealing with student misbehaviour. In this handbook, misconduct was defined as disruption to the school, damage to property, assault on a school employee, physical abuse of a student, having weapons and dangerous instruments, narcotics, alcoholic beverages, and/or stimulant drugs on campus, and repeated school violations.

Interpretations of what is considered “an incident” at school has changed over the years as well. For example, in the 1920’s an incident occurred when a student failed to

comply with school expectations (Wells, 1927), but by the 1970's issues were related to discipline for student misconduct. By the 1990's, school safety and school discipline issues focused on wider and more serious behaviours under the umbrella of school violence (Barbanel, 2005). This change, according to Barbanel (2005), now defined school violence as behaviours such as bullying, aggravated assault, suicide, and homicide. Changing the definition complicates literature searches about violence in schools. The range of studies may deal with perpetration of violence, violent victimization, antisocial behaviour, criminal behaviour, fear/worry beliefs, and discipline/school climate. School violence can also mean crime on school campuses, victimization experiences, school disciplinary practices, weapon possession at school, use of controlled substances at school, the influence of delinquent gangs on school, or conflict resolution (Furlong & Morrison, 2000). However, given the political utility of the term "school violence," it is not surprising that when speaking about violence in schools, the discussion quickly turns to examples of the most extreme forms of violence: school shootings.

Second, despite the infrequency of school shootings, Burns and Crawford (1999) suggested that when these incidents occur and are sensationalized in the media, they give rise to a perception that schools are unsafe that is often used for political gain. The more severe the violence, for example using school shootings as a worst-case scenario, the harsher the expected consequences. This allows for calls for policies with punitive measures, like zero tolerance, to be implemented in schools (Anderson, 2007; Burns & Crawford, 1999). Zero tolerance clauses provide standardized procedures and consequences for principals responding to school safety issues. Policies with zero tolerance clauses have mandatory suspension or expulsion consequences for students found in violation of the policy

(Heaviside, Rowand, & Farris, 1998). However, the rigidity of zero tolerance policies has led to cases where students with minor violations, like bringing a plastic knife to school, pointing their finger like a gun, and shooting a paper clip like a water gun were all treated with the same consequences as bringing a gun to school (Kaplan & Cornell, 2005). The assumption that any violation of school rules constitutes an incident of school safety suggests that schools are unsafe and that a hard stance against rule violations must be taken. These assumptions justify the need for policies with zero tolerance clauses to ensure school safety.

**Links between misbehaviour and zero tolerance policies.** Perceptions of schools as unsafe usually end up assigning responsibility for safety violations to individual students. This promotes the perception that danger in school comes from within. In this school climate, the concept of safety goes beyond preparation for natural disasters, like earthquakes and tornadoes, to constant vigilance of students for fear of their potential violence (Herr & Anderson, 2003). It is common to find schools, especially in the United States and in Canada, that ask students to rehearse practices geared toward school safety like lockdowns, when no one can get in or out of the school, or checking for weapons and gang colours before students enter the school (Herr & Anderson, 2003). School personnel may be asked to attend seminars on responding to incidents of school violence.

This climate leads to calls for penalties for students involved in safety issues, while ignoring complex social issues that might have played a role in the incident. In addition, policies about school safety are implemented. Examples of these policies in Canada are found in the school safety policies from the early 2000's onwards (Burns & Crawford, 1999). Examples include, in Ontario, *Safe Schools Act* (2000), in Manitoba, (*Bill 18, The Public Schools Amendment Act, Safe and Inclusive Schools* (2012)), in Alberta, *School Act*,

*Amendment 45* (8) (1999), and in *British Columbia Safe Schools Act* (2006). Not surprisingly, each of these policies has been accused of a tone of zero tolerance and of increased punitive measures toward youth behaviours (e.g., Daniel & Bondy, 2008; Jull, 2000). Two examples are described in the sub-sections below, the *Gun-Free Schools Act* (GFSA, 1994) in the United States, and the *Ontario Safe Schools Act* (2000). These examples are followed with the individualizing effects of zero tolerance and examples of alternatives to zero tolerance policies and practices.

***United States, GFSA (1994).*** The *Gun-Free Schools Act* (1994) is a United States Federal Government education policy based on a policy created by the United States Customs Agency. This policy is important because the United States federal government has a long tradition of only interfering in education on issues of human rights. For example, the United States government stepped in during the Civil Rights Era, when schools were shown to be violating human rights by denying access to education to African Americans, children with special needs, and children from poor families (Berliner & Biddle, 1995). Government intervention with the introduction of the GFSA (1994) indicated the political importance of school safety at that time, and was part of what opened the door for additional federal policies like the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB, 2002). Granting this level of importance to safety in schools suggested that the issue of school safety was comparable to issues of human rights violations from the past.

The United States Customs Agency policy was intended to deal with adult criminal behaviour, specifically, the smuggling of guns and drugs across ports of entry into the United States. This policy was borrowed, and adapted to be used with children and youth in schools (Sutton & Levinson, 2001). Key to the GFSA (1994) was the zero tolerance approach toward

the possession of weapons in schools, and a mandatory minimum 1-year suspension for students who brought firearms to school. The GFSA (1994) was also attached to school funding.

Unfortunately, since its implementation, there has been little research that supports the effectiveness of the GFSA (1994) in reducing violence in schools or reducing disciplinary problems (e.g., Gorman & Pauken, 2003; Skiba & Knesting, 2001; Skiba & Rausch, 2006). However, it has been found that zero tolerance can “normalize the processes of criminalization and militarization in public schools” (Robbins, 2005, p. iv), by reinforcing stereotypes of minority youth as prone to criminal behaviours that justify the need for high levels of security measures in schools where these students are found. This acceptance that some youth require closer scrutiny has been associated with “undermining racial justice by limiting life chances through disproportionate punishment and social exclusion of youth of color” (Robbins, 2005, pp. iii-iv).

Though there were no measurable differences in crime rates in schools between 2004 and 2007, more schools reported an increase in their use of safety and security measures (Dinkes, Kemp, & Baum, 2009). Security measures included increased controlled access to buildings during school hours (from 75% to 90%), controlled access to school grounds during school hours (from 34% to 43%), requiring faculty to wear badges or picture IDs (from 25% to 48%), the use of security cameras to monitor schools (from 19% to 55%), and telephones in classrooms (from 45% to 72%). In addition, a 2011 National Education Policy Center report noted an increased percentage of students suspended from schools and an increase in racial disparities in students suspended from schools through the period of 1972-1973 to 1988-1989, and 2006 to 2007 (Losen, 2011). Despite increased spending on safety

measures, student reports of feeling safe at school during the same time periods showed a downward trend, and minority students continued to report being more afraid of being in school than their white peers (Losen, 2011).

***Ontario Safe Schools Act (2000).*** The Ontario Safe Schools Act (2000) was implemented with the goal to help make schools safer for students. Since implementation however, this Act has been associated with increased racial discipline gaps, increased securitization and hypervigilance of students, but not necessarily with increased safety of students in schools (Bhattacharjee, 2003). However, a report by the OBA Institute of Continuing Legal Education in February 5, 2007, and a Safe Schools Action Team in 2006, both identified differences in the interpretation of the Act that led to school policies that were not in line with the Act. While the Act made no references to zero tolerance, and proposed additional services offered to students to whom this Act was applied, school Codes of Conduct were often inflexible in their application of disciplinary procedures. This Act is interesting because it shows how, in the process of policy implementation, Acts can take on different meanings. While the *Ontario Safe Schools Act* has been revised with more inclusive language, most recently in 2012, the initial zero tolerance assumptions about the Act continue to haunt the implementation of this policy.

***Individualizing effects of zero tolerance.*** While most incidents reported by the media involved fatalities, not all incidents in schools are as severe. This suggests that there must still be processes in place when dealing with incidents of school safety that arise in schools. As noted, school policies have been associated with zero tolerance responses. Effects of zero tolerance policies individualize responsibility for incidents of school violence and reduce the

role of social factors in incidents of violence in schools (e.g., Jones, 1998; Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Toby, 1994).

Blaming individual students for incidents at school constructs them as “at-risk” and or “deviant” and aims interventions toward improving their social and emotional skills. The “problem” in these cases is assumed to be the individual child who is pathologized (Vadeboncoeur & Luke, 2004). Placing responsibility for school “mis” behaviour on individual students also disregards systemic issues in schools like racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, and ableism (e.g., Ogbu, 1987), and hides issues of social norms and ideologies. The media sometimes offers students a voice, then publicizes edited examples of students acting immature, out of control, and irresponsible, thereby undermining students’ ability to challenge these misrepresentations (Kelly, 2006).

***Alternatives to zero tolerance.*** Multiple studies point to a long list of negative effects of zero tolerance on individual students, from suspension, to early student leaving, and even prison (e.g., Gorman & Pauken, 2003; Skiba & Knesting, 2001; Skiba & Rausch, 2006), but Glanzer (2005) also challenged the educative nature of zero tolerance in institutions of learning. Glanzer’s (2005) suggested that zero tolerance “fails to allow the opportunity for moral action” (p. 102), and further that “educational leaders should merge their discipline policies with robust forms of moral and civic education in order to avoid the abuses of zero-tolerances policies” (p. 102). Accordingly, consequences for student behaviour should be opportunities for student learning, not simply instances of punishment. Four alternatives to dealing with school safety are described below: School-wide Positive Behaviour Support (PBS), Progressive Discipline (PD), Threat Assessment Protocols, and Restorative Justice approaches.

The first, School-wide Positive Behaviour Support (PBS), is a “structured way to promote positive relationships in schools and to provide students with social and behavioural skills to be successful learners and school citizens” (McKevitt & Braaksma, 2008, p. 735). School-wide positive behaviour support is based on an assumption that typical school disciplinary practices, like school exclusion, are ineffective in promoting desired behaviours in school thus the focus needs to be on the entire school and the kinds of relationships and expectations of each person in the school community (McKevitt & Braaksma, 2008).

The second example is that of Progressive Discipline (PD): an approach intended to replace zero tolerance in Ontario by addressing students’ individualized academic and social needs while formalizing parental involvement. Progressive Discipline allows educators discretion when determining duration and severity of disciplinary measures and it requires parental participation in decisions related to student behaviour (Milne & Aurini, 2015). The term progressive in this instance is related to the “new” and “innovative” way of dealing with student behaviour that focuses on helping the student within a more inclusive environment. However, as with many programs that rely on parental participation, some parents may take more a proactive approach than others. Parents who are impeded due to work or language requirements may not be able to advocate as readily for their children and this program may again reify inequities experienced by students, especially students who are minorities or students from lower income families (Milne & Aurini, 2015).

The third example uses Threat Assessment Team (TAT) guidelines—proposed by the FBI after the Columbine shootings in the United States (O’Toole, 1999)—field tested in schools in Virginia (Cornell, Sheras, Sebastian, McConville, Douglass, Elkon, McKnight, Branson & Cole, 2004). After the 1999 shootings at Columbine High School, the Federal

Bureau of Investigation (FBI) proposed guidelines for threat assessment. Threat assessment protocols focus on assessing the incident first, then examining the context of the incident, rather than focusing on the individual(s) involved. These guidelines have been adapted for use in schools and followed for evidence of their effectiveness in keeping schools' safe (e.g., Allen, Cornell, Lorek, & Sheras, 2008; Cornell, Loper, Atkinson, & Sheras, 1999; Cornell & Mayer, 2010; Cornell et al., 2004). What is remarkable about these guidelines is that the focus is on the threat, not on the student. Incidents that in the past would have led to immediate suspension, for example, bringing a toy gun, are assessed for their threat level, rather than assessing or categorizing the student performing the behaviour. This has led to lower suspension rates for students, especially students who are minorities (Cornell et al., 1999; Cornell & Mayer, 2010). Despite the positive reviews of this program, it is important to note that not all threat assessment guidelines are the same, and while some are adapted for use in schools, there are some that are intended for use by clinicians; these have been field tested in the United States (Mitchell & Palk, 2016). When threat assessment teams do not have the necessary participants, the use of the guidelines may not be as effective.

Another alternative to policies that focus on individual students are Restorative Justice approaches in schools (e.g., Lockhart & Zammit, 2005; Ryan & Ruddy, 2015; Zehr, 2002). As defined by Lockhart and Zammit (2005),

Restorative justice is a value-based approach to responding to wrongdoing and conflict, with a balanced focus on the offender, victim, and community. Restorative justice focuses on transforming wrongdoing by healing the harm, particularly the relationships, that is created by the harmful behavior. (p. 7)

Approaches that stem from Restorative Justice, for example restorative discipline, focus equally on the victim, offender, and community, and give voice to both victim and offender. In schools with zero tolerance policies, when a student is responsible for an incident, they are removed from the school through suspension or expulsion. Restorative justice, however, through practices like restorative circles, allow the victim and the offender to rebuild their relationship with each other and the school community.

### **BC Principals and Safe Schools Policies**

Sutton and Levinson (2001) highlighted the impact of agents in the interpretation and practice of policy. This suggests that principals' interpretations—permeated by their individual experiences, motivations, and use of discretion—mediate how policy becomes practice. This section examines principals as mediators of policy. This is followed by a brief history of the BC Safe Schools Act (1996).

#### **Principals as mediators of policy**

How principals interpret policy(ies), including when and how they are applied, is important to understand how policy becomes practice. The work of principals is fast-paced. For example, Calabrese and Zepeda (1999) estimated that principals engaged in an average of 10 decision-making processes per hour and attended to over 150 tasks per day. These estimates suggest that principals need to make decisions quickly and cannot afford the “luxury of delayed decision-making” (p. 8). Principals, described as “multi-taskers extraordinaires” by Findlay (2012), make decisions while walking in the hallways or even while having conversations with staff and students. Many of the decisions principals make are based on their individual experiences, discretion and/or judgment.

Discretion, defined as “the power or right conferred upon them by law” of acting “according to the dictates of their own judgment and conscience, uncontrolled by the judgment or conscience of others” (Black’s Law Dictionary, p. 374), is vital to principals’ creativity and flexibility to act in schools. Both Greenfield (1993) and Manley-Casimir (2003) have contributed to understanding the role of discretion in the daily work of principals. While a principal’s use of discretion is recognized as vital to daily issues that arise that require immediate responses, Findlay (2012) warned “discretion is not absolute” (p. 19):

[Although] discretionary decisions will generally be given considerable respect, discretion must be exercised in accordance with the boundaries imposed in the statute, the principles of the rule of law, the principles of administrative laws, the fundamental values of Canadian society, and the principles of the Charter. (Justice Claire L’Heureux-Dubé, as cited in Findlay, 2012, p. 20)

This suggests that principals may be called upon to identify the policy and/or legislation they use and to justify their decisions. This warning is, in part, a response to the observation by Davis (1969) that “emotions, more than intellect, may determine the choices of values in discretionary decision-making” (as cited in Findlay, 2012, p. 476). In effect, discretion may lead to principal’s decisions based on personal values, emotion, or multiple interpretations of Ministerial policies, and lead to a myriad of different practices. Principal discretion can affect how policy becomes practice.

**Leadership style variations on policy to practice.** Principals must be seen as acting when an incident happens in schools. The swiftness with which principals often need to act lends itself to situations where they are more likely to act on assumptions about students and apply standardized or uniform consequences. For example, in Ontario, Canada, Cassidy and

Jackson (2005) observed that when students involved in negative behaviours were labeled as “troubled” or “violent,” administrators were more likely to apply zero tolerance policies. School safety policies based on zero tolerance characteristically apply “‘automatic’ punishment [that] treat offenses with uniform severity regardless of intent, circumstances, or student’s records” (Losinski, Katsiyannis, Ryan, & Baughan, 2014, p. 126). This suggests that the application of zero tolerance policies is likely to occur without addressing the root cause of the behaviours, or a consideration of possible systemic sources for the behaviours.

It is also likely that if principals make exceptions in favor of individual students this could be equated with leniency for the student offender and not in the best interest of rule-abiding students and teachers in schools. This line of thinking suggests that student behaviours result out of personal choice, and students are therefore entirely responsible for these behaviours. Research by Levinsky (2016) demonstrated that principals who conceived of inappropriate behaviour as a student’s choice were more likely to be concerned with the reputation of the school, and were more likely to place responsibility for behaviour on the individual student. In practice, this translates into a situation in which principals apply zero tolerance policies to protect the school’s reputation (Levinsky, 2016) and to avoid legal or professional liability (Glanzer, 2005). In another recent California study, Lasnover (2015) studied the effects of the school boards’ removal of “willful defiance” as a category for recommending student suspension. What this study noted is that 30% of teachers still referred students for suspension at similar rates, but admitted using different categories for recommending student suspension. Further, principals admitted that they still felt that defiance and respect were sufficient reasons to remove a student from the class and school despite what was contained in the revised policy. Both teachers and principals used their

discretion to circumvent policy by prioritizing their own personal beliefs about student responsibility for their behaviours, and the consequences that should be applied.

While there is evidence that principals sometimes challenge policy for the benefit of their students—for example, Koyama (2011) provided examples of principals actively resisting aspects of the *No Child Left Behind Policy* (2002) in the United States when they felt the policy was not in the best interest of their students— research shows a complicated relationship between principals and disciplinary policies. What is clear, however, is that principals play a key role in whether or not, and how, students experience disciplinary policies.

For example, Mukuria (2002) compared schools with high and low suspension rates and noted that principals in schools with lower rates of suspension viewed district suspension policies as general guidelines that they could refer to and modify on a case per case basis. However, he also noted that principals who felt that suspension was a justifiable consequence were more likely to be at schools with higher rates of suspension. Principals' conceptions of the justifiability of consequences, like suspension, appeared to play a greater role in determining school suspension rates, despite students' racial backgrounds or the socioeconomic status of the neighbourhood where the school was located.

Mukuria (2002) also noted that high school principals in low suspension schools appeared to work more closely with teachers, parents, deans, and students, to share their school vision, and to develop the schools' discipline policies. These policies were then implemented school-wide with each contributing member responsible for maintaining the agreed-upon rules for school behaviour. At these schools, teachers, who play a crucial role in maintaining school climate, reported high levels of confidence that their principal would

support and respect their decisions. Parents were called upon on by the school to make decisions about their children's education and were expected to remain involved with school activities year-round. Mukuria's (2002) study demonstrated the relevance of a leadership style that involved the entire school community. It also highlighted the role of principals in creating a school climate that either worked together, or that removed students.

**Principals' relationships with the racial discipline gap.** Key to this study is literature that suggests that the root of the disparities in suspension rates, "after controlling for race and poverty," is "the attitude of a school's principal toward the use of suspension" (Losen, 2011, p. 8). School principals who viewed punishment as important to improving behaviour, or who blamed behavioural problems on poor parenting and poverty, suspended students more often than high school principals who viewed suspension as a measure to be used "sparingly" (p. 8). Reports like these suggest that in matters of suspension, the school principal is likely to be the key decision maker in a minority student's experience of suspension policies in school. This also suggests that by being culturally responsive, principals might play a key role in alleviating the experiences of students from minority backgrounds and helping them be more successful in school (DeMatthews, 2016). Differences in how students from minority groups in the United States experience discipline in schools have been identified as the "racial discipline gap" (Gregory, Cornell, & Fan, 2011).

This discipline gap is evidenced in the United States by the disproportionate number of students of colour who were suspended from schools during the academic years collected by the Office for Civil Rights (CRDC, 2012), In Canada, it is evidenced by the high percentage of minority students who felt school authorities were more likely to suspend and

call the police on them, than their white counterparts (Ruck & Worthly, 2002). In both instances school principals appear to have interpreted policy differently for minority students.

In the United States, the Office for Civil Rights collected data through the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) for over 85% of students in the United States for the year 2009-2010. Part of the data collection focused on rates of student discipline. This data showed that “African-American students represent 18% of students in the CRDC sample, but 35% of students suspended once, 46% of those suspended more than once, and 39% of students expelled” (CRDC, 2012, p. 2). Furthermore, “in districts that reported expulsions under zero tolerance policies, Hispanic and African-American students represent 45% of the student body, but 56% of the students suspended under such policies” (p. 2). This data shows an over-representation of ethnic minority students in the number of students who are suspended and expelled in schools in the United States.

In Canada, despite a nation-wide lack of data about suspension and about the distribution of suspension along race and ethnic lines, there is little reason to believe that minority youth are faring any better. Dei (1996), for example, found that minority youth in Canada are more likely to have disciplinary experiences and leave school early than other youths in school. In Toronto, Canada, Salole and Abdulle (2015) demonstrated that the Safe Schools policy was associated with a “security-based response” in schools and focused on increased security measures in schools, such as increased surveillance technology and zero tolerance disciplinary policies. The effects of these measures have failed to enhance security, and have exacerbated the criminalization of marginalized youth, especially racialized minority youth (Salole & Abdulle, 2015).

In BC, while data about numbers of students suspended and the distribution of ethnicities among those students suspended is not publicly available, school completion rates for students designated as Aboriginal show clear differences. The *Summary of Key Information* (2012) by the BC Ministry of Education indicated that students designated as Aboriginal have a completion rate of 54% compared to the overall population's completion rate of 81%. While demographic information about students who are suspended is not centrally collected, given the percentage of students designated as Aboriginal who do not complete school, the problem of ethnic minority over-representation in suspensions may be a reality not only for students who are identified as Aboriginal, but also for students who are minorities. Bowlby (2005) argued that the high proportion of Aboriginal youth represented in high school dropout statistics in Canada suggests a “school to prison pipeline.”

This racial discipline gap has also been identified as a contributor to the “school to prison pipeline” (Weissman, 2010). Working with data from the United States, Weissman (2010) suggested that zero tolerance and other harsh disciplinary policies help to prepare certain young people for a life in the criminal justice system. Salole and Abdulle (2015) observed that minority students in Toronto reported feeling under constant surveillance and perceived teachers as trying to catch them doing something wrong; students did not feel that teachers were cultivating relationships based on trust. These students reported feeling excluded and detached from school, a circumstance associated with higher levels of school leaving. Furthermore, Weissman (2010) also suggested that these policies—through their harsh consequences—erode students’ beliefs in fairness and, in combination with social context issues like poverty, further alienate young people from school. These statistics,

alongside recent more stringent Canadian youth criminal laws, suggest that there is much to learn about how minority youth in Canada experience schooling (Scofield, 2012).

### **History of the BC Safe Schools Act**

The *BC Safe Schools Act* (2006) is best understood in historical context to demonstrate differences in its evolution through changing policies and emphases. Canada has no overarching federal education mandate; individual provinces are responsible for schooling. Each province provides for schooling in their own way. In BC, the BC Ministry of Education is the highest-level education policy maker.

Fleming (2003) traced how the education government became a government of education, a distinction that resulted in the separation of educational governance from school administration, with school administration under the responsibility of Boards of Education. The result is that the Ministry is responsible for the articulation of Acts, Regulations, Orders in Council, and Ministerial Orders. Ministry responsibilities include: developing education policy ensuring educational standards; monitoring student performance; publishing public reports; and, working with schools and communities to improve student and school performance. The Ministry is also responsible for allocating funds for the educational system, and overseeing the governance of the system as a whole. Boards of Education, or school boards, are responsible for the administration of schools and the daily work of ensuring that buildings are maintained and services are provided. School boards can also create supporting policies and or policy implementation tools consistent with provincial guidelines.

In terms of “discipline” of students in schools—the term that was originally used in schools by school boards and principals to refer to the management of student behaviours, including the consequences for not following school rules—discipline was originally defined

by the School Act (1996) that granted School Board administrators and principals the power to develop policy at the school level. The *School Act* (1996, s. 85 (2) (c) (i, ii) (d)) also provided the school administrative officers the authority to suspend students. This Act left the supervision of students to individual principals. In effect, “School Boards in British Columbia have the authority, but not necessarily the obligation, to establish local procedures for school discipline and suspension” (BC Safe Schools Initiative, 1999, p. 5). The *School Act* (1996) placed students under the care of principals who were allowed to discipline and suspend. Prior to the *Safe Schools Act* (2006), there were no articulated overarching provincial policies specific to student discipline.

Table 2.1 presents a compilation of legislation and policies related to school safety, starting with the origins of the *State of Educational Policy Order: A Mandate for the School System* (1989), and ending with the Ministry’s *ERASE Bullying* (Expect Respect and A Safe Education, 2012) five-year plan. In common is that all these documents were linked to the *BC Safe Schools Act* (2006), originated from the Ministry level, or were followed through by the school boards as policy enactment tools based on the *BC Safe Schools Act* (2006).

In 1987, the Lieutenant Governor in Council instructed the Royal Commission on Education to assess the state of schooling in BC from Kindergarten to Grade 12. The Commission published its findings in the document, *A Legacy for Learners: Summary of Findings* (1988). The commission recommended a “loose and tight” system for the school system. On the one hand, a loose system offered greater differentiation, choice, diversity and freedoms for individuals within the system. On the other hand, a tight system offered stronger cooperation between components of the system, especially in terms of funding, clarification of roles and responsibilities of all social actors in education, clearly delineated

zones of authority and jurisdiction, and appropriate structures for communication, control and action. This system was envisioned to provide stability and greater flexibility and responsiveness to environmental changes.

In response to the Royal Commission's report, the Ministry passed the *State of Educational Policy Order: A Mandate for the School System* (1989). This legislation articulated the purpose of the BC school system as enabling "learners to develop their individual potential and to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to contribute to a healthy society and a prosperous and sustainable economy" (p. D-90). It also provided a policy platform in support of the "educated citizen" and "diversity and choice." The goals of schooling were identified under three categories: intellectual development, human and social development, and career development. In line with these goals, the Select Standing Committee on Education, in their 2002 report, *A Future for Learners: A Vision for Renewal of Education in British Columbia* (2002), identified the predominant vision for BC education in the statement: "the economic, social, and democratic interests of learners, of local communities, and of the province is best served by a seamless education system that enables all British Columbians to access a variety of world-class opportunities" (p. 38).

Table 2.1. Key Documents Related to School Safety in BC

<b>Commission</b>	<b>Ministry of Education: Policy Piece or Legislation</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Royal Commission on Education</b>	<i>A Legacy for Learners: Summary of Findings</i>	1988
	<i>State of Educational Policy Order: A Mandate for the School System</i> (1989)	1989
<b>BC Safe School's Initiative</b>	<i>Focus on Suspension: A Resource for Schools</i> (1999)	1997/8
	<i>BC Performance Standards for Social Responsibility</i> (2001)	2001
<b>Selecting Standing Committee on Education</b>	<i>A Future for Learners: A Vision for Renewal of Education in British Columbia</i>	2002
<b>Safe Schools Task Force</b>	<i>Facing Our Fears: Accepting Responsibility: Bullying, Harassment, and Intimidation. Report of the Safe Schools Task Force</i>	2003
	<i>Safe and Caring School Communities Policy Statement</i>	2004, revised and expanded 2007, 2012
	<i>Safe, Caring and Orderly Schools: A Guide</i>	2004, updated Nov 2008
	<i>Developing and Reviewing Codes of Conduct: A Companion to the Provincial Standards for Codes of Conduct Ministerial Order and Safe, Caring and Orderly Schools: A Guide</i>	2004
<b>Legislative Assembly</b>	Hansards of Legislative Sessions during the 37 <sup>th</sup> and 38 <sup>th</sup> Parliament	2003, 2005, 2006
	<i>Safe Schools Act</i>	2006
<b>School Board</b>	<i>ERASE Bullying (Expect Respect and A Safe Education)</i>	2012
	<i>Threat Assessment Protocol-Fair Notice</i>	2013

In the meantime, between 1997 and 1998, prompted by an increase in school disciplinary incidents and incidents of violence against teachers (Naylor, 1999), the Ministry of Education, alongside the Attorney General, commissioned the BC Safe Schools Initiative.

The Safe School Centre was established in Burnaby, BC to coordinate the support services that included school-linked programs, community programs, and resources for enhancing safe and healthy school environments. The rationale behind this initiative was to provide alternatives to out-of-school suspensions to students in a school climate where “traditional discipline techniques may no longer be sufficient for managing behaviour in today’s schools” (p. 1). This rationale recognized that suspension, as a “traditional” discipline technique, was having no effect, and in some instances, led to an increased likelihood of the behaviour re-occurring.

In addition, Statistics Canada (Taylor-Butts & Bressan, 2008) reported that youth crime in Canada peaked in 1991 with 9,126 youth aged 12-17 per 100,000 implicated in violations of the *Criminal Code of Canada*. Between 1991 and by 2006, youth crime in Canada was down to 6,885 per 100,000. Yet, youth accused of violent crimes accounted for a quarter of youth crime. There was a reported 18% increase in Criminal Code violations and 60% rise in drug offences. In that same year, there were 84 youth implicated in 54 homicides with multiple perpetrators and evidence of gang activity in about 22% of the cases. Crimes in schools had increased 27% between 1998-2006, this increase was composed of 30% common assaults, 8% uttering threats, and 20% drug offences. Thirteen percent of all criminal code violations and drug violations involving youth occurred at school. Seventy-three percent of youth criminal offences took place on school grounds, during supervised school activities. About a quarter of all criminal code violations occurred after school (between 3-4 pm). In discussions about the high numbers of youth implicated in criminal violations it was noted that “‘zero tolerance’ policies may increase the likelihood that violent offences that have taken place during school hours will be reported to police” (Taylor-Butts & Bressan, 2008, p.

4). These statistics, even when used alone, seem to confirm that schools are unsafe and support the need for attention to issues of school safety.

These statistics sit alongside the mediatization of incidents of school violence that suggested that school ground homicides were increasing, that weapons in schools were a big problem, and that increases in bullying and violence were directly related. Furthermore, between 1997 and 2000, the tragic deaths of three youth in BC led to a public outcry for more to be done about student safety. These incidents, which included the murder of Reena Virk and the suicide deaths of Hamed Nastoh and Dawn Marie Wesley, drew attention to the personal and social challenges faced by youth in schools related to instances of bullying. More specifically, in the case of Board of School Trustees of School District No. 44 (North Vancouver) v. Azmi Jubran (2003), the School Board was found to contravene section 8 of the *Human Rights Code*, “by failing to provide a learning environment free of discrimination” (Paragraph 118). This decision was upheld after Jubran was repeatedly bullied while he attended a school in the district in the 1990’s.

Media reports about these and other incidents where safety in schools could be questioned highlighted the need to look at schools more closely and may have played a role in a 2003 province-wide consultation process about school safety with students, parents and schools. This consultation was led by the Safe Schools Task Force, under the authority of the Minister of Education. These consultations resulted in a report entitled, *Facing Our Fears: Accepting Responsibility: Bullying, Harassment, and Intimidation* (1988). This report publicly acknowledged that there was a problem of bullying, harassment, and intimidation in schools and recommended changes in policies and procedures for the safety of students including that: instances of bullying behaviours be reported and recorded; schools and

communities collaborate to develop preventative plans; safety zones for schools be implemented; and schools and communities consider the effects of implementing school dress codes.

At the same time, and in response to the self-reported increase in violence in schools and experienced by students, the Safe School Initiative produced a document entitled, *Focus on Suspension: A Resource for Schools* (1999) followed in 2001 by the *BC Performance Standards for Social Responsibility* (2001). These information resources addressed issues of social responsibility for students in schools. In addition, the Ministry produced the *Safe, Caring, and Orderly Schools Policy Statement* (2004) now known as the *Safe and Caring School Communities Policy Statement* (2004, revised and expanded 2007, 2012).

The Ministry *Safe, Caring, and Orderly Schools Policy Statement* (2004) was accompanied by the implementation tools, *Safe, Caring and Orderly Schools: A Guide* (2004, updated Nov 2008), and the *Developing and Reviewing Codes of Conduct: A Companion to the Provincial Standards for Codes of Conduct Ministerial Order and Safe, Caring and Orderly Schools: A Guide* (2004). At the same time, debates over the *Safe Schools Act* (1996) were held at the legislative assembly and led to the passing of the *Safe Schools Act* (2006). The Hansards or transcripts of parliamentary debates in legislative sessions, during which school safety was discussed, also informed this study (Legislative Session of the 37<sup>th</sup> Parliament 2003, 2005; Legislative Session of the 38<sup>th</sup> Parliament, 2006).

In articulating the history of legislation and policy regarding school safety in BC, it should also be acknowledged that *Expect Respect and A Safe Education (ERASE) Bullying* (2012), a five-year campaign to combat bullying in schools, was launched by the Ministry of Education and had already been incorporated in various ways in the two school boards that

participated in this study at the time of interviews with principals. This ministerial policy espoused a vision to “ensure every child feels safe, accepted and respected, regardless of their gender, race, culture, religion or sexual orientation” (Vision: <http://www.erasebullying.ca/policy/policy.php>) through fostering connectedness, climate, and culture.

### **Principals and Teachers in BC**

In BC, the authority of principals in schools is granted by the Ministry, but their roles are shaped by their relationships with teachers in schools. Legally, the Ministry has ensured that principals are positioned as “agents of the state” who are sometimes expected to act in contradiction to the goals and expectations of teachers in schools (Mackay & Sutherland, 2006). Yet, the government of BC, under different parties has had a tenuous relationship with the BC Teacher’s Federation (BCTF; Fleming, 2003). This relationship has played an important role in how principals can perform their jobs in schools.

This relationship is defined mostly through conflicting definitions about the purpose of schooling that challenged school structure and administration (Enoch, 2007). The BCTF’s conceptions of the purpose of education from a social welfare perspective, alongside simultaneous social revolutions in identity politics, including race, gender, and recognition of special needs services in schools, have repeatedly challenged BC governments to provide legislation and financial investment in educational programs along these lines (Fleming, 2003; Slinn, 2011). For their part, provincial governments have responded differently to the calls for change, while trying to balance their budgets.

The most relevant relationship has been between the BCTF and the BC Liberal government. The BC Liberal government came to power in 2001 and by 2002 through Bills

27 and 28 had stripped class size and composition and specialist ratios from the BCTF Collective Agreements. In treating schooling as an economic expense to be reduced, the BC Liberals legislated cuts to the school system that impacted school boards' abilities to provide services for students. For example, school boards were legislated to present balanced budgets that have negatively affected the ability of schools to meet the needs of increasingly diverse student populations (see the recent Supreme Court ruling in favor of the BC Teachers' Federation (BCTF): *British Columbia Teachers' Federation v. British Columbia* (2016) 2 Supreme Court Ruling 407, Case number 36500; <https://scc-csc.lexum.com/scc-csc/scc-csc/en/item/16241/index.do>).

In this political and economic environment, principals, as agents of the state and separate from teachers, were in times of conflict made "exiles in their own schools" (Fleming, 2003, p. 232). Yet, it is the responsibility of principals to ensure that Ministry policies are implemented in their schools, notwithstanding different perspectives inside schools. Principals remain the actors that interpret policy in practice.

### **Summary**

In two sections, this chapter examined 1) how the work of principals is influenced by public perceptions of schools as unsafe, and 2) principals' relationships with policy, in general, and principals working in BC specifically. The first section reviewed the history of the concept of school safety; described the social construction of school violence as a social crisis that makes schools unsafe; demonstrated how perceptions of a school crisis is used to justify zero-tolerance approaches to school safety that focus on individual students; and described alternatives like Restorative Justice approaches. The second section demonstrated how the work of high school principals is discursively implicated through the narrowing of

definitions of school violence that influence the kinds of decisions these principals make about student behaviour in schools. In combination, these sections stress the importance for this work across policy to practice and the need for policy analysis coupled with analysis of principals' interpretations of policy to inform their practices of safety. This research can be used to understand the challenges facing BC principals as they use policy to inform school practices.

### **Chapter 3 Methodology**

Understanding the dynamic relationship between policy and practice regarding safety in schools requires an approach that considers how policy becomes practice, specifically, critical discourse analysis, as well as data to reflect both policy and interpretations of policy and practice. The research questions for this study were: *How is school safety recontextualized in policy texts by the BC Ministry, school boards, and school Codes of Conduct?* and *How do principals interpret policy to make decisions about school safety?* In order to address these questions, a genre chain of Ministry, school board, and school policy documents on school safety was analyzed alongside interviews with principals' about how they interpret policy to inform their school practices.

This chapter is composed of five sections. The first section describes my position as researcher and clarifies my motivation for this research. The second section consists of a description of the qualitative methods used for this study and includes sections on qualitative data sources, document analysis, active interviews and data collection procedures. The third section details critical discourse analysis, following Fairclough (2003), and provides a description of the main levels of social life that offer insight about the relationship between school policy and practice, and the procedures for analysis. The fourth section reflects on ethical considerations for this study.

#### **Researcher's Position**

I have been a student, a teacher, a head of department, and a research observer in schools. My research interest in school policies is one that I recognize as privileged. It is a privileged perspective because school for me was a good experience and relatively easy. Up to high school, I was only "sent to the principal's office" twice. On both occasions, I was sent

as part of a group of students, not alone for any individual incident. Of the two occasions, I was disciplined once along with the group, and once I was sent back to class because, according to the principal, it was unlikely I was involved in the actual incident. This dismissal occurred, despite my assurance, that on a dare, we had all lifted a table in the lab and in the process, broken pipes and other important laboratory equipment. The principal sent me back to class because I was a “good” student; he refused to accept that I actually participated in the incident. “Good” students did not do this. As a “good” student, I was never in direct contact with disciplinary policies and, was in fact, protected from them.

In addition, I have also been a teacher, a head of department for a small junior college in Belize, and in these roles I encountered educators dedicated to helping students learn and succeed in schools. However, despite this commitment to student learning that most educators had, my volunteer work with the Young Womens’ Christian Association (YWCA) in Belize helping young women return to school after leaving school early, suggested to me that there was something about the structure of schooling that was not working for many youths. This was the motivation for my Master’s research with youth in an alternative program. Here again, I was confronted with the ominous “school” these youths had left because they did not fit. But coming from a teaching background, where “school” is comprised of people, it was difficult to see how the educators, the teachers, the principals, and any other person in school would collude to push these youths out of school. These questions eventually led me to explore “the structure” of schooling that challenged these youth, and more specifically, to look at the relations between discipline, policy, policy implementation, and student suspension.

My experience, as a student and my experience as an educator, contrasted with the experiences of youths who had left school and played an integral role in why I conducted this study. I was forced to re-consider the role my principal played in defining my behaviour in high school, and beyond that, in determining which students did or did not require discipline; and as a consequence, which students stayed in school until graduation, and which ones did not.

My privilege, as a student, and now as an educational researcher, however, comes with responsibility. Kincheloe and McLaren (1994) suggested that a critical approach to research includes the following assumptions:

that all thought is fundamentally mediated by power relations that are socially and historically constituted; that facts can never be isolated from the domain of values or removed from some form of ideological inscription; that the relationship between concept and object and between signifier and signified is never stable or fixed and is often mediated by the social relations of capitalist production and consumption; that language is central to the formation of subjectivity (conscious and unconscious awareness); that certain groups in any society are privileged over others, and although the reasons for this privileging may vary widely, the oppression that characterizes contemporary societies is most forcefully reproduced when subordinates accept their social status as natural, necessary, or inevitable; that oppression has many faces and that focusing on only one at the expense of others often eludes the interconnections among them; that mainstream research practices are generally, although most often unwittingly, implicated in the reproduction of systems of class, race, and gender oppression. (pp. 139-140)

In addition to these assumptions, Baez (2007) suggested “there are ethical responsibilities associated with the critique of society. As critics *of* society, researchers must also be critical of their role *in* society” [emphasis in original] (p. 20). Research conducted by researchers within a critical framework must acknowledge the role of power, values, capitalism, oppression, and how research practices can sometimes play a role in the reproduction of systems of oppression. After all, I am a product of the educational system that I choose to critique.

Contrary to a “traditional intellectual,” in Gramsci’s terms (1971), who sits on a pedestal in deep thought, I struggle every day with the choices I make in trying to be an intellectual. I struggle with the privilege of being an educated woman who is also a mother, wife, student, educator, and woman of color. I struggle with choosing each day the role that will take precedence. I struggle even more when I position myself inadvertently as an example to other women who try to reinvent their positioning as women, as wives, and as mothers. Do I need to be a mother to be a woman? Can I be a successful academic, while also being a wife and mother? What does being a wife and a mother and an academic mean? How can all of these roles contribute to being a better educator? Gramsci (1971) proposed a “new intellectual” as one who was identified not only in her function within society, but also in her capacity to act in defense of social transformation. Can I take on the role of “new intellectual” who no longer consists “in eloquence...but in active participation in practical life, as constructor, organizer, ‘permanent persuader’ and not just simple orator” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 10)? What does this role look like for me?

My concern with policies about school safety begins with my experience; safety means different things to different people. For many children, but not all, school is a place of

safety from other issues taking place in the community. Yet, as in my case, decisions made about students are clearly not always equitable, may enhance privilege, and may influence students' experiences and relationships to school and learning. How policy is interpreted to inform practice rests on the shoulders of the high school principal.

As the world becomes more complex, as the educational system creaks under the pressures of change and added responsibilities, I recognize that for others, as it has been for me, schools can provide an avenue to critique and to extend understandings of social transformation. For this to happen it is necessary to better understand the links and disjunctions between school policy and principals' interpretations of policy in practice.

### **Qualitative Methods**

This research contained two data sources: policy texts and transcripts from semi-structured interviews with high school principals. In this section, I introduce a genre chain of fourteen documents selected for analysis and provide a brief description of each of the documents. I also describe the role of semi-structured interviews, in making visible the interpretations of high school principals to inform policy to practice.

#### **Genre chain: Texts for analysis**

Documents dealing with school safety from all levels of the schooling system in BC were initially gathered to decide which could be directly linked to each other and to principals in schools. In total, three levels were identified: Ministry, School Boards, and School Policies. Ministry policies, pieces of legislation, and Hansards were gathered and foregrounded in the research.

Genres are “different ways of inter(acting) discursively” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 26). Each genre is associated with its own genre conventions for how the text should be

organized. In this instance, the data from the three levels of schooling included: four Ministry documents, four school board documents, and six high school Codes of Conduct. Henceforth, the documents are referred to as “texts.” Each text is described below (see also Table 1.1: List of Documents for Analysis).

**Ministry.** In this sub-section, texts produced by the BC Ministry of Education contained a combination of the following genre conventions: the identification of the authority on which the document was signed (e.g., by approval by the Lieutenant Governor of BC or Her Majesty); the authorization of legal documents (e.g., the School Act); the date of when it became effective, and dates it was revised; and page numbers.

There were four Ministry texts in this study. First, the *Statement of Educational Policy Order: Mandate for the School System* (1989, rev 2012) was an eight-page text that articulated the mission, goals and objectives of the BC Ministry of Education. This text also contained a list of duties and responsibilities to which each social actor with a role in education could be held accountable. Social actors identified in this text included: students, parents, teachers, school principals, school boards, district officials, the College of Teachers, the community, the Ministry of Education, other government ministries and agencies, and the public.

The second text, the *Safe and Caring Communities Policy* (2004, rev 2012), is approximately four pages. This text has undergone several changes since the original text was produced in 2004; however, given the scope of this study, only the most recent version, revised in 2012 was analyzed. The purpose of this policy was identified in these texts as to guide school boards and schools as they developed and implemented violence prevention

programs and as they endeavored to create safe and inclusive school environments for students.

Third, the *Safe, Caring and Orderly Schools: A Guide* (2008) [henceforth *The Guide*] was an 82-page text that provides provincial standards for Codes of Conduct, and identifies attributes of safe, caring and orderly schools. This text included six sections. The first section provided instructions for developing school Codes of Conduct. The second listed students' responsibilities for behaviour self-management. The third section was specific to parent support and involvement. The fourth to sixth sections addressed student safety and security, including specific types of incidents such as weapons, intoxication and so on. It also included suspension procedures and the district-wide code of conduct. The appendix contains a table with 31 offences and the expected response at the school level: Level I Suspension (under 5 days), Level II Suspension (over 5 days: District Resource Counselor involved), and, notify Police (May or Must). In the table, under the police notification options, "may" suggested that the school authorities could call the police at their discretion; "must" call the Police was to be used for specific offences that were crimes and, therefore, out of the jurisdiction of the school. *The Guide* also outlined strategies for "informing appropriate members of the school community of safety concerns in a timely manner" (p. iii). This document contained excerpts from various Acts, including the *Constitution Act*, *Multiculturalism Act*, *the Human Rights Code*, and *the Youth Criminal Justice Act* (2002).

Fourth, the *Safe Schools Act* (2006) was a four-page legislation that originated from a province-wide consultation process about the safety of children and youth in school. This consultation process was held province wide and was partly as a response to reports of incidents of violence in schools, many directed at teachers, but also, as demonstrated through

some high-profile cases, directed at other students through bullying that was associated with the suicide deaths of two youth, and the murder of one student. Consultations were held between 2002-2003 and culminated in the report *Facing Our Fears: Accepting Responsibility: Bullying Harassment, and Intimidation. Report of the Safe Schools Task Force* (June, 2003). These consultations were used to justify the need for more attention to school safety at the provincial level, as was recorded in official reports of debates in the legislative assembly (Hansards), leading to the implementation of the *Safe Schools Act* (2006).

Supporting texts for the four central Ministry policies that were not included in this study, but were part of the document selection procedure and were referred to along the genre chain were, the *Provincial Standards for Codes of Conduct Order* (2007- revised 2013) and *Developing and Reviewing Codes of Conduct: A Companion to the Provincial Standards for Codes of Conduct Ministerial Order and Safe, Caring and Orderly Schools: A Guide* (2004).

**School Board.** At the school board level, policy texts for two school boards, henceforth referred to as Ocean and River School Boards (pseudonyms), were included. These texts contained the following genre conventions: they noted that they were produced by the school boards, referenced the *Safe and Caring Communities Policy* (2004, rev 2012), and cited other pieces of policy and regulations.

The policy texts included from the Ocean School Board were the *Safe Schools Handbook of Policies and Procedures* (2012), a 28-page text, and the *Safe and Caring School District Code of Conduct* (2012), a three-page text. From the River School Board, *Keeping Our Schools a Safe Place to Learn: Our Policy on Weapons and Violence* (2013), a

two-page text, and the *River School District Code of Conduct* (2013), a two-page text were included.

**Codes of Conduct.** At the school level, the texts included were six individual school Codes of Conduct: three from Ocean and three from River. Each of the Codes of Conduct contained at the minimum: authority from either the school board or the Ministry, a list of student expectations, a section on consequences, and procedures for notification (of parents). They each also identified the school they were written for and, in most instances, included a few lines similar to a school motto or mission statement.

These Codes of Conduct varied in length and the amount of detail contained. *Royal Roads High School Code of Conduct* was a page and a half in length. It contained a *School Preamble* that resembled a mission statement, three rules, a description of the two levels of suspension, and a list of seven student rights and seven student responsibilities, including the right to a fair hearing for grievances, and the responsibility to bring to the attention of the staff conditions potentially harmful to the students in the school. It ended with a policy on technology use. The *Cherrylane High School Code of Conduct* was a nine-page document that consisted of a section on *Student Expectations*, a detailed section on *Misconduct* that included *Serious Misconduct* like bullying, fighting, theft, alcohol and drugs, and a section on *Academic Misconduct* that dealt with issues of plagiarism and cheating. It also included a short section describing student services and counselling.

*Paddle Creek High School's Code of Conduct* was a two-page text that presented a list of 13 expectations from all members of the school community; these were followed with a *Healthy School Statement*. This code of conduct dedicated one and a half pages dedicated to *Academic Honesty* and the process of progressive discipline of academic dishonesty. It

ended with contact information for the administrative and counselling team. *Hill Top High School's Code of Conduct* was a three-and-a-half-page text that contained a list of 11 *Student Expectations*, including a list of seven acts a safe and caring school should be free from, a list of three banned items including drugs, weapons, and intruders, and the expectation for due process in reporting incidents. These expectations were followed with a list of 11 *Serious Offences*. These offences included: use of foul or racist language; physical violence; physical or sexual abuse; theft; truancy; willful damage to school property; and being under the influence of or in possession of alcohol or drugs at school or at a school function. This code of conduct referred readers to the school district's disciplinary guide for progressive discipline methods. It also contained the process of parental notification and a list of policies on which it was based.

*Fernhill High School's Code of Conduct* was a six-page text that consisted of three pages dedicated to *Student Expectations*: including positive attitudes and behaviours; a dress code, including a hat policy (hats could not be worn inside the school); attendance; respect for other's feeling and property; and one about environments free from violence, weapons, non-students, and disruptions to learning. These were further emphasized with a table in which expectations for each area of the school were listed. There was also a page-length list of the process for the resolution of student and parental concerns. Another page was dedicated to a list entitled *Unacceptable Conduct* that contained 13 items, most of which had been mentioned in the student expectations (*Safe and Caring Environments are Free From* section). It also consisted of a list of consequences. This code of conduct ended with the process of parental notification and the list of school district policies on which it was based.

Finally, *Montgomery High School's Code of Conduct* was a one-and-a-half-page text that, in bullet points, contained a list of four sections. Under *Acceptable Conduct* was a list of expectations for a safe and caring environment. There was also a section on acts the school should be free from, and a section of things/people not tolerated (banned substances, weapons, and trespassers). The consequences section referred to the school district's disciplinary guide. This code of conduct also contained the parental notification process and the policies on which it was based.

### **Transcripts**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with principals from each of the six participating schools. Patton (2002) noted that “qualitative interviewing begins with the assumptions that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit” (p. 341). In addition, interviews contain elements of power based on who conducts the interview and who was interviewed. Both interviewers and interviewees position themselves in particular ways and negotiate power, commonalities and assumptions as part of the interview (Merriam, Johnson-Bailey, Lee, Kee, Ntseane, & Muhamad, 2001). In this study, I, as the interviewer was a student who had been a teacher and a head of department. However, I was not native to Canada, and had never been a high school principal so could not speak to the everyday work of high school principals in BC. At the same time, high school principals in schools hold positions of power and are gatekeepers of the school and how the school is represented to the outside world (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2013). It could be argued that in agreeing to an interview, high school principals relinquished some of their power even if only for brief instances during the interview. This suggests a sort of

hybrid interview where there is some negotiation about the boundaries of the interview. This is discussed later in this chapter in the section on the interview.

**Interview protocol.** The interview protocol was designed, approved, and piloted. The pilot interview was conducted with a volunteer high school principal while school board and university ethical approval was in process. Analysis and feedback from this pilot interview identified changes for restructuring the questions. These changes included removing redundancy, adding a section about the demographics of the school, and, rephrasing questions to make them more open ended. These changes were made and discussed with my research committee prior to utilizing the revised protocol in the field. The revised interview protocol was estimated to last between 60 and 75 minutes (see Appendix A).

**Participant selection procedure.** School boards are responsible for the management of schools within their school district. As such, all applications to conduct research within a school district were made to the corresponding school board authority. Applications to the three largest school boards in BC were made requesting permission to carry out the study with principals in their school districts. Two school boards consented to school participation. Once school board approval had been finalized, the first round of hard copy invitations was mailed to schools within the school districts. Hard copy letter invitations were sent to 24 schools across two school districts asking for the participation of either principals or vice-principals; there was no response by the end of three weeks. A second round of invitations were sent, this time by email. One principal responded asking for more information; he later agreed to participate. A third round of email invitations was sent out with no additional responses. I then conducted two rounds of phone calls to principals and was able to speak to five principals and left over a dozen voice messages. Three of the principals with whom I

spoke opted out of the interviews. One principal agreed and one requested additional information about the study. I emailed the requested information to him and, after he verified my permission from the school board, he agreed to participate in the study. I then sent a fourth round of 12 email invitations, followed less than a week later by follow-up phone calls. I spoke to six principals, of whom two agreed to be a part of the study. Table 3.1 presents a list of the principals who participated in the interviews. Principals are very busy and must manage daily affairs at the school, plan ahead, and maintain open communication with school boards, parents, and any other party who might need of their time. Participating in a study, took time away from all these activities and had no immediate benefit to them. It was expected that finding participants might require repeated requests.

**Interviews.** It is noteworthy that though it was difficult to find participants, once principals agreed, interviews took place within two weeks after gaining consent. Interviews were between 60 and 75 minutes, and principals were emailed a copy of the interview protocol before the meeting. Follow-up member checks (Anfara, Brown, & Mancione, 2002), in which principals reviewed transcripts of their interviews, and were given the opportunity to clarify or re-phrase sections of the transcript, were estimated between 20 to 30 minutes. In total, the amount of time invested by principals for this study was approximately two hours.

Of interest, each principal requested a mini-interview prior to the actual interview. These mini-interviews served two purposes: 1) they set the boundaries for how principals wanted to be represented, and 2) principals assessed my qualifications and educational experience, and my commitment to schooling. Mini-interviews were important in that principals were exercising their own power by requesting the mini-interviews, by setting boundaries, and by deciding whether to continue with the interview. Gewirtz and Ozga

(1994) suggested that interviewing powerful people can produce difficulties including “misrepresentation of the research intention, loss of researcher control, mediation of the research process, compromise and researcher dependence” (pp. 192-193). Walford (1994) suggested that as people in power, principals “are well used to their ideas being taken notice of...their power in the educational world is echoed in the interview situation” (p. 225).

Yet, during one of the mini-interviews, one novice principal, who consulted with his school district prior to agreeing to participate articulated that on a previous occasion he had allowed a reporter to observe his school. He allowed the reporter and his photographer permission to visit all the classes for several days spend time in the school most anywhere in the school. In the end, though many events had taken place at the school during that time, the article that was published was about a two-minute fight that broke out between two students in the hallway at the end of classes on day. Since the incident, this principal had been weary of allowing anyone in the school who he felt might misrepresent what happened in schools.

As revealed by this principal as he explained his initial hesitation to participate in the interview, principals recognize the importance and the danger of representation. This was one reason that they requested for me to speak to my assumptions about schooling before they continued with the interviews. In effect, interviews were a sort of hybrid interview with a negotiation of power. On the one hand, principals were gate-keeper to the school, and could potentially represent themselves in many ways. On the other, they had a willingness to talk about an issue that for them is misunderstood, and represents schools in a negative way. In continuing with the interviews, they allowed me the power to choose how they and their schools would be represented in research. In effect, these interviews were hybrid interviews given our negotiation of power.

**Participants.** Interviews were conducted with six high school principals from across two school districts. These included an interview of about an hour in length, and a follow-up member check of the interview transcripts of about 20 minutes with each of the principals. Table 3.1 contains the list of principals (all names are pseudonyms) who participated in the study along with some basic demographic information about their experience and about the size and composition of their schools. After five principals were interviewed, it became clear that the schools differed in terms of the family incomes in the neighbourhood or school catchment. To ensure balance in the data, a sixth school was selected. Its location in a high-income area balanced the socio-economic representation in this study. Based on the National Household Survey (Statistics Canada, 2011), two schools were located in areas where the median family income level was at the lower income level end (\$55,000 and under), two were located in areas that contained mixed income families, but had a higher percentage of middle income families (between \$55,000-75,000), and one was located in an area with the highest proportion of high income earning families (over \$95,000). This data differed from assessed property values in the neighbourhoods; data was skewed by families who rent suites in homes.

**Table 3.1 Participant Principals and School Size**

<b>Principal</b>	<b>Years of Experience</b>	<b>Years in Admin</b>	<b>Years at this School</b>	<b>Size of School</b>	<b>Income level of Catchment</b>
Mr. Richard	29	24	2	1308	High
Mr. Murphy	25	18	6.5	1932	High
Mr. Cahill	20	13	7	1150	Mixed
Ms. Peters	17	11	5	710	Mixed
Mr. Holmes	28	7	2	1325	Middle-Low
Mr. Franks	26	16	1.5	1384	Middle-Low

**Transcriptions of interviews.** After six interviews were conducted, each was transcribed and preliminary analysis began. The transcriptions and the preliminary analysis

of each occurred concurrently. Transcription conventions were developed after the pilot interview (see Appendix B). In addition, each transcription had line numbers for ease of referring to the text; blank lines were not numbered. Transcriptions were then sent to all the principals and a member check interview date was chosen. The transcripts of the interviews included highlighted sections of the transcription that had been marked during the first level analysis. Member checking allowed principals the opportunity to clarify, re-word, or re-phrase sections of the interview about which they felt uncomfortable. While two principals made clarifications, four of them felt comfortable enough with their responses that they did not require any changes or additions.

**Additional observations of the school.** I arrived early to all interviews and meetings for member checking. This allowed me to be prepared for interviews with the principals, and also allowed me to make observations of the school. A few of these observations included: notes about the staff in the office; the level of activity of the students as they travelled between classes (all visits coincided with the end of one class and beginning of another), and; reflections about the parking lot. In these pre-interview observations, all schools seemed alike: the office staff were all quietly busy behind their desks and I needed to call their attention on my arrival; students were relatively quiet between classes and I did not witness any running or yelling in the hallways; and groups of kids huddled in the corners and chatted and giggled for a little bit before an adult walking by reminded them to continue on their way.

However, the parking lots were notably different. All schools had parking lots and all had sections designated for staff and teachers. What was interesting was how occupied the area not designated for staff and teachers was at each school. In most schools, enough open

spaces were available and it was relatively easy for me to find a parking spot. However, at the two schools designated as higher social and economic levels based on the higher income levels of the neighbourhood, parking took longer and required a longer walk to the office. This appeared to me to highlight issues of access to public transportation and the potential socioeconomic status of the population of the school; perhaps more students travelled to school in cars than on public transit.

In summary, this section detailed the qualitative methods for this study including the texts for analysis and the process for recruitment and interview protocol. In the next section I discuss the analysis of both texts and interview transcripts.

### **Critical Discourse Analysis**

This study investigated how school safety was recontextualized in policy texts by the BC Ministry, school boards, and school Codes of Conduct and how principals interpreted policy to inform their practices of school safety. These texts were analyzed following Fairclough's (2003) method of critical discourse analysis. This section first provides definitions for grounding concepts in Fairclough's (2003) critical discourse analysis (CDA). Second, it describes Fairclough's levels of social life, and explains the role of discourse in the construction of social life. Third, this section presents the analytic concepts that guide this research. And fourth, this section explains the procedures for data analysis including the levels of coding that were necessary.

#### **Grounding Concepts: Critical Discourse Analysis**

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a methodology with a critical social research aim of understanding "how societies work and produce both beneficial and detrimental effects, and of how the detrimental effects can be mitigated if not eliminated" (Fairclough,

2003, p. 203). Drawing from critical theories, CDA examines how societies are built upon issues of “the domination, exploitation and dehumanization of people by people,” and shows “how contradictions within these systems constitute a potential for transforming them in progressive and emancipatory directions” (Fairclough & Graham, 2010, p. 304). CDA was used in this research project because it “views texts as a moment in the *material* production and reproduction of social life, and analyzes the social ‘work’ done in texts as a significant focus of materialist social critique” [emphasis in original] (Fairclough & Graham, 2010, p. 304).

This theoretical grounding makes visible the relationship between school policies (school structure) and incidents of school safety (social event), as mediated by high school principals’ (social actors) interpretations of policy to inform social practices regarding safety in school. CDA is founded specifically in a critique of ideology in the Marxist sense, where ideology is a “contrivance by vested interests” to address the void left by socially sanctioned authorities (Fairclough & Graham, 2010, p. 313). CDA also espouses a transdisciplinary approach to research, one that brings into dialogue various disciplines, theories, and methods and that combines the strengths of each, and in the process, allows each to evolve in the “encounter with the object of research” (p. 305). As a methodology for analyzing embedded assumptions and relationships within discourse, CDA is well suited to understanding how policies and interpretations of policies inform the practices of high school principals. Informing both policies and principals’ interpretations are the concepts of social difference, dominance, and normalizing assumptions. CDA demands that these concepts be clearly defined.

**Social difference.** Social difference is “the salience of particular social identities (be it those of women, of lesbians, of ethnic groups, and so forth)” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 40) and how they are used as identifiers of commonality within groups and differences from other groups that impact social life. Fairclough suggests that text analysis “may be used as a resource for researching ways in which difference is accentuated, negotiated, bracketed or suppressed” (p. 40), thereby making visible how “the establishment, maintenance, and contestation of the social dominance of particular groups” (p. 41) is achieved. Social difference is important for this research because it provides insights about how different social actors, such as student, are positioned both within policy texts and in practice as interpreted by high school principals.

**Dominance.** Processes of social structuring allow some discourses to be more readily accepted as mainstream, while others are not (e.g., Foucault, 1975; Gramsci, 1971). Discourses can make visible instances of dominance (Fairclough, 2003). This differentiation highlights questions of the universal and the particular, for example, “how particulars come to be represented as universals, or how particular identities, interests, representations come, under certain conditions to be claimed as universal” (pp. 40-41). It is important to identify how dominance is exercised in the discourse of school safety in policy texts and by principals’ interpretations; that is, in the ways in which the “particulars” of social actor groups, such as students, are claimed as universal across policy texts and interpretations by principals.

**Normalizing Assumptions.** Assumptions within texts often reflect underlying dominant discourses that contribute to social structuring. Fairclough (2003) argues that through consensus, or an “acceptance of differences of power which brackets or suppresses

differences in meaning and norms” (p. 42), assumptions about what is normal embedded in discourse constrains what can be experienced, for example by principals or even students in schools. This concept provides insight into how individual social actors may be bracketed under assumptions applied to the entire social group. This suggests a “one-size-fits all” approach to dealing with issues in schools.

The concepts of social difference, dominance, and normalizing assumptions provides insight into the processes through which policy texts may inform principal practices. One way to help visualize how these processes work together is by using Fairclough’s levels of social life.

### **Fairclough’s Levels of Social Life**

Social life is how Fairclough (2003) described the social construction of the material world, who is involved, and the relationships between these. Grounded in critical realism, Fairclough (2003) argued that “aspects of the social world such as social institutions are ultimately socially constructed, once constructed they are realities which affect and limit the textual (or ‘discursive’) construction of the social” and while “we may textually construe (represent, imagine, etc.) the social world in particular ways...whether our representations or construals have the effect of changing its construction depends on various contextual factors” (p. 8). Contextual factors include who is construing the social reality, for example, social actors. Fairclough’s levels of social life provide a visual representation of one way to try to explain what we see and how concepts play out in reality, including through the social practices of principals in schools. In this section, social actors are important at every level of social life and are defined first, followed by definitions of the different levels of social life,

including social structures and social events, and how they are mediated through social practices performed by social actors.

**Social actors.** Social actors are participants in clauses, and can appear as either nouns (Norman), pronouns (he, she), or even as a reference group (educators). The social actor is present at all levels of social life through their participation, or representation. Social actors can be human or non-human. For example, principals and students in schools are human social actors, and safety is a non-human social actor. Social actors' participation is made visible through their inclusion or exclusion in text, as well as *how* they are included or excluded in text.

**Social structure.** In terms of this study, the macro level was the level of social structure, "(such as an economic structure, a social class or kinship system, or a language) as defining a potential, a set of possibilities" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 23). This macro level was represented through the policy texts at various levels of schooling including the BC Ministry, school boards, and schools.

**Social events.** Social events are concrete occurrences, as well as how these occurrences are represented in various forms of text or an individual's talk: "social events are causally shaped by (networks of) social practices" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 5). In this study, social events were the incidents that took place that may be perceived to make schools unsafe.

**Social practices.** Social practices mediate social events and social structures. Social practices are "relatively stabilized form of social activity" where "every practice is an articulation of diverse social elements within a relatively stable configuration, always including discourse" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 205). Social practices, of which discourse is

central, are comprised of various elements including: action and interaction; social relations; social actors—for example, with beliefs, attitudes, and histories—and the material world. In this study, social practices were used by principals, for example, to define an incident as unsafe, and were mediated by social agents, by the actions/behaviours of students, and the style of the principals.

**Discourse: An element of social practice.** Discourse is an integral element of social practices that encompasses all aspects of meaning-making, including language and talk. Discourses shape and are shaped by particular ways of representing the world in relation to other elements of social practice. Discourse affects textual genres (ways of acting), discourses (ways of representing), and styles (ways of being). Each is associated with specific text meanings and particular ways of representing the world. Genre is usually associated with action, discourses with representation, and styles with identification.

### **Analytic Concepts: Internal and External Relations of Text Analysis**

Fairclough (2003) proposed a “relational view of texts, and a relational approach to text analysis...concerned with several ‘levels’ of analysis, and relations between these ‘levels’” (p. 35). The two levels he proposed are internal and external relations. Each one of these levels of relations is linked with different kinds of analysis. Internal relations are best examined through linguistic analysis, and external relations are best examined through text analysis.

**Internal relations/Linguistic analysis.** Internal relations are relations found within the text and are comprised of syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations. Syntagmatic relations are “relations between elements which are actually present in a text” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 39). This refers to the relationships between words within the same text, for example, “school

safety” where the co-occurrence of the words is indicative of the relationship between the two words. Paradigmatic relations “are relations of choice, and they draw attention to relations between what is actually present and what might have been present but is not – ‘significant absences’” (p. 39). Paradigmatic relations speak to both what is written in text, and also, what appears to be omitted or by virtue of being assumed, does not appear to need to be physically present in text. For example, when people talk about “students” who collect food for the food bank, or participate in bottle drives, they actually mean “good student” and refer to certain conceptions of what a “good student” should be. Fairclough proposed using specific linguistic tools for analysis of internal relations including examining semantic relations using, for example, collocations and examining terms through an analysis of lexical choices in the text.

**External relations/Text analysis.** “Analysis of the ‘external’ relations of texts is analysis of their relations with other elements of social events and, more abstractly, social practices and social structures” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 36). External relations highlight claims by the author of the text. Two claims are intertextuality and assumptions. Intertextuality is defined as “the presence of actual elements of other texts within a text” (p. 39), for example, through direct speech (quotes), and indirect speech (reported speech). Assumptions are defined as presuppositions in text, that “are not generally attributed or attributable to specific texts” (p. 40). This study analyzed instances of intertextuality and assumptions as part of a text analysis.

### **Mediation: Movement of Meaning**

Fairclough (2003) adopted Silverstone’s (1999) definition of mediation as “‘movement of meaning’: from one social practice to another, from one event to another, and

from one text to another” (p. 30). This movement of meaning occurs through texts, types of texts, and chains and networks of texts. “Texts are a crucial part of these networking relations—the orders of discourse associated with networks of social practices specify particular chaining and networking relationships between types of text” (p. 30). Though Fairclough mentioned several examples of mediation, in this study the focus was on the mediation of meaning through a specific genre chain of policy texts that was then linked to principals’ interpretations of policy in interview transcripts.

**Genre chains.** Genre chains are “different genres which are regularly linked together, involving systematic transformations from genre to genre” (Fairclough 2003, p. 31). These genre chains transcend space and time and link social events in different social practices. Genre chains highlight how aspects of text are repeated across genres and allow for the genre chain to show how each genre exists within its relationships with other genres. This allows for “action at a distance” (p. 76), where text in one genre can have an effect on a different genre that may or may not be directly linked to the first genre.

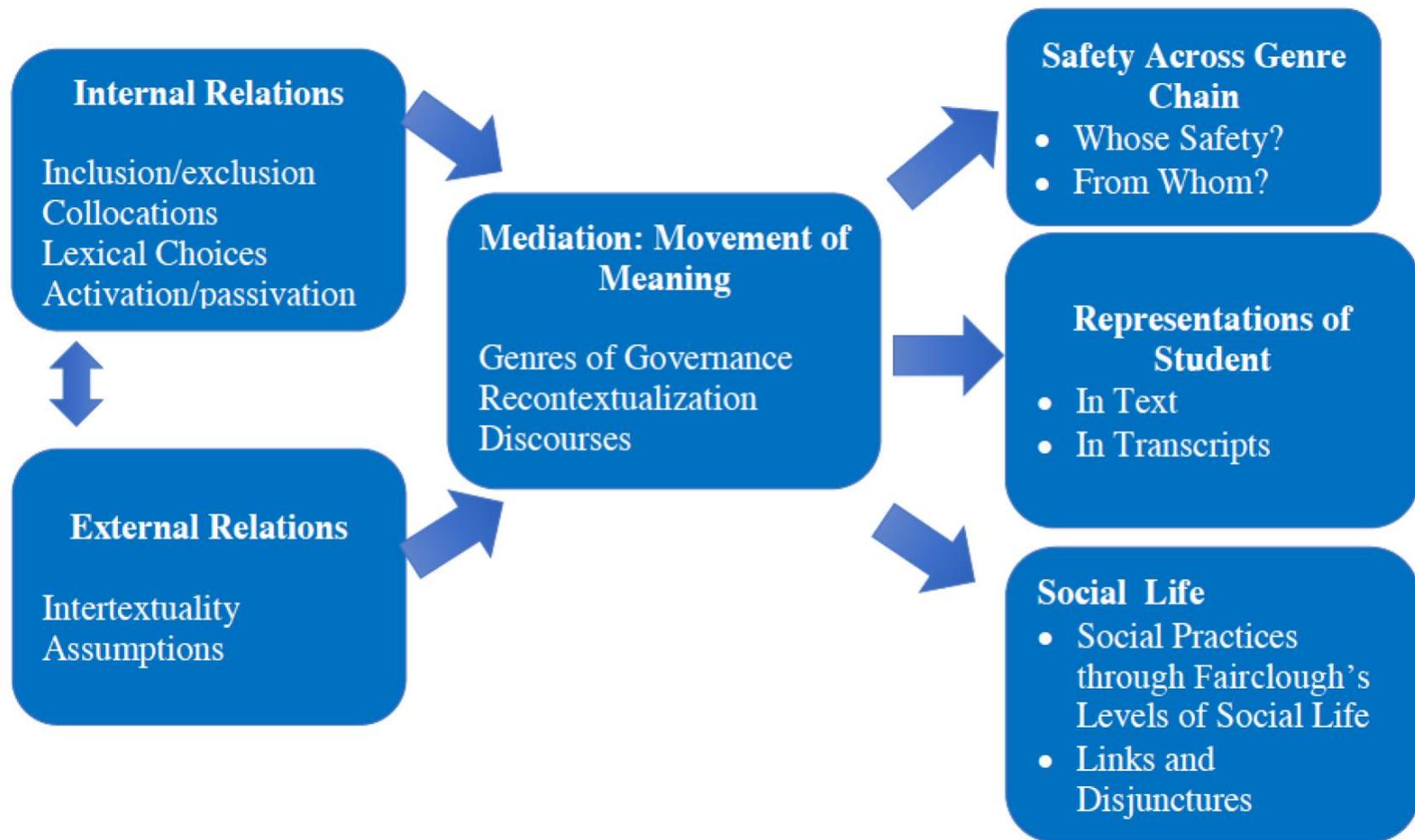
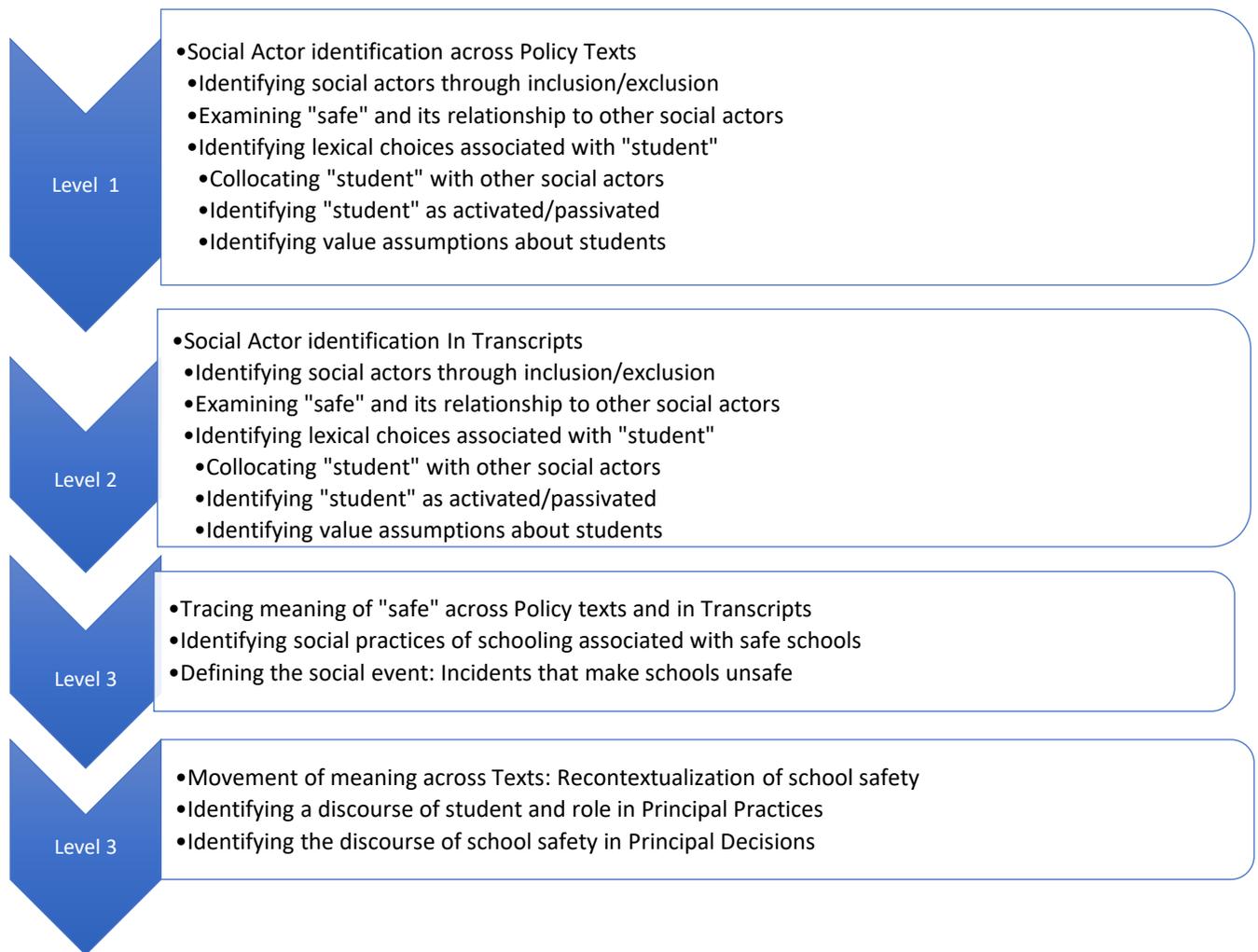


Figure 3.1 Tracing CDA Analytic Concepts from Internal/External Relations to Responding to Research Questions

### **Levels of Analysis in This Study**

In this study, the “textually-oriented discourse analysis” (Fairclough, 2003) combined linguistic and text analysis. First, linguistic analysis was conducted across the genre chain for all social actors and their relationships with other words using two tools: collocation and lexical choices (defined below). Second, a text analysis was carried out across the genre chain in order to identify the different levels of social life; this was also conducted with interviews. The third level of analysis, brought together elements of the linguistic and text analysis to identify a discourse of student and of safety as they emerged from the data, as well as how these impacted how high school principals interpreted policy about school safety.



**Figure 3.2 Levels of CDA Across the Genre Chain**

**CDA Level 1.** This first level of analysis was proposed by Fairclough (2003) as essential to showing the internal relations contained in texts. In this study, this level of analysis focused on defining school safety using linguistic tools. Fairclough (2003) suggested that internal relations are comprised of both relations that are present (syntagmatic) and ones that are absent (paradigmatic). Lexical relations were used to follow words present in text and their relations with other words. In this instance, school safety was defined through the identification of social actors, identifying how students were represented in text, and how safe was related to other

words in text. Lexical tools that were used include: social actor inclusion/exclusion; collocation; lexical choices; social actor activation/passivation; and value assumptions.

***Social actor representation.*** Linguistic tools were used to demonstrate how social actors were represented within and across text. For example, the lexical choice “kid” to mean “student” was only used in interviews. While the use of this word may be traced to the colloquialisms that occur in oral speech, this change can also signal a difference in the way “students” were represented in that genre.

***Inclusion/Exclusion.*** Fairclough (2003) defined the term social actor as a participant in text and identified different ways social actors are represented as participants in social processes, through their presence (inclusion) or absence (exclusion). Inclusion is if and how they are present in the text and exclusion is if the social actor was absent, but should logically be in the text. If a social actor is included, was a noun or pronoun used, and were they present as activated (an actor in the social process) or passivated (as the recipient or receiver of the action)? Inclusion also refers to whether social actors were personalized, or referred to indirectly, represented specifically by name, or generically, by category. If a social actor was excluded, was that social actor present at some point, then intentionally suppressed, or were they backgrounded, subsumed in another category until they disappeared? Thus, are they represented as part of a social group with social significance? For example, “if ‘the poor’ are consistently passivated (represented as subject to the action of others), the implication is that they are incapable of agency” (p. 222).

In this study, human social actors were identified starting with a list provided in the Ministry text, the *Mandate for the School System Province of British Columbia: Statement of Educational Policy Order* (1989). In Section C, subsection *Duties, Rights and Responsibilities*, a list of 11 participants in the educational system was provided. Using this list as a starting point, a

word count across all 20 documents was conducted. This analysis noted that sometimes words that represented human social actors were used synonymously and therefore, some categories of social actors were collapsed. Specifically, in this study, the social actor Student was determined to include the words: “student,” “students,” “children,” “youth,” “youths,” “kid,” “kids,” and “school community.” These were all different lexical terms used to represent the social actor “student.” The final count of human social actors for the corpus of data analyzed was 13: Students, Parents/Guardians, Teachers, Principals, Staff, School District, Superintendent, College of Teachers, Ministry of Education, Government Ministry, Police, Outside Community, and the Public. The social actor, College of Teachers, was part of the original list of social actors identified in the *Mandate for the School System Province of British Columbia: Statement of Educational Policy Order* (1989), however, due to the dissolution of this institution by the provincial government in Bill 12 *Repeal of Teaching Profession Act and end of the British Columbia College of Teachers* (2011), it was not a term present in any of the documents.

**Collocations.** Collocations refer to the patterns of co-occurrences between words that take place through text and transcripts, for example, what words are located along with the words “principal,” “safety,” “children,” or “students.” Collocations identify patterns and frequency of repetitions of words in text, and are a powerful tool in identifying the relations of those words within the text. Collocations have implications for the production of commonalities that are implicated in the production or reproduction of social difference within texts.

Patterns and frequency of words identify possible relations between words that appear together. At this stage of analysis, a concordance line of +/- seven words was used to identify the words that are co-located with each of the social actors examined. To create the concordance line, when a social actor was identified, it was highlighted, and the seven words before and the

seven words after it were selected. Then, these lines were extracted from the texts and compiled separately. For example, a sample of concordance lines for the social actor student appeared as in Table 3.3.

**Table 3.2 Sample Concordance Lines for Student(s)**

<p>it would be a <i>community</i> of ahh, <i>teachers</i>, <b>students</b> and <i>parents</i> working together with RESPECT and  dignity</p> <p>we offer programs, we do programs for all <b>students</b>, we bring in <i>speakers</i>, ahh, also <i>speakers</i> for  an effort to accommodate varying <i>parental</i> and <b>student</b> expectations of <i>school services</i>, <i>public schools</i>, within  within available resources, will provide <i>parents</i> and <b>students</b> with choice of programs. BC Ministry of</p>
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Concordance lines were made for each social actor to identify collocated words. In the excerpts above, the social actor Student was noted to co-occur with the words “community,” “teachers,” “parents,” “school,” “Ministry,” and the wider “community” (i.e., speakers). One notable relationship identified in Table 3.3 was between the human social actor, Student, and the human social actor, Parents.

**Lexical choices.** Lexical choices were used in two ways. First, as the word choices used represent the same social actor, and; second, in terms of patterns of co-occurrence between words. In the first instance, lexical choice was used to identify where and when the social actor Student appeared as the words “student,” “child,” “youth,” or “kid.” In the second instance, patterns of co-occurrence provided insight about representation, for example, the significance of the relationships between “student” and “victim, and “youth” and “crime.”

Identifying in which genres lexical choices occur also signals a difference in how social actors occur across genres, for example, when words that appear related to a specific social actor suddenly appear in a different genre without a social actor, an actorless action, like “school violence.” Lexical choices also helped identify when relationships between words change within

and across texts; this word change is referred to as a lexical turn. One example of a lexical turn was when the data identified that that relationship between the words “student” and “victim” or “student victim” turns to a discussion related to “student” as related to “offender” or “student offender.”

***Activation/Passivation.*** The context of the social actor in the text also identified whether the social actor was activated (acting on/or affecting other social actors) or was passivated (acted upon, or subject to the actions of others).

***Value assumptions.*** Value assumptions are about what is good or desirable. Some texts contain explicit evaluations (That’s great!), but most are assumed. Some value assumptions can be triggered, for example, “violence” in schools implies that there is a risk to students in school. For example, “inappropriate behaviour,” or “incident” when linked to violence implies a risk to students in schools that can lead to panic about school safety. A “team player” or “good student” implies something desirable to the building of community. Value assumptions provide clues that link them to specific discourses.

**CDA Level 2.** The text analysis, a second level of analysis, took into consideration the relationships between linguistic tools and text analysis and used these to identify processes within texts. In combination, linguistic tools and text analysis allowed for the discourses identified to be grounded in an analysis of text, as well as the processes that comprised social practices used by principals about school safety. Fairclough (2003) stated, “[c]ritical discourse analysis is concerned with continuity and change at this more abstract, more structural, level (text), as well as what happens in a particular text” (p. 6). Further “text analysis is an essential part of discourse analysis...I see discourse analysis as ‘oscillating’ between a focus on specific texts and a focus on...the relative durable social structuring of language” (p. 3). This analysis

examined movement of meaning across genres, and in addition, borrowing from Patton (2002), sensitizing concepts about how social actors can be positioned in text with different outcomes, may have impacted the analysis.

***Recontextualization.*** Fairclough (2003) defined genre as “text as action” (p. 17), that is to say, genres are explicit ways through which texts are enacted or act, through semantic and/or grammatical relations between sentences. For example, legislation is written with specific intentions as exhibited by their legal terminology, they contain references to other legislation, and include implicit assumptions that they will lead to action. Genre chains are “genres which are regularly and predictably chained together such that meanings are moved and transformed along the chain, and recontextualized and transformed in regular ways” (p. 26). In this study, the genre chain of policy texts allowed me to identify the recontextualization or semiotic transformations that occurred as ideas moved from genre to genre; specifically, from Ministry legislation and policy, to school board policy, to school codes of conduct.

This genre chain highlighted how school safety was represented and related to other social actors across policy texts. Examining the similarities in intertextuality and semantics between policy texts and then looking for those similarities in transcripts with principals made visible how concepts and definitions from policy texts stayed the same or changed, were recontextualized, in their interpretation by principals. Specifically, the process of selectivity and filtering to control for meaning made visible how specific concepts were taken from one context to another as quotes, and also allowed for examining how meanings were transformed from policy to interpretations of policy. In this way, the analysis of a genre chain helped identify the interdiscursive nature of school safety and how and what was recontextualized from policy to the interpretation of policy by high school principals.

*Sensitizing concepts.* Text analysis made evident larger issues associated with the relationships between words. These relationships were better able to be understood in context. Patton (2002) identified sensitizing concepts as significant words and suggested that the analyst can use these as a reference point from which to begin organizing data. For example, “good kids” or “perpetrators.”

*Identifying social practices in context.* Text analysis allowed for processes to be identified. These processes provided evidence that pointed to social practices related to school safety. Some processes that were identified included: how principals used specific Ministry or school board policies; the process principals used to define the social event “incident” and; the process of considering other human social actors when making decisions about safety. In addition, this text analysis also highlighted the concerns of principals, in particular, in making it known that schools—as part of the social structure of the BC school system—are safe places. Sensitizing concepts, alongside the levels of social life provided by Fairclough (2003), allowed for general themes to be applied. These themes then allowed for the social practices related to school safety to surface.

Following Patton (2002), the concept of convergence was applied throughout the data. Recurring regularities that seemed to fit together were included under a loose category. These categories were then sorted through and organized. For example, all the segments of data that spoke about safety were initially simply coded as “safe” and were later separated into different categories based on whether it included social actors or was specific social events (incidents), the processes associated with incidents, and also if these processes were proactive or reactive. General categories were later re-examined to see if each category had enough in common within them, internal homogeneity, to suggest that they fit together, and whether the differences

between categories were clear enough and did not overlap. This required returning to the original categories several times to ensure that the data within each category fit or whether the category needed to be expanded, more focused, or redefined.

**CDA Level 3.** The final stage of analysis brought together the representation of social actors within policy texts and the inherent assumptions about “students” and about “safety” to gain insight into how these assumptions were normalized. As normalized assumptions are accepted, implications of social difference that arose out of these were extrapolated. In combination, what this analysis provided were discourses specific to “student” and “safe” that may be implicated in how high school principals interpreted policy to inform their practices of school safety.

For example, the definition of “safe” in one text, may have similar and/or different meanings at different levels of schooling. The policy texts were produced at different levels of governance—Ministry, School Board, and School—that may shape meanings associated with a word like “safe.” Linguistic tools, like collocation showed that, through repetition, words were powerful in identifying what was important, at what level, for whom. Text analysis allowed insight about what was identified in texts through the context of how it was stated in texts: how principals defined “unsafe incidents” (social event); made decisions about policy (social structure); took into consideration social actors across genres, and; the social practices (procedures they used) related to these events. Text analysis also allowed for implied social differences between schools, and between students, to be identified.

**Key Terminology.** Throughout the data, key terms were used, sometimes interchangeably by principals. However, the following words are defined as they are used in this study.

***Policy.*** Formal statements by the Ministry, school Board, or Codes of Conduct detailing particular actions.

***Guidelines.*** Systematically derived statements that principals used to help make decisions in specific circumstances.

***Protocols.*** A framework for responding to different situations. A framework responds to the questions For whom? Why or from what? When? And response by whom?

***Procedures.*** A list of “how-to” instructions to be followed specifically.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Conducting this study and writing this dissertation raised three ethical dilemmas. First, I recognize that the research endeavor is value laden and that my research questions, choice of methodology, and analysis were shaped by my biases and values. As an educator who has been a teacher and department head, I recognize the complexity of simultaneously balancing what I felt would benefit my students, and addressing administrative duties. These experiences perhaps biased how I looked at the data through an educator’s lens. To mitigate some of these effects, using linguistic tools in CDA allowed my findings to be based on the data, rather than making assumptions based on my own experiences.

A second dilemma was the small population of principals across the school districts that affected my sample size, and in turn, may have posed confidentiality issues. There was a combined total of 40 high school principals across the two school districts studied. The smaller school district had only one dozen principals. The small number of possible participants for this study posed issues concerning confidentiality and anonymity. Both school districts had monthly meetings of school principals and so it was possible that information about the study was shared amongst participants and the rest of the principals in the school district. The principals all asked

questions like: How many other principals have you interviewed from this school district? Have you been to this or that school? I responded with numbers of participants, but did not respond to questions that could potentially expose participants. My responsibility as a researcher was to ensure that each principal knew that his or her participation would not be shared with anyone else.

A third issue was the recognition of an important limit of my study. This study examined how students were positioned in policy texts and by high school principals, but stopped short of exploring the lived experiences of the students themselves. It was necessary to constantly remind myself that in dealing with how policies impact practice, the voices and experiences of high school principals were the focus of this research. As I conducted this study, I may have had assumptions about principals and about schools that framed my interest in how discourses impact the everyday practices of principals. These assumptions impacted how I conducted this study, what I chose to analyze, and how I chose to represent my work in written text.

### **Summary**

This chapter was comprised of four sections. The first section described the researcher's position. The second section defined the qualitative methods. The third section explained CDA as the theoretically grounded method of analysis for examining how discourse was recontextualized across the genre chain, and how high principals interpreted policy. This section included the stages of analysis that were used in this study. The fourth section discussed some ethical questions that arose during the research.

## **Chapter 4 Analysis of Genre Chain of Policy Texts**

To understand what gives policy power, the discourses in policy must first be examined. This chapter presents an examination of the genre chain of policy texts including the Ministry, School Board, and School Codes of Conduct to respond to the research question; *How is school safety recontextualized in policy texts by the BC Ministry, School Boards, and School Codes of Conduct?* Divided in two sections, the first section examines how *Safety* is defined across the genre chain. The second section examines how *Student* is represented across the genre chain. Both *Safety* and *Student* are capitalized when I refer to them as social actors.

### **Defining Safety in Schools**

Defining *Safety*, as a social actor was the intended conclusion of the analysis. As such, to begin this analysis *Safety* was conceptualized by responding to critical questions related to safety across the genre chain. First, whose safety was being addressed? Second, from whom and what must social actors in schools be made safe? This section also examines safe in the texts to identify relationships between safety and other social actors. This section ends by describing a safe school based on policy texts.

### **Whose Safety?**

Social actors are participants in text, as well as the actors who constitute and are constituted by social events and practices (Fairclough, 2003). In this study, social actors included both human and non-human actors as both were positioned as acting in some way in the texts. In this case, human social actors were readily identifiable given terms, like students, teachers, and principals. Non-human social actors in this study included safety, for example, “*safety* demands that the school community respect each other.”

**Identifying human social actors.** Answering whose safety is being addressed begins with identifying human social actors. The BC Ministry of Education explicitly defined social actors in the *Statement of Policy Order/Mandate for the School System* (1989/ revised 2013). This text acknowledged 11 human social actors the Ministry identified as having “Duties, Rights, and Responsibilities” in schools (p. D-91). The importance of these human social actors was first assessed by counting the frequency of their mentions in the texts. Notably, though not part of the list identified in the *Statement of Policy Order/Mandate for the School System* (1989/ revised 2013), two other human social actors were also identified in the texts and are included in Table 4.1: Staff and Police.

**Table 4.1: Frequency of Human Social Actors Within the Genre Chain**

<b>Human Social Actors</b>	<b>Ministry</b>	<b>School Board</b>	<b>Codes of Conduct</b>
<i>Students</i>	362	229	160
<i>Parents/Guardians</i>	79	64	33
<i>Teachers</i>	19	6	28
<i>Principals</i>	27	72	8
<i>School Board</i>	126	69	8
<i>Superintendent/District officials</i>	9	3	5
<i>College of Teachers</i>	4	0	0
<i>Outside Community</i>	46	4	4
<i>Ministry of Education</i>	11	2	4
<i>Government Ministries</i>	20	0	0
<i>Public</i>	25	36	4
<i>Staff</i>	57	55	19
<i>Police</i>	8	51	3

In Table 4.1, human social actors are categorized by immediacy to school and so begin with Students and Parents. Next are human social actors who are in direct contact with Students in schools including Teachers and Principals. Next on the list are human social actors who work with schools, but at an arms-length distance from the students, including: the School Board, Superintendent, Community, the Ministry of Education, and other Government Ministries.

Finally, Staff and Police are noted. Of the social actors that appeared consistently across all policy texts, four were later selected for further analysis including Students, Parents, Teachers, and Principals.

Clearly, at nearly three times the frequency of any other social actor, Students dominate Ministry texts. In School Board texts, Students appear one and a half times more frequently than Parents. The remaining human social actors in descending order are Staff, Outside Community, Principals, Teachers, Superintendent, Police and College of Teachers. Of these, it should be noted that the College of Teachers ceased to exist in 2012 and is not mentioned in any other texts. The numbers suggest that Students are the possible focus of Ministry texts.

The prevalence of Students can also be found in School Board texts. In these, Students are mentioned three times more than any other human social actor. Compared to Ministry texts, Students are mentioned more frequently than any other human social actor. Other social actors that appeared in descending order and were separated in two groupings based on their comparable frequency are: in the first group, Principals, School Board, Parents, Staff, Police, who all appeared between 72 and 51 times in descending order, and in the second group, the Public, Teachers, Outside Community, Superintendent, Ministry of Education, and Other Ministries, with a frequency range of 36 to 0. What is particularly striking in the School Board texts is that Teachers only appear six times. While the presence of Staff might, in some instances include Teachers, if these two categories are combined they would add to 61. When they are compared, teachers/staff appear 61 times and police appear 51 times; these numbers would suggest these adult human social actors are given comparable weight in schools.

The Codes of Conduct, which were the shortest of all the policy texts, also contained the fewest number of social actors. What is notable is that these are the only texts in which Teachers

appeared in the top three social actors present. This text also had proportionately the highest mention of Staff and Police as social actors, the fewest mention of Principals, and the complete exclusion of any other Government Ministry. This may be the result of who wrote the Codes of Conduct and for whom they were written. Codes of Conduct were ordinarily given to Students and Parents, and mostly written by Principals and their Staff and approved by the School Board. This points to the Codes of Conduct as a policy implementation tool through which Ministry policies are materialized.

Identifying the presence, exclusion, and suppression of human social actors highlights the tone of the document, and provides clues about how these policies might be reflected in the social practices of principals in schools. For example, the frequency of Students across the documents might help to identify this social actor relative to their importance in these policy texts. The exclusion of the College of Teachers that appeared only in Ministry texts speaks to changes within the Ministry. The apparent backgrounding of Teachers through their possible incorporation into the social actor of “Staff” might point to an intention to make it clear that Teachers are part of the school and like staff, are under the supervision of the Principal. At the same time, it appears that Teachers play a role in the implementation of Ministry policies as stated in the Codes of Conduct.

Remarkable is the presence of Police across these policy texts. Police appears in Ministry texts eight times, in School Board texts 51 times, and in Codes of Conduct, three times. This begs the question of why this social actor appears so frequently at the school board level. Why were police required in school board documents and what does that mean for the work of principals?

**Identifying non-human social actors.** As important as the human social actors, the concept of Safe animated the texts and as a participant in texts it was identified as a non-human social actor. All policy documents were chosen for their relationship to the *BC Safe Schools Act* (2006), however it was important to identify the ways in which Safe was a non-human social actor in these policy texts. To understand how “Safe” is conceptualized in the texts, it is necessary to analyze the frequency of “Safe” and words related to “Safe” like: harm, violence, threat, bullying, incident, intimidation, harassment, weapon, fight, and derivatives of the word safe like safety, safely, and unsafe. While all these words appeared across the policy texts, the word Safe was used most frequently. It was also noted, as will be examined later, that the word Safe occurred within the same sentences as many of the other words that were counted from the list above. This led to the extraction of concordance lines where words related to safe were present. A collocation analysis was then conducted to identify any words collocated with safe within these concordance lines. This collocation identified relationships between Safe and human social actors, and to non-human social actors within policy texts.

**Collocating human social actors and Safe.** The human social actor most frequent across the concordance lines of Safe varied depending on the policy texts (see Table 4.2). In Ministry texts, the most frequent social actor mentioned was the School Board and then Students. In School Board texts, Students appeared most often, nearly four times more frequently than any other social actor. Interestingly, in School Board texts, Police were the next most frequent, but were closely followed by a wide number of social actors. In the Codes of Conduct, Students and School Board/District was mentioned most frequently. A notable observation was the absence of Principals and Teachers in the table. Principals, as a focus of this study, might have been expected to be collocated with the social actor Safe. And also, given the leadership position of

Principals and the inferred role of Teachers in implementing the Codes of Conduct, the absence of these social actors in terms of Safe, raises questions about their assumed role in relation to Student safety. It is also important to note the absence of Police in concordance lines of Ministry texts, but its presence in concordance lines of School Board texts and Codes of Conduct.

Further context for the prevalence of the collocation of Safe and School Board in Ministry of Education texts is needed. The Ministry assigns implementation of school safety to the School Board. For example, “Schools and boards of education track violent incidents in a variety of forms, and use that information in conjunction with other measures to monitor school safety and plan for improvements” (p. 19). And in another example, “Together, these two information systems assist schools and boards of education to monitor safety issues and plan comprehensive strategies to address them” (p. 21). Clearly, the Ministry expects the School Boards to track and monitor safety.

**Table 4.2 Human Actors Collocated with Safe**

<b>Safe</b>	<b>Ministry</b>	<b>School Board</b>	<b>Codes of Conduct</b>
Student	<b>24</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>3</b>
Child(ren)	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>
Youth	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
Kid	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
In-School Community	<b>15</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>
School Board/District	<b>28</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>
Superintendent	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>
Police	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>
Parents	<b>8</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>

Also important was that in Ministry texts there was a lexical pairing of “student safety” (see Table 4.3) which suggests that safety in school, at least in Ministry texts, was about Students. Other social actors present in Ministry texts were Parents; however, it should be observed that the safety of Students and their Parents in Ministry texts was most related to the

phrase “safe to inform.” “Safe to inform” was uni-directional in that it was about Students and Parents informing the school about concerns that took place in school. This collocation is important because the role of Students and Parents is defined in relation to a school-identified goal, or something that the school is asking of them.

**Table 4.3 Excerpts: Safe for Whom**

*students* benefit academically and socially from a **safe**, caring and orderly learning environment; discrimination, bullying, harassment, intimidation and violence. *Student safety* is paramount and can only be called for provincial standards to address *student safety* in schools. As a result, this document the flow of information related to *student safety* in schools. This is a matter within legislative provisions. However, heightened concern for *student safety* in recent years has led schools to That schools and their communities face in providing **safe** environments for our *children* and *youth*, and Effective response strategies facilitate the **safe** reporting of safety concerns, and encourage *victims (Students)* actions. Safe schools make it easy and **safe** for *students* and their *parents* to inform

In School Board texts, Safe collocated with Students and Children, and with Police. In these texts, the word pairing “student safety” identified Students as the objects for school safety. It is also important that as Table 4.4 demonstrates, there were other words that were collocated with Safe including “children” and “learner.” The use of these words is discussed in Chapter 5., but suggests that the words used reflect different expectations. What is also noteworthy is that the word Visitors also appeared here, as human social actors whose safety in schools also needed to be taken into account. Already made responsible by the Ministry “to fostering optimal environments for learning” in *The Guide* (2006, 25) and in the policy document, *Safe and Caring School Communities* (2004, p. 2), the School Board is also “committed to providing safe and caring environments” in the *Safe Schools Handbook of Policies and Procedures* (2012, p. 17), and in the *Safe and Caring District Code of Conduct* (2012, p. 1). The absence of Principals and Teachers within School Boards texts was notable, despite directly teaching and working with students in schools.

**Table 4.4 Excerpts: Collocating Safe and Human Social Actors**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Social Actor Student</b></p> <p>but not limited to, concern for the <i>student's safety</i>, need to gather information from a student that immediate parent notification would compromise <i>student safety</i> and/or the security of an evidence of the Principal or designate, the <i>child's safety</i> and well-being are not at increased risk; and c</p> <p>CONDUCT 1.1 The Board is committed to providing <b>safe</b> and caring environments in which all <i>learners</i> student behaviour is a necessity to establish <b>safe</b> and caring environments that foster <i>student</i> learning</p> <p>Board is committed to providing a <b>safe</b>, supportive environment for all <i>students</i>. The school board</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Additional Social Actors</b></p> <p>adapted as necessary to ensure that the <b>safety</b> and security of <i>students, staff</i> and <i>property</i></p> <p>(c) develop guidelines for supervision to ensure the <b>safety</b> of <i>staff, students</i> and <i>visitors</i> at all school-sponsored</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Schools ought to be <b>safe</b>, supportive places for <i>students</i> and <i>staff</i>. Growing</p>
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In Codes of Conduct, in which the concordance lines of Safe were most related to Students, Parents, and School Board, the collocations revealed a more personal tone to the texts. Specifically, Safe was collocated with the pronoun “everyone” and “we” that were used to refer to all human social actors in the school including Students (see Table 4.5). The term “learning community” also included Student and other human social actors who were not specified. School Codes of Conduct were written specifically for Students and appeared to identify these human social actors more personally. The use of the pronouns “we” and “our” may be an attempt to engage students’ ownership in school safety for “everyone.” This suggests that when principals question students about their behaviours in schools, they can also point to the Codes of Conduct to remind students of their duties and responsibilities to the school.

**Table 4.5 Excerpts: Safe in Codes of Conduct**

<p>We believe that school should be a <b>safe</b> place for learning and that <i>everyone</i> has</p> <p>We want our school to be a <b>safe</b> and welcoming place for <i>everyone</i>. Actions that</p> <p>SERIOUS OFFENCES A school must provide a <b>safe</b> and comfortable environment for <i>students</i> to learn</p> <p>of Royal Road’s Secondary is to be a <b>safe</b> and respectful learning <i>community</i> where all <i>students</i></p>
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Across the genre chain, Students were identified as needing to be safe. Other human social actors that were also present like Parents and School Boards. Principals and Teachers were markedly absent in School Board texts, and this begs the question of who, in direct contact with Students, would be ensuring that Students are safe? Also in these collocations, the occurrence of Parents was minimal and only appeared eight times in Ministry texts. Of these, twice it was in reference to the Parents Advisory Board.

That Parents were mentioned across the genre chain could imply that they played a role in terms of safety for their children in schools. However, Principals and Teachers, even if assumed to be backgrounded within other categories, are social actors who are physically present in schools, yet do not appear collocated with safe. While this may or may not be related to the antagonistic relationship between Ministries of Education and teachers, it needs to be noted that the Ministry documents relevant to school safety were all brought in by the BC Liberal Government. In summary, across the genre chain, both through the frequency of occurrences of the Student and through collocations of Safe, Students were referred to as the social actors who needed to be safe.

### **Safe from Whom and What?**

If Students need to be kept Safe, it follows to ask, from whom? Safe from what? Further analysis of Ministry and School Board texts, and Codes of Conduct, shows the ways in which certain social actors are responsible for making school unsafe, and collocating safe and other non-human social actors shows how and under what conditions these social actors co-occur.

**Safe from whom?** Identified in Ministry texts were two categories of human social actors related to unsafe schools: Persons and Students. One observation was that Person might include references to Student, Intruder, and Visitor. The majority of the time, however, school

safety was found to be associated with the social actor Student. For example, in the concordance lines in Table 4.6, “youth” and “violence” co-occur repeatedly, and “persons” responsible could implicitly refer to Student.

**Table 4.6 Excerpts: Safe from Whom?**

<p><b>Person</b></p> <p><i>person’s</i> presence is considered detrimental to the <b>safety</b> or well-being of another person.</p>
<p><b>Student</b></p> <p>Concerns about <i>youth</i> violence in recent years, <b>safe</b> schools have anticipated and made additional provisions schools keep records of all reports of <b>unsafe</b> conditions or actions and their responses to [<i>records of actions by Students</i>]</p> <p>manner which in no way compromises the <b>safety</b> or well-being of others Safe &amp; Caring [<i>Student</i>]</p>

Collocations of Safe across the genre chain highlighted that the social actor most responsible for making school unsafe was Students. While there was some vague language about who students needed to be kept safe from, it can be inferred that the Persons whose actions make the school unsafe are the same actors who are most likely to be the victims: the social actor Student. Students were positioned as both the ones who needed to be kept Safe, and the Persons responsible for making the school unsafe. They were both victims and offenders in terms of school safety. It can be suggested that principals’ practices of school safety might be complicated by a human social actor who was positioned as both victim and offender. In addition, the co-occurrence of “Safe Schools” as a social actor that “anticipated and made additional provisions” suggests that “Safe Schools” are responsible for school safety.

**Safe from what? Other possible non-human social actors.** In trying to identify safe from “what” for students in school, two stages of analysis were conducted. In the first, a linguistic analysis identified words across the genre chain that appeared related to Safe. In the second, collocations were carried out to see if they co-occurred with Safe. The first stage of analysis identified words that appeared related to Safe across the policy texts (see Table 4.7).

Words that appeared across genre chain included: “incident,” “situation,” “concern,” and “violation.

**Table 4.7: Compilations of Non-Human Social Actors Across Data Levels**

<b>Texts</b>	<b>Incident</b>	<b>Situation</b>	<b>Concern</b>	<b>Violation</b>
Ministry	<b>71</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>5</b>
School Board	<b>11</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>
Codes of Conduct	<b>7</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>0</b>

In Ministry texts, the words “incident,” 71 times, and “concerns,” 65 times, were prevalent. School Board texts focused on “incidents” 11 times. Though “incident” appeared seven times in Codes of Conduct, the word “concern” was present more often, 12 times. It was interesting that in Ministry texts, the kinds of “incidents” noted in concordance lines included: bullying, harassment, intimidation, illegal acts, possession (of alcohol or drugs), and violence. In School Board texts and Codes of Conduct, incidents appeared as “serious incidents.” The word “concern” in Ministry texts also suggested that it might be a precursor to “situations” or “incidents.” Specifically, that something might be considered a “concern” prior to being defined as a situation or an incident, and especially a “violation.” The importance of lexical choices suggests that Ministry texts were more likely to include “concerns” before they became “incidents.” Simultaneously, Codes of Conduct were also more likely to include “concerns” prior to anything becoming an “incident.”

The second stage was collocating safe and any other non-human social actor. This was done to extrapolate “what” was meant by school safety. Table 4.8 provides a list of words that were collocated with the social actor Safe. Observed in this table is that Ministry texts had more non-human social actors collocated with Safe than any other texts. Also noted was that the words that appeared in School Board texts were “violence,” “bullying,” and “incident.” In Codes of

Conduct, the words that co-occurred with Safe were “intimidation,” “bullying,” and “harassment.”

**Table 4.8 Collocations of Safe and Social Actors They are Safe From**

<b>Collocation: SAFE</b>	<b>Ministry</b>	<b>School Board</b>	<b>Codes of Conduct</b>
<b>Concerns</b>	42	0	0
<b>Incident (s)</b>	12	2	0
<b>Force</b>	10	0	0
<b>Intimidation</b>	8	0	1
<b>Violence</b>	7	5	0
<b>Harassment</b>	6	0	1
<b>Bullying</b>	6	4	1

Words collocated with Safe were concentrated in Ministry texts, and included “concerns,” “incidents,” and “force.” Also interesting was that in the concordance lines for Safe, when collocated with the list of words in Table 4.8, there were no human social actors identified as causing or contributing to these negative behaviours. The result, therefore, is that “violence in schools” as demonstrated in Table 4.9—whether as violence, inappropriate behaviour, theft, bullying, cyber-bullying, or vandalism—was constructed as a process that was not related to any human social actor. Again, actorless instances of negative behaviour might make it more difficult for principals to respond.

**Table 4.9 Excerpts: Safe from What” in Ministry Texts**

*violence* in schools. In June 2003, the **Safe** Schools Task Force completed a report on necessary to develop and maintain a welcoming and **safe** school environment free of *violence, bullying, cyberbullying,* characteristics; any form of *violence, theft, vandalism*. 2.3 **Safe** and caring school environments do not tolerate Right to learn and work in a **safe** environment. *Bullying, harassment, intimidation, fighting* or being lockers, textbooks, or other school property 7. **Safe** and caring school environments are free from *acts* and stop the *inappropriate* and/or **unsafe** behaviour. The goal of any intervention is be implemented to alter the *inappropriate* and/or **unsafe** behaviour. NOTIFICATION Reasonable steps will be taken

The *Safe Schools Act* (2006) defined Safe through the terms associated with a lack of safety, specifically, bullying, harassment, and intimidation, and discrimination defined as “written, verbal, or physical act” which:

- a. physical or emotionally harms a student or damages the student’s property,
- b. substantially interferes with a student’s education; or
- c. is so severe, persistent, or pervasive that it creates an intimidating or threatening educational environment; or
- d. substantially disrupts the orderly operation of the school. (p. 2)

In combination, what appears to happen is that Safe is about specific bullying, harassment and intimidation, and yet no human social actors were identified with incidents or concerns. Actorless actions like Violence, Bullying, Cyber-bullying, Harassment, Intimidation were, thus, constructed as non-human social actors who themselves were acting to make schools unsafe.

### **Safe and Policy-Related Words in Texts**

This subsection examines whether policy texts appeared in response to the need for a policy on safety because there was none, or because safety in schools needed to be improved. It also examines the kinds of policy-related words that appear in the texts to identify which level of schooling was most responsible for the implementation of school safety practices.

**To make or maintain safety:** Key to understanding school safety texts was determining if schools were perceived as safe. Of the documents analyzed, the oldest document was the *Safe, Caring and Orderly Schools: A Guide* (2003). The Preface of this document stated that its purpose was to make “recommendations for improving school safety...in keeping with the government’s New Era vision of safe streets and schools in every community” (p. 3). What can be inferred from this statement is that there was reason to assume that the streets were unsafe,

therefore, identifying a need for “improving school safety.” The policy document that followed the *Safe and Caring Communities Policy* (2004, rev 2012) stated its intention to guide “boards of education and schools in their efforts to create safe and inclusive learning environments and develop prevention and intervention strategies for dealing with harmful behaviours and threats or risks of violence” (p. 1). This intention “to create” alludes to a lack of safety and inclusivity in schools.

The *Safe Schools Act* (2006) acknowledged “students benefit academically and socially from a safe, caring, and orderly learning environment” and the aim of British Columbians “to create a school system free from bullying, harassment, intimidation, and discrimination” (p. 1).

The implication of an Act “to create” again implies that schools are unsafe and require being made safe; A lack of safety serves the purpose of requiring Principals to make schools safe.

that there was no safety before, and that the Act will serve that purpose. Safety defined through the words bullying, harassment, intimidation, and discrimination, resonate school unsafety, not school safety. The issues identified in this act are confined to things that might happen inside the school; there is no mention of unsafe streets.

**Policy words related to Safety.** It follows that if Ministry texts purport that schools are unsafe and need to be “made safe” then related policy words would be present in the texts. This portion of the analysis required that a frequency count of words related to policy words was conducted, followed by examining the co-occurrence of Safe with these words.

The set of policy words that were present across the policy texts included: “policy,” “guide,” “regulations,” and “law.” “Policy” appeared across the genre chain. Policy was the most frequent word across the texts; it appeared in Ministry, 37 times, in School Board texts, 52 times, and in the Codes of Conduct, 12 times (see Table 4.10).

**Table 4.10 Frequency Count of Procedural Words Across Genre Chain**

<b>Texts</b>	<b>Policy</b>	<b>Guide</b>	<b>Regulations</b>	<b>Law</b>
Ministry	37	26	16	13
School Board	52	12	21	10
Codes of Conduct	12	4	2	8

In Ministry texts, “policy” was paired as either “district policy” or school “board policy” more than any other word in the following way “as required by school district policy.” In School Board texts, “policy” was in direct reference to the “district’s safe and caring schools policy” or the “school code of conduct...district policy.” It was also noted that 15 times the mention of “policy” was in reference to a specific policy (e.g., Policy #37262). Mentions of specific policies were also the trend in the Codes of Conduct. This demonstrated that Ministry texts placed responsibility for the policy on the school boards. School Board texts and Codes of Conduct referenced specific Ministry policies, another demonstration of the Ministry texts as the genre of governance.

The second part of the analysis of non-human social actors collocated Safe with other policy words. In this case, four words were identified, these included: “reports,” “procedures,” “expectations,” and “guide” (see Table 4.11). It is striking that the words largely occur only in Ministry texts.

**Table 4.11 Collocation of Safe with Procedural Words**

<b>Texts</b>	<b>Report (s, ed, ing)</b>	<b>Procedures</b>	<b>Expectations</b>	<b>Guide</b>
<b>Ministry</b>	38	17	5	13
<b>School Board</b>	1	14	0	1
<b>Codes of Conduct</b>	0	0	0	3

For the most part, when the word “report” occurred in concordance lines of Safe, it was noted that they appeared as “made it safer to *report* safety concerns” and “made *reporting* safety

concerns a common.” This led to a question about who or how this reporting of safety concerns was made. A link was found in terms of the word “inform” and led to a collocation of Safe and “inform.” Table 4.12 demonstrates that while the word “inform” was used in terms of relaying information from the schools to students or parents, it appears to have been primarily used unidirectionally to encourage parents and students to inform the school about “concerns” and “incidents.” In this way, the role of information was more related to reporting, than to receiving information, as is noted in the sample concordance lines from Ministry texts, “*information*. – make it easier to *report* safety concerns: students know that all staff members.”

**Table 4.12 Excerpts: Student Collocated with “Inform”**

<p><b>INFORM: Ministry</b></p> <p>Their parents to <i>inform</i> school authorities of <b>safety</b> concerns – make a “big deal” about bullying          Expectations – expected behaviours – including <i>informing</i> adults about <b>safety</b> concerns – inappropriate          behaviours – including disruptive behaviours and          ways – help to make the school a <b>safe</b>, caring and orderly place – <i>inform</i> a “tellable”</p>
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The importance of Students and Parents telling adults and therefore, “informing,” suggests that safety was constructed in relation to Students feeling safe to report incidents in the school to a “tellable” adult they trusted in the school. The assumption is that the report will lead to a response. Students report so the school can deal with the incident. The use of informing in this way occurred most frequently in Ministry texts.

### **Describing a Safe School**

This part focuses on the *whats* within a school that made the environment safe. In this case, the social actors Safe and Student were collocated. These analyses led to a list of words that co-occurred with a “Safe School” and with what students were expected to be able to do because the school environment was Safe.

**Features of safe schools: Safe.** An analysis of the social actor Safe is presented in Table 4.13. This analysis identified words that could be related with a Safe School. Words that were first identified at the Ministry level, like “caring,” “orderly,” and “responsibility,” were traced across the genre chain. What these analyses revealed was that through the genre chain “caring” occurs three times more frequently than other words in the School Board texts and three times more than other words in the Codes of Conduct. “Orderly” also appeared in both Ministry texts. “Responsibility” was also mentioned in Ministry texts. These were adjectives used to describe the policy and, therefore, this was not surprising. However, they were not defined, and this was important.

**Table 4.13 Co-occurring Features of Safe.**

<b>Texts</b>	<b>Caring</b>	<b>Orderly</b>	<b>Respect</b>	<b>Respons (e, ible, ibility)</b>
<b>Ministry</b>	60	55	0	13
<b>School Board</b>	26	0	2	2
<b>Codes of Conduct</b>	10	2	3	1

“Respect” did not appear in Ministry texts, and only appears twice in School Board texts, and yet thus is the second most frequent word in Codes of Conduct. Again, most words related to Safe Schools appeared in Ministry texts and positioned Ministry texts as the governing document. It is also important to note that Ministry documents used the adjectives “Safe, Caring, and Orderly” in the name of the legislation, and it is therefore not surprising that the words were found related to each other in Ministry documents. It is noteworthy, however, that despite this lexical pairing of “safe, caring, and orderly,” orderly is absent in other texts. This perhaps reflects recent changes where “safe, caring, and orderly” policies were shortened to “safe and caring.” The removal of the word “orderly” might be linked to a Ministry re-focus on building community, rather than on maintaining order.

**Features of schools that are safe: Student.** Collocations of the social actor Student were also conducted to identify words that co-occurred with this social actor. Words that co-occurred with Student are listed in Table 4.14. Two words that had been collocated with the social actor Safe were also identified with the social actor Student: “care” and “respect.” Other words that were collocated with Student included: “support,” “learn,” “education,” “relationships,” “individual,” “belonging,” and “achieve.”

**Table 4.14 What Students Should be able to do**

<b>Texts</b>	<b>Care (ing)</b>	<b>Respect (ing, ful)</b>	<b>Learning</b>	<b>Education (al)</b>	<b>Relationships, al)</b>	<b>Individual (ity)</b>	<b>Belonging</b>	<b>Achieve (ment)</b>
<b>Ministry</b>	10	15	10	35	6	9	10	6
<b>School Board</b>	4	7	1	13	0	1	0	4
<b>Codes of Conduct</b>	3	2	10	1	0	2	0	2

The frequency of the co-occurring words was different across texts. For example, in Ministry texts, “education” appeared two times more than the next most used word, “respect.” In School Board texts, the most frequent words were “education,” 13 times, and “respect,” seven times. In Codes of Conduct, “learning” was most frequent, appearing three times more frequently than the next most common word, “care.” This difference in the occurrence for words collocated with Student might indicate for whom the Codes of Conduct were intended. While Ministry and School Board texts were intended for adult readers, Codes of Conduct were intended to make clear the expectations schools had of Students. Codes of Conduct highlighted learning; this perhaps suggested that the responsibility of students was to learn.

Interestingly, the word “belonging” only appeared in Ministry texts. This is surprising given the number of research studies associating student feelings of belonging to feeling safe in school (e.g., D’hondt, van Houtte, & Stevens, 2015; Van Ryzin, Gravely, & Roseth, 2009). The absence of this word in policy implementation tools, like those provided by the School Board,

opens questions about how the School Board responds to the responsibilities placed on them by the Ministry. Though the Ministry is in a position to use discourses and make recommendations identified in research, if these are not visible in School Board texts and Codes of Conduct, it begs the question of “how” or “what other ways” are used to ensure that schools are safe? This in turn would beg the question about the tone and/or discourses reflected in school board policies that might guide the work of principals.

### **Student Representations**

This section examines how the human actor Student was positioned within and across the genre chain through the use of different words. While on the surface it might appear that the words that are used to discuss Students as a social actor group might be objective, this analysis suggests that each word was a lexical choice that positioned this social actor differently. The lexical choice used to represent Student alongside how these choices position students as acting (activated) or acted upon (passivated) reveal value assumptions that emerge within these sets of relations (Fairclough 2003).

This analysis highlights how a discourse about Students positions them in ways that impacts the practices of principals in maintaining school safety by grouping them as one, and then normalizing the prospect of their misbehaviour. This discourse constituted a framework for normalizing dominant perspectives that, when accepted as fact, positioned Students as intentionally acting in negative ways. This normalizing discourse narrows the construction of misbehaviour. The implication of this discourse is the criminalization of misbehaviour that is used to justify school exclusion of students through suspension.

This section is comprised of three sub-sections. The first examines the different words that were used to reference “student” and the possible implications for each of these choices. The

second sub-section analyzes different representations to identify under which conditions they appeared as activated or passivated. The third sub-section suggests a discourse of Student that impacts how principals might make decisions about school safety if they were informed by these policy texts.

### **Lexical Representations of Students Across the Genre Chain**

The words chosen to identify a social actor play a significant role in how that social actor is represented within the text (Fairclough, 2010). In this case, the human actor Student is represented through different words, each positioning them differently. Table 4.15 shows how Student appeared throughout the genre chain as different words. Student(s), Child/Children, Youth, Kid, and Community were identified and kept separate for this portion of the analysis. The most common word across genre chain was “student,” but “child” was also used in Ministry and School Board texts. Children was used in Ministry texts, and Codes of Conduct. The word “youth” was used in Ministry texts, and Codes of Conduct. The lexical choices that were analyzed for their representations were student, child, and youth.

**Table 4.15 Lexical Choices for Social Actor Student**

<b>Texts</b>	<b>Students</b>	<b>Child/ Children</b>	<b>Youth</b>	<b>Kid</b>	<b>School Community</b>	<b>Outside Community</b>
<b>Ministry</b>	256	20/8	10	1	67	46
<b>School Board</b>	203	8	0	0	18	4
<b>Codes of Conduct</b>	195	0/7	7	1	18	4

**As Students.** When the human social actor Student appeared in Ministry texts it was collocated with specific words, many of which were related to the word “to” and the object being the “student.” Table 4.16 provides some examples of these concordance lines.

**Table 4.16 Excerpts of Student in Ministry Texts**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Intellectual Development – <i>to develop</i> the ability of <b>students</b> to analyze critically, reason and think independently, and bodies of knowledge; <i>to develop</i> in <b>students</b> a lifelong appreciation of learning, a curiosity exercise professional judgment in <i>providing instruction to</i> <b>students</b> in accordance with specified duties and powers. have a corresponding responsibility <i>to ensure</i> that each <b>student</b> <i>is provided</i> with quality <i>instruction</i>, to participate</li></ul>
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Student in this instance appeared as a category of people for whom something needed *to be provided*. For example, Students were helped “to develop” or by “providing instruction to.” Students were social actors to whom something was done or given, or perhaps as potential consumers. From the examples, above, Students were to be provided with the right instruction so they could develop to “think critically,” or to “reason,” and to “think independently,” and even to “develop a lifelong appreciation of learning and curiosity.” Providing these opportunities to “Students” is part of “specified duties and powers.” These phrases speak to a perception of students as possible consumers of school services. This would suggest that, as consumers of a service, if Students do not develop the abilities listed, then perhaps the government, through schools, should be held accountable. This responsibility was accepted by the government in the *Mandate for Schools* (1989), which stated, “Government is responsible for ensuring that all of our youth have the opportunity to obtain high quality schooling that will assist in the development of an educated society” (D-90). Here the government claims responsibility for ensuring that all youth have an opportunity to obtain a high-quality schooling.

In terms of which other human social actor Students were related to in Ministry texts, the main human social actor was Parents, 44 times, School Board, 15 times, and Principals, four times. In addition, eight of the times that Parents were related to Students were specific to either

students and parents informing the school about an incident, or being informed about an incident. This suggests that students and parents respond to the school, and that the school will inform them when they feel it was necessary.

**As Child[ren].** When the social actor was presented as Children, the tone was different. The word “child” can connote a human person who is small, frail, in need of help and nurturance. The use of the word “child” can be likened to someone who needs someone to help them. In the examples in Table 4.17, Children needed someone to look after them, especially Parents and, in one instance, they needed the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

**Table 4.17 Children Collocated with Parents**

<p>to: • enable <i>parents</i> to advocate for their <b>children’s</b> well-being Caring schools make parents aware of are <i>parents</i> involved following incidents affecting their <b>children</b> as victims, aggressors or bystanders? How is Nations <i>Convention on the Rights of the Child</i> and recognizes that young persons have rights informed of measures or proceedings involving their <b>children</b> and encouraged to support them in addressing (<i>parents inferred</i>) law enforcement• child and youth mental health• <b>child protection</b>• probation• youth crown counsel• psychiatry• health access to quality public schooling for their <b>children</b>. For those students, unable to attend school (<i>parents inferred</i>) of choice regarding the schooling of their <b>children</b>. <i>Parents</i> in British Columbia have the right goals, policies and services provided for their <b>children</b>. They have a primary responsibility to ensure (<i>parents inferred</i>) quality. <i>Parents</i> may choose to school their <b>children</b> at home provided that certain conditions are <i>Parents</i>: have a right to enroll <i>their children</i> in a registered independent school of their with your knowledge of the following. <i>Your child’s</i> behaviour and attitudes – the behaviours and attitudes (<i>parents inferred</i>)</p>
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There was a sense of ownership for the Child, as was seen by the use of the possessive pronouns “your” and “their.” The word child is more often used in the individual sense, rather than as a group of children. This individualization of Child suggests that this social actor needs individual protection, and needs to be supported by Parents and any person acting as a Parent in schools.

This suggests, also, that Children are persons who receive protection and benefit from advocacy and—contrary to the actors Students who are capable of committing offenses—Children are to be protected especially by parents. The relationship between Students and Parents is reflected in the concordance lines for Child[ren]. Parents appear in Ministry texts (10 times), and in School Board texts (five times). Importantly, note the emphasis on the identification of Parents as the social actor responsible for Children.

**As Youth.** Youth was found in Ministry texts and in Codes of Conduct. Youth, was found to be related to the words violence and crime, which positioned these social actors as different from Child[ren]. Youth as social actors were represented as a generic social group, rather than as individuals within a group. This generic group of social actors was presented as capable of acting and as responsible for actions, as opposed to the case of the Child[ren], who were represented as in need of protection and advocacy. Youth were not collocated with Parents, nor were other social actors given responsibility for protecting them. This is in line with a representation of Youth who can act independently. However, another notable observation from the data (see Table 4.18), is that the word “crime” was related with Youth, eight times in Ministry texts. This is important because crime had not been collocated with Child[ren] or kids. While the word “violence” was found to be related to Children, this only occurred when the words “children and youth” were used together.

**Table 4.18 Excerpts of Youth Collocated with Violence**

<p>While acknowledging “... that <i>violence</i> among children and <b>youth</b> is a complex social problem best addressed achievement. In light of increased concerns about <b>youth violence</b> in recent years, safe schools have Code, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the <b>Youth</b> Criminal Justice Act and the School Act). Appendix the effectiveness of measures taken to address <b>youth crime</b> should be publicly available; WHEREAS Canada AND WHEREAS Canadian society should have a <b>youth criminal</b> justice system that commands respect, takes following principles apply in this Act: (a) the <b>youth criminal</b> justice system is intended to (i) prevent crime most appropriate and effective way to address <b>youth crime</b>; (b) extrajudicial measures allow for effective and</p>
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The representation of Youth as having the capacity to act, but only in relation to crime and violence, suggests that this social actor was positioned narrowly. In this way, Youth are positioned as having the capacity to make decisions and make choices, yet choosing ones that were not in accordance with “responsible” social behaviours expected of adults. The relationship between Youth and “violence” suggests negative value assumptions about Students. These assumptions and representations of Youth fits with a paradigm that positions adolescence as a “youth as a stage of storm and stress” proposed by developmental psychologist G. Stanley Hall (1904); his influence remains today across a number of disciplines (e.g., Casey, Jones, Levita, Libby, Pattwell, Ruberry, Soliman & Somerville, 2010). Expectations of Youth as irresponsible, in need of regulation, and likely to need discipline, denies their agency. This appears to contradict the assumed agentic positioning that Youth are given in texts, for example, the assumptions of Youth agency in criminal acts. Youth identified as only having a capacity to perform negative actions is problematic for principals when they encounter Students involved in behaviors that do not fit nicely as negative.

### **Students as Activated/Passivated**

Fairclough (2003) described social actors as either being activated or passivated. Activated social actors are acting upon or impacting something or someone else. Passivated social actors are being acted upon or are the recipients of an action. For this study, all the concordance lines for each of the lexical choices used to represent Student were analyzed and categorized as either an activated or a passivated social actor. Each of the concordance lines were examined to identify the verb, then the line was examined in relation to the social actor Student to determine if the action was directed to or done by the Student. Examples of segments of text that identify Students as activated and as passivated are presented in Table 4.19.

**Table 4.19 Excerpts Activated and Passivated**

<b>Activated</b>	<b>Passivated</b>
<p><i>student fails to make</i>  <b>students attending</b> educational programs                      A <b>student</b> must <i>comply</i> with the school rules                      student, may <i>appeal</i></p>	<p><i>communicated to students</i>  <i>search of a student,</i>  <i>provided for the student</i>  <i>applies to every student</i>                      Inform <b>students</b>                      It is <i>expected that students</i></p>

In the examples, activation, identified the Student as performing an action. Whether it was to “fail,” or “attending,” or to “comply,” or to “appeal,” in all these cases the action was performed by the student. This suggests that the Student was the subject of the sentence, and active in the performance of the action and, therefore, activated. The second set of examples, consist of instances where Student was represented as the object of the sentence, the recipients of the action, or passivated. There was a third set of concordance lines that were unique in that it appeared as if Students were acting in an activated manner, but a closer reading of the sentence found them to be passivated. These examples were related to the word “inform” (see Table 4.20).

**Table 4.20 Excerpts Students and Parents Collocated with Inform**

<p>make it easy and safe for <b>students</b> and their parents to inform                      schools make it easy and safe for <b>students</b> and their parents to inform                      make it easy and safe for <b>students</b> and their parents to inform</p>
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In these examples, there is an action that occurs before Students “inform.” In the excerpts above, other social actors “make it safe” for students to “inform.” Whenever the word “inform” appeared collocated with Students it served as a reminder that this was one way for schools to know about possible concerns or incidents. This contributed to identifying social practices that principals might use to determine if there was an incident, and what course of action might take place.

The analysis of Students, as activated and passivated, is represented in Table 4.21. The concordance lines for Student, Child(ren), Youth, and Kid were each categorized. The results indicated that across the genre chain Student, Child(ren), and Youth appeared more frequently as passivated.

**Table 4.21 Lexical Choices for Student as Activated and Passivated.**

<b>Social Actor</b>	<b>Policy Level</b>	<b>Activated</b>	<b>Passivated</b>
<b>Student</b>	Ministry	80	169
	School Board	49	110
	Code of Conduct	70	81
<b>Child(ren)</b>	Ministry	1	27
	School Board	1	6
<b>Youth</b>	Ministry	4	14

In Ministry texts, Student appeared as passivated more than twice as many times as it appeared as activated. The same could be said in relation to School Board texts. It was only in Codes of Conduct that the social actor Student appeared as activated, 70 times, and as passivated, 81 times, the most comparable at any level. This is most likely related to the fact that the Codes of Conduct consist of expectations about behaviours that Students are expected to perform. These expectations appeared as being performed by the Students and, therefore, they were presented as activated about 50% of the time.

The disparity between activated and passivated social actors was perhaps most visible with Child or Children. For example, while the concordance lines for this social actor appeared as activated once in Ministry texts, and once in School Board texts, this same social actor appeared as passivated 27 times in Ministry texts, and six times in School Board texts. Child(ren) did not appear in the Codes of Conduct. Youth appeared only in Ministry texts. In all these cases, the social actors appeared more often as passivated. Based on the instances of Student, Child(ren), and Youth, these social actors were predominantly treated as passivated (see Table 4.21)

**Activated Student.** Although the analysis of social actors as activated or passivated provided evidence that Students were predominantly treated as passivated across the genre chain, the kinds of actions in which Students appeared as either activated or passivated were noteworthy. In this section, each of the lexical choices for Student was followed across the genre chain when they appeared as activated. Similarities for each lexical choice were noted and categorized.

**Student.** Four categories were compiled from the list of concordance lines where Students were activated. These categories included: expectations, consequences/behaviours, student rights and responsibilities, and safety (see Table 4.22).

**Table 4.22 Activated Social Actor Student Across the Genre Chain**

<b>Level</b>	<b>Expectations</b>	<b>Consequences/ Neg Behaviours</b>	<b>Student Rights Responsibilities</b>
<b>Ministry</b>	46	11	0
<b>School Board</b>	17	14	3
<b>Codes of Conduct</b>	21	16	14

The category of “expectations” with Students positioned as activated appeared most frequently in all texts. In Ministry texts, “expectations” appeared four times more often than the next more frequent word. In School Board texts, “expectations” appeared 17 times, and was closely followed in frequency by Consequences/Negative Behaviors. In Codes of Conduct, “expectations” appeared 21 times. This suggests that expectations might play a prominent role in terms of Students who are activated.

The frequency for the first category of “expectations” required a deeper analysis of the relationships with other words collocated with “expectations” across the genre chain. Table 4.23 presents a sample of concordance lines in which Students were activated in terms of expectations. These expectations varied across genres. For example, in Ministry texts,

expectations about school were related to words like achievement, ability and success. In School Board texts, the expectations appeared more likely related to student behaviour. In the Codes of Conduct, expectations were related to student responsibility and behaviour.

**Table 4.23 Student as Activated: Expectations**

Ministry	School Board	Codes of Conduct
<p><b>and student expectations of school services in helping students to achieve Responsibilities Students: have the opportunity student's ability to students to succeed</b></p>	<p>expectations regarding <b>student</b> behaviour <b>student</b> conduct while at include behaviour of the <b>student</b> the duties of <b>students</b> <b>student</b> would continue to attend</p>	<p><b>Students</b> are responsible <b>Students</b> have a responsibility to <b>students</b> will prepare intellectually <b>students</b> to learn effectively <b>students</b> are to be aware appropriate <b>student</b> behaviour</p>

It is interesting that when Students appeared as activated under expectations, these were instances related to being allowed to do something facilitated by another social actor. The activation, therefore, rested upon someone else letting Students, as a group, achieve, understand and be aware. For example, one clause that was repeated across three different Codes of Conduct pertained to the “Misuse of: Cyberspace/cell phones/Electronic Devices/Computers – students are to be aware that they may be subject to discipline” (Montgomery, p. 2; Fernhill, p. 21; Fernhill, p. 30). This is possibly a response to the school board policy stating that “Students, *having received* instruction and guidance in the ethical and safe uses of ICT, will conduct themselves online with the same level of appropriate behaviour as in all contexts of the school community” (emphasis added, Oceans Information and Technology (ICT) Access and Use Policy, p. 3). The assumptions, in both cases, appeared to be that Students have received the instruction and guidance about ICT use, and were aware that they will be disciplined for misuse of the ICT resources.

The second category, student conduct and behaviours, was also examined and seemed to rest on the actions of the individual student. This difference was notable in the use of the italicized singular “a Student” or “the Student” with reference to examples of individualized

behaviours (see Table 4.24). It was also noted that the words related to Student in these cases were words that are associated with negative values, for example, “fails,” “negligent,” and “unacceptable.” The negative associations, therefore, positioned Students in a negative way.

**Table 4.24 Students Activated: Consequences/Negative Behaviours**

<b>Ministry</b>	<b>School Board</b>	<b>Codes of Conduct</b>
<b>Incidents of student breach to record incidents of student conduct breaches the intentional or negligent act of a student</b> students <b>are unable to comply</b> students <b>and volunteers that fail to comply</b>	<i>the student</i> fails to make a reasonable <b>students</b> above] or has failed to apply himself <i>a student</i> continues with unacceptable When <i>a student</i> knowingly engages <i>the student</i> has a harmful effect weapon by <i>a student</i> on	<b>Students</b> involved in theft <b>Students</b> who drive recklessly of threatening or intimidating other <b>students</b> <i>the student</i> offender <b>student</b> displays inappropriate conduct <b>Students</b> who are chronically late <b>students</b> who arrive late <b>Students</b> who misuse their phone <b>Students</b> who skip class

The category of negative behaviours and consequences, where Students were activated, was specific to Students doing something that was contrary to the expectations regarding behaviour, especially in Ministry texts. In Ministry texts, Students had “breaches in conduct,” or were “unable to comply.” In School Board texts, this language continued, but included an added dimension where Students “failed to do,” and did so “knowingly.” In the Codes of Conduct, Students were activated to perform specific behaviours like “stealing,” “driving recklessly,” “intimidating other students,” “arriving late,” “misusing their phones” and “skipping class.” The negative behaviours by Students appeared in ways that suggested that these behaviours were expected of Students, and that Students performed them “knowingly.” These assumptions appear to support the idea that students will misbehave even when they know the consequences of those actions.

The third category was that of Rights and Responsibilities, it was interesting to see what Students were activated to do in terms of their rights (see Table 4.25). In Ministry texts, Students were activated to “help each other,” and “to cooperate.” In School Board texts, Students could

request and move around. In the Codes of Conduct, Students had rights and could access the Internet. The range of behaviours that appeared under rights and responsibilities was related to vague “rights” and to “responsibilities” towards other students.

**Table 4.25 Students Activated: To Help**

<b>Ministry</b>	<b>School Board</b>	<b>Codes of Conduct</b>
<b>Responsibilities Students: have the opportunity</b> students <b>to help each other to cooperate with fellow students and to cooperate</b>	requested by the <b>student</b> If the <b>student</b> wishes the movement of the <b>student</b>	<b>Students’ Rights</b> Each <b>student</b> has the right respect the rights and property of other <b>students</b> <b>students</b> can access the Internet

*Children.* The lexical choice of Child(ren) was only activated twice throughout the concordance lines across all genres. In Ministry texts, it appeared once specific to “violence among children” in which the activated Children were participants in the violence that was perpetrated against children. In School Board texts, the one-time activation for Children had to do with the individual child’s behavioural history at school. In the Codes of Conduct, this lexical choice did not appear.

*Youth.* The lexical choice of Youth was only present as activated in Ministry texts, four times. In these instances, Youth were activated to be perpetrators of violence and crime, for example, “intimidation and youth violence,” “address youth crime,” and “to address youth crime.” Youth in this case were clearly related to activities counter to the expectations of school that had been present when the social actor Student was used and was expected to achieve and succeed at this same genre level of Ministry texts. Again, the relationship between Youth and negative behaviours promotes a view of youth as intentionally acting and/or participating in violence and crime in schools.

**Passivated Student.** In this part, lexical choices for how Students were represented are discussed in terms of when they appeared as passivated, specifically, the relationships of the

passivated Student to other words. This analysis allowed for insight about the ways in which Students were positioned as passive and, potentially, in need of adult guidance.

*Student.* Concordance lines for the passivated Student were also examined and categorized. In these instances, categories that had been identified under activated concordance lines were initially applied, but were found to be inadequate and new categories were formed, for example, “support programs” and “protocols” (see Table 4.26). The differentiation between supportive environments was evidenced by collocation with words like social responsibility, belongingness, listening and talking to students, recognizing students, and consider the needs of students. “Support programs” was a category that appeared as providing Students with instruction, delivery of non-instructional supports, providing placing and programming for students. “Protocols” ensured that students records were kept and updated, and the management and supervision of students were consistent, and that assessments were made. In terms of “other Social Actors,” these consisted primarily of instances when parents were involved on behalf of students through, consultations, and information circulated to parents. “Safety,” as a category, arose out of recognition that safety is paramount for addressing student safety and ensuring that students were safe from harm. “Expectations,” were imposed on students by adults, specifically in terms of acceptable conduct. Finally, the category of “Consequences/behaviours,” encompasses the discipline of students, the supervisions and suspension of students. Notable is that the concept of “zero tolerance” did not appear in Ministry or School Board texts, nor in Codes of Conduct.

**Table 4.26: Passivated Social Actor Student Across Genre Chain**

Level	Supportive Environ	Support Programs	Protocol	Other SA	Safety	Expectations	Consequences/ Neg Behaviours
Ministry	49	30	27	21	17	8	8
School Board	11	18	10	10	15	6	35
Code of Conduct	13	10	6	16	5	18	9

In Ministry texts, the categories that were more prevalent were supportive environments, followed by support programs, and processes/protocols. In contrast, in School Board texts, consequences appeared most often. In Codes of Conduct, the most common categories were expectations and the presence of other social actors.

The categories of “supportive environments” and “support programs” were the most frequent categories in Ministry texts (49 times and 30 times respectively). “Protocols” and “safety” were present 27 and 17 times respectively in Ministry texts. The frequency of these categories, perhaps, alludes to a tone or intention for these texts. Ministry texts seemed to espouse an idealized a goal of supportive environments in schools. Whereas, in School Board documents, the most frequent category was Consequences and negative behaviours, which indicated their focus on processes; on consequences, rather than on expectations. In terms of the Codes of Conduct, “expectations,” “other social actors,” and “supportive environments” occurred with similar frequency suggesting that these documents were directed to the Students and Parents. Based on observations of the frequency of categories, it can be inferred that the purpose of the Codes of Conduct was to make expectations clear while outlining consequences, and also to maintain the focus on expectations of students in particular.

**Children.** Child(ren) appears a total of four times as activated and 57 times passivated. The difference between these is significant, but it was also interesting to note that there were no common categories identified across the genre chain for this lexical choice. Neither were there

categories in common with the categories that appeared when the social actor Child(ren) appeared as activated. Child(ren) were not present in the Codes of Conduct.

**Table 4.27 Social Actor Child(ren) Across Genres, Passivated.**

<b>Genre</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
<b>Ministry</b>	Advocating for Children	18
	Protecting	6
	Violence/Aggression	2
<b>School Board</b>	Supporting	7

In Ministry texts, the most frequent category was that of “Advocating for Children,” 18 times, and “protecting” them, six times. In School Board texts, Children appeared seven times to “Supporting Children” (see Table 4.27). The prevalence of advocating for Children in Ministry texts, and of supporting Children in School Board texts, represents Children as specifically in need of being taken care of and protected.

**Youth.** Youth occurred 14 times in Ministry texts. Youth appeared in terms of “protecting youth,” 9 times, or related to “crime,” 5 times. The protection in this case was related to Youth mental health, service agencies, and protecting Youth. Crime in Ministry texts was related to the Youth criminal justice act or system. The way that Youth is represented in these texts identifies them as related specifically to crime and dependent on the provision of services by others. Youth in these instances are recognized as possible future criminals who might need to access services. This narrowed perspective of youth as possible criminals presents principals with unique challenges when using policy texts to inform their practices for school safety.

### **Identifying a Discourse of Student in Policy Text**

This study points to a narrowing effect and a representation of Student as a social actor in specific ways, and related to specific lexical choices. Students as Students, Child/Children, and Youth appeared in different ways within and across the genre chain. Students began by being associated with expectations, behaviours, and consequences. In addition, a pattern emerged

through lexical choices, collocations, and whether social actors were passivated or activated, that positioned Students, as one category of social actor: as perpetrators of behaviours that were negative, unsafe, violent, and simultaneously related to crime (as perpetrators), and as related to safe (as victims).

The process of this particular view of Students began as they were separated from other social actors and universalized under a single narrowed category. This was followed by normalizing the expectation that students would misbehave. In combination, in policy texts, Students merged into one broad category being perpetrators and victims simultaneously. In a sense, as a perpetual problem for Principals.

**Social difference: Students positioned as alike.** The lexical choices for the Student, as well as whether they were activated or as passivated, led to different ways in which they were positioned within and across the genre chain. Ministry texts referred to Students as activated mostly when they were not following rules. However, Child(ren) were positioned as needing more nurturing and in relation to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. As Children, this social actor needed protection and advocacy. What is interesting is that in Ministry texts, the *in loco parentis* clause is also referred to, but only with respect to discipline. It could be argued that the inherent relationship between parent and child allows for discipline to be educational. What this suggests is that if the same nurturing relationship is not explicitly required between school principals and children, then discipline that principals apply to students may not have the same educational benefits.

By identifying Students as a class that is different from adults, it confirms that this group of social actors needs to be treated differently: that they need to be dominated, to be controlled. Differences in the use of lexical choices was especially evident when the lexical choice Youth

was used, since it collocated with the word “crime.” This Youth-crime relationship, where youth as young as 12 in the criminal justice system can be treated as adults, suggests that they are considered responsible for their actions. This suggests that Students need to be controlled, yet Youth need to be held accountable.

**Social difference: Normalizing misbehaviour.** While all lexical choices for Student, appeared most frequently as passivated, when they appeared as activated, it was mostly to fulfill some expectation imposed on them by an adult social actor. Instances where Students appeared as activated were related to negative behaviours, for example: stealing; driving recklessly; intimidating other students; arriving late; misusing their phones; skipping class; as well as offences that intimidate, hurt, involve weapons, break the law, and when students denied these behaviours. Children were also only activated in terms of “violence among children.” As passivated, there were many instances of actions that were done or provided to Students. This was true especially in terms of supportive environments, support programs, processes and protocols, and consequences. Clearly, this representation of students who misbehave normally, suggests that these are the behaviors expected of them.

The assumption that students will naturally misbehave might be used to justify why protocols in Ministry texts required that principals describe the Students’ behaviours for which they were sent to the office in their reports. Given that it was behaviours that policy texts suggested that principals should be identifying, it is not surprising that in terms of consequences, the words that appeared most frequently were “discipline” and “suspension.” While other words appeared—for example, excluded and consequences—exclusion from school was used to mean suspension from school. Consequences were actions that happened after an incident occurred and could mean a variety of different things—from a warning to community service—however, in all

instances it referred to some form of exclusion from school, and most often it was used to mean suspension. This suggests a narrowing of the category of “consequence” to suspension. In combination, when the social actor Student was only perceived as activated when performing a negative behaviour, and the consequence of this behaviour was limited to suspension, then the link between policies of school safety leading to Students being pushed out of school becomes even more plausible.

### **Summary**

This chapter included two sections. The first section examined how Safe was defined across Ministry, School Board, and School Codes of Conduct texts. Safe was defined by responding to questions related to safety, first, whose safety? Second, Safe from what? and Safe from whom? This section ended by organizing the data to describe what a safe school might look like based on policy texts. Responses provided insight about how principals’ social practices might be informed by policy texts. The second section examined the social actor Student to see how this social actor was represented across the genre chain as simultaneously perpetrators and victims who were activated to perform negative behaviours.

## **Chapter 5 Analysis of Transcripts: Principals' Perspectives on Safety in Schools**

This chapter examines transcripts of interviews with high school principals. This chapter responds to the question: *How do principals interpret policy to inform their practices of school safety?* It begins by identifying how principals defined the words *Safe* and *Student*, and comparing principals' perspectives with those in policy text. Two schools from neighbourhoods representing low, medium, and high family income levels were represented in this study. Six principals responded to questions about how they conceptualized school safety (see Table 3.1).

### **Principals' Conceptualizing Safe, Based on Whose Safety?**

As with policy texts from the Ministry, School Board, and Codes of Conduct, Transcripts from interviews with Principals of high schools in Ocean and River were analyzed to see how Safe was conceptualized. This included asking: Safe for whom? Safe from what? And what should Students be able to do in a Safe school?

#### **Safe for Whom?**

In Transcripts, there were 16 social actors mentioned and these are listed by order of frequency in Table 5.1. Students, whether as Student or as Kid, were the most frequent social actor in Transcripts. Noteworthy was that Principals were present and that Police were mentioned more often than teachers.

**Table 5.1 Human Social Actors in Transcripts**

<b>Human Social Actors</b>	<b>Mentions in Transcripts</b>
<i>Students</i>	752
<i>Kid</i>	448
<i>Principals</i>	150
<i>Parents/Guardians</i>	119
<i>Police</i>	58
<i>Superintendent</i>	42
<i>Teachers</i>	39
<i>Staff</i>	39
<i>Ministry of Education</i>	34
<i>Outside Community</i>	26
<i>Child</i>	25
<i>School Board</i>	21
<i>Public</i>	9
<i>Youth</i>	5
<i>Government Ministry</i>	1

Frequency counts were followed with collocations of Safe with human social actors. These collocations identified the co-occurrence of Safe and Students, as both Students and as Kids (see Table 5.2). Safe and Police appeared in the same concordance lines 14 times, making them the next most frequent pairing of social actors after Safe and Students and Safe and Kids. The way in which Safe and Police co-occurred was with respect to the Safe Schools Liaison officer. Youth and Safe did not co-occur.

**Table 5.2 Collocation Safe and Human Social Actors**

<b>Social Actors</b>	<b>Concordance lines of Safe</b>
Student	48
Kid	18
Police	14
Parents	8
School Board	6
Superintendent	6
School Community	3
Child(ren)	2

Analysis of the context in which Safe and human social actors co-occurred was interesting. For example, in the co-occurrence of Safe and Student, the use of personal pronouns

when referring to Students was noted (see Table 5.3). For example, “our students” and “your kids.” The use of these possessive pronouns suggests ownership for Students in a more personal way than had been observed in policy texts. The contexts in these concordance lines confirmed that Students were the objects of safety, for example, “kids if they feel safe,” or “make sure students are safe.”

**Table 5.3 Principals and Safe**

its impacting our learning environment [R: uhum] and and the <b>safety</b> of all <i>our students</i> and so therefore talk to people, but I think, regarding <i>student safety</i> , it’s pretty straight forward, now there may be the when you ask <i>kids</i> if they feel <b>safe</b> , everyone might translate what that may mean <i>students</i> , and for keeping the community here <b>safe</b> and that's care and respect, now if number one, because if <i>students</i> don't feel <b>safe</b> they don't learn, if they don't feel safe they don't learn, if they don't feel <b>safe</b> they don't come to school, so its access those ahmmm, again, could be <i>student safety</i> could be student support, could be school community because while these <i>kids</i> don't feel <b>safe</b> , have had experience with adults that, they've that the majority of <i>kids</i> want a <b>safe</b> school to be coming to so most to make sure that the <i>students</i> are <b>safe</b> because when they feel safe they can learn how do you...[INTERVIEWER R: uhum].. transition <i>your kids</i> to <b>safe</b> area appropriately, what do <i>you</i> do under
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These concordance lines also show a relationship between mentions of “students,” “safety,” “learning,” and “coming to school.” For example, “number one, because if *students* don't feel safe they don't learn, if they don't feel safe they don't come to school” (Mrs. Peters, 91-92) This quote reflected that Principals worked directly with students. This familiarity with Students allowed Principals to express a more personal understanding of the role of Safety for Students.

### **Safe From?**

The Principals conceptualized what made schools unsafe differently than the policy texts analyzed in Chapter 4. Instead, Principals spoke about “issues,” “situations” and “decisions.” These lexical choices were used mostly in speaking of either hypothetical “unsafe situations,” or as safety “issues.” What is interesting in these lexical choices is that an “incident” in Ministry

texts referred to something specific. This suggests that when Principals respond to “issues” and “concerns” they have not yet determined if an “incident” of unsafety has happened. “Decisions” hold open the question of whether or not this was an incident.

“Issue” appeared 24 times, of these, three times it was related to “I’m not saying there’s not safety issues” (Mr. Holmes, 519). The purpose of using the word “issue” appeared to highlight that an event occurred and that the event would need to be assessed as either a concern, an incident, or perhaps as nothing. This was also true for the use of the word “situation,” which appeared seven times and represented expanding the different possibilities that a situation might be interpreted as, for example, “there’s all kinds of situations that happen with kids, and we have counselling services to support kids that way as well, we have school-based team meetings we talk about kids who are at-risk in their classrooms” (Mr. Cahill, 478-478). Both “issues” and “situations” are suggestive of an event that still needs to be assessed as an incident that makes school unsafe or not.

Principals, as policy implementers, determined if an event made the school unsafe, for example, “I’m gonna make a decision to make sure that we can control the situation” (Mr. Richard, 126-127). This quote suggests that as far as Mr. Richard was concerned he is the one who makes decisions about when a situation becomes an incident.

### **Defining a Safe School**

How Principals defined a safe school differs from what appeared in policy texts, specifically when it came to the Ministry texts. Ministry texts and Transcripts differed the most when it came to words associated with what students should be safe *to do* in schools, as well as in descriptions of what a safe school would look like.

First, Table 5.4 compares words that were collocated with the social actor Student in Ministry texts and Transcripts related to what a Student should be able to do. These words included: “caring,” “respect,” “learning,” and “education.” The expanded category of Student was used to include all the lexical words for Student (Student, Child, Youth, and Kid). What can be noted is the co-occurrence of the word “respect” and “learning” and “education.” Specifically, questions of how these words were used in the text were noted. The absence of “belonging” and “achievement” in Transcripts is also notable.

**Table 5.4 Expanded Student in Ministry and Transcripts**

<b>Text</b>	<b>Respect (ing, ful)</b>	<b>Education (al, ally)</b>	<b>Learning</b>	<b>Relation (ships, al)</b>	<b>Belonging</b>	<b>Achievement</b>
<b>Ministry</b>	15	35	10	6	10	6
<b>Transcripts</b>	12	8	8	4	0	0

While in both Principals transcripts and Ministry texts the social actor Student were collocated with “respect,” the word “respect” was used in distinct ways. In Ministry texts, “respect” focused on aspects of the Students’ educational programs, for example, “respecting attendance of students in educational programs for suspended students” (Safe Schools Act, p. 3) or “respecting the management of student” (Safe Schools Act, 2006, p. 3). The use of the word respect in these instances was as “in reference to” versus “high or special regard, or the quality or state of being esteemed” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2011). The latter was only present once, for example, that “Students...conduct themselves in a manner that reflects an understanding of acceptable behaviour, respect and decorum” (The Guide, 2006, p. 33). Whereas, in Transcripts the use of respect was specific to “high or special regard.” For example, “a community of teachers, students and parents working together with RESPECT and dignity for each other” (Mr. Richard, 65) and “not a need to discipline students, if everybody is functioning with respect and dignity why would I have to discipline?” (Mr. Richard, 273-274). It was also noted that, in

Transcripts, Students were expected to show respect, but more importantly, were also to be respected by others, including adults. For example, a safe school has a “sense for students where they're feeling comfortable coming to school, that they're feeling safe...respected by the adults and their fellow students” (Mr. Franks, 57-58).

The word “education” co-occurred with Student in both Ministry texts and in Transcripts, however, their use differed. In Ministry texts “education” was specific to “educational programs” and to “education system” or “board of education.” Whereas, in Transcripts, education referred to “discipline has to be educational, in my opinion, ahmm because if you...if you discipline without educating the students just get tricky” (Ms. Peters, 249-250), and “educationally trying to establish what's correct for students and modelling behaviour” (Mr. Richards, 93-94), and also about “we try to make it as educational, so the kids see the RCMP as a person and not a resource” (Mr. Cahill, 199). The difference in the use of educating in these instances included “a process of instruction... to develop mentally, morally, or aesthetically” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2011), especially in terms of educating about expectations, behavior, and also, relationships with the RCMP.

Similarly, “learning” in Ministry texts referred to providing “positive school/learning environment for students” and catering to “different learning styles.” However, instances of “learning” in Transcripts were about “conversations... not about policing, they are about student and learning” (Mr. Holmes, 200) and about “foundation of all learning, you need, kids need to feel safe, all people who attend and work and are part of this community need to feel safe” (Mr. Cahill, 79-80). While Ministry documents appeared to use the word “learning” in the context of the Ministry, or some other adult, ensuring that the “goal of learning” would occur, in Transcripts, the focus appeared to be more in terms of a foundation and process that would

engage Students. The question follows, what can be found in Safe schools? Table 5.5 lists words collocated with Safe that respond to this question.

**Table 5.5 The *What* of School Safety in Ministry Texts and Transcripts**

<b>Texts</b>	<b>Caring</b>	<b>Orderly</b>	<b>Respons (e, ible, ility)</b>	<b>Respect</b>
Ministry	60	55	13	0
Transcripts	14	14	6	4

When the social actor Safe was analyzed, the words that co-occurred in Ministry texts and in Transcripts were “caring,” orderly,” and “responsibility;” the word “respect” was only present in Transcripts collocated with Safe. In Ministry texts, the word “caring” mostly occurred in word pairings of either “safe and caring schools” or in terms of the “safe, caring, and orderly schools” guide. These words were not defined, but were titles of policy and policy implementation tools. While this was mostly the case in Transcripts as well, it was noted that in two instances “caring” was defined: once as “caring, of course, that’s creating emotional safety for the kids” and also as “for us for a caring school we have to show that, and demonstrate and have our kids demonstrate ...that just because they have a wonderful suburban lifestyle, doesn’t mean everybody does” (Mr. Murphy, 251-253). In these instances, the word was used as “regard coming from desire or esteem” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2011). This esteem was either to Students, or helping Students learn to care for others.

The word “respect” was interesting because it was not collocated with Safe in Ministry texts, yet in Transcripts it emerged, as in “if I ask a student, would you say *was that caring and respectful of that other person?* that usually stops them in their tracks, and *go, maybe not, no it was kind of uncaring and was definitely disrespectful*” (Mr. Cahill, 245-247). The idea of respect, caring, and the process of learning, appear intertwined and support the discussion of how “education” appears differently. This points to similarities in the Principals’ discourse about processes of educating, helping students, and processes of learning.

The word “responsibility” in Ministry texts surfaced as “people associated with safe, caring and orderly schools assume responsibility,” “take responsibility,” and “accept responsibility.” Transcripts were more personal, for example, “the school act is really clear on my responsibility as principal” (Mr. Murphy, 106). There were also some issues with the responsibility that was either placed on, or accepted by Principals. For example, Mr. Franks spoke about an increased responsibility in terms of:

bullying type issues are put on to the school to be dealing with, so that complexity has increased our work load, unfortunately the media portrays bullying as...? Many things are being called bullying and there's an expected response associated with that, and a single comment is not bullying, it's a negative interaction between two people. (Mr. Franks, 593-598)

What was interesting about Mr. Franks' comment was that while he accepted that dealing with issues of bullying was his responsibility as part of keeping the school safe, he also challenged media interpretations of bullying. He found it “unfortunate” to have to deal with a situation that he defined as a “negative interaction” between two people that was perceived by others as bullying. This again points to the discretion of principals in elevating an “issue” to an “incident” or not.

Principals represented safe schools in ways that were essentially different than what was presented in Ministry texts. While Ministry texts used words to name policy, it appeared that it was often up to Principals' discretion to define these words. Words like respect, learning, education, and caring were made into processes through which principals had specific Student outcomes. Responsibility in Ministry texts was about assigning “responsibility,” whereas for

principals it was about taking “responsibility,” even when they had misgivings about the scope of that responsibility.

An interesting observation was that in collocations of Safe in Transcripts, the words “discipline,” “suspension,” and “zero tolerance” were present. These words were not present in Ministry texts, or Codes of Conduct. “Suspension” and “discipline” appeared only once in the School Board texts. This is important because, in terms of conceptualizing a Safe school, these words appear more as consequences related to making schools unsafe. This suggests that consequences were not referred to in terms of Safety, but perhaps more as a consequence of Student behavior, discussed in the following section.

To sum, in Transcripts, safe schools were essentially places where principals and adults took responsibility for safety and for teaching students about how to act in the school community, despite the fact that these words that were not defined in Ministry texts. The next section examines how Students were represented in Transcripts.

### **Linguistic Analysis of Lexical Choices Associated with Student**

Lexical choices that were identified in policy texts included Student, Child, and Youth. Though the lexical choice Kid was present, it was not until analysis of the Transcripts that its possible importance became more pronounced. As Table 5.1 notes, the two lexical choices that were prevalent in Transcripts were Student and Kid. Further analysis showed they were used similarly.

#### **Student**

When Students appeared in the Transcripts they were represented as acting and capable of taking action (see Table 5.6). These actions included, “not attending,” “skipping out,” committing an “offence,” coming with a “discipline history,” or stealing from another student.

Note the negative value assumptions associated with these words. In all these instances, the Student, in acting, was engaged in a negative action. Students only acted to perform negative behaviours, representing them as trouble-makers who need to be controlled.

**Table 5.6 Excerpts of Students in Transcripts as Acting**

<p>to allow all parents know if a <b>student's</b> <i>not attending</i>, but I can't make them what is happening, whether its attendance, a <b>student</b> <i>skipping out</i>, if they know ahead of are making a decision about a, about <b>student</b> discipline, so <i>something happens</i>, what are it's a criminal offence, if it's a <b>student</b> <i>offence</i>, a discipline, what has been the student file, I mean, if it, a <b>student's</b> coming in with a <i>discipline history</i>, and in the <i>theft</i> of something...<i>from another student</i>, tha..that will involve the, that's a good</p>
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In the Transcripts, representations of Student were of social actors who acted on their own, did not follow school rules or expectations of school, and were likely to require discipline (see Table 5.6). These actions shift Students from passive social actors who needed to be cared for in Ministry texts, to potentially active perpetrators in Transcripts.

### **Child(ren)**

The use of the lexical choice Child(ren) appeared across policy texts, and also appeared, to a minimal extent, in Transcripts. In Ministry texts as someone to be cared for and taken care of by adult social actors, they played a similar role in Transcripts. As noted in Table 5.7, there were adult social actors identified as personally responsible for Child(ren). The pronouns “your” and “their” point specifically to parents. The principals’ relationship with parents was about reporting, or informing parents, about the behaviour of their child. Parents were expected to act as advocates for their children.

**Table 5.7 Child and Ownership**

on to your child, this is what *your child* was involved in, we try to explain went...ahh, they don't, they feel that *their child's* been singled out or they feel that their dealt with it, please talk to *your child* at home, ahmmm, and then, so you are

Milne and Aurini (2015) noted that some parents, specifically middle-class parents, used cultural capital, defined as “cultural logic...to facilitate children’s successful movement through dominant institutions and the world of work” (p. 53). This study suggested that the expectations principals have of parents may be shaped by particular groups of parents who are more likely to be involved with the school and more likely to negotiate more favourable outcomes for their children. Their study observed that parents with higher social outcomes, including higher income, might be more likely to take advantage of processes for student advocacy than other parents whose work might prevent them from tending to school matters during the day. For example, “occasionally parents are dissatisfied with how something went, they feel that their child's been singled out or they feel that their child...that the penalty is too excessive” (Mr. Cahill, 474-476). Or, in reference to being sued by a parent for the disciplinary action taken against their child, “that's the nature of our parents, they don't like the discipline, right, they don't agree with it” (Mr. Murphy, 324-325). Though Principals’ insisted that they would stand by their decision if they had “done our due diligence” (Mr. Murphy, 325), Parents role in advocating for their children ensured that Principals did their due diligence. This suggests that even when the outcomes for Students remained the same, Parents ensured that Principals had followed due diligence more closely.

No matter the form that advocacy for children takes, principals recognized that “we're still dealing with children, we are still dealing with kids and we can never forget that, and kids

need to learn, and they are still pliable to learn” (Mr. Holmes, 494-496). This recognition of the process of educating children and kids was distinct from policy texts.

### **Kid**

The social actor Kid appeared only once in the Ministry texts and the Codes of Conduct, but was prevalent in Transcripts. The use of this word is interesting because, as a colloquialism, it was the word of choice for high school principals during interviews. Kid in Transcripts was related to words like, “struggles,” “unacceptable behaviours,” “at-risk,” “mistakes,” “helping understand,” and “skill set.” Collocations with Kid appeared to advance a process of educating this social actor that recognized that making mistakes occurs, and the ownership of the act of making a mistake seemed to be debatable or in process. Some high school principals represented Kids as making mistakes and positioned their own roles as principals to use these mistakes to teach them.

The words that were related to Kid, as noted in Table 5.8, represented particular positive assumptions about Kids. For example, words like “self-respect,” “respect,” “teachable,” and “connected,” show Kids as associated with positive outcomes, the assumptions being that Kids are capable of engaging in good actions.

**Table 5.8 Excerpts of Kids in Transcripts**

always going to be a percentage of **kids** who are *struggling*, families who are struggling have some *self-respect*, *some self-care*, and, some **kids struggle** based on all kinds of parameters you must *demonstrate care and respect*, we tell **kids** at grade assemblies, we reinforce them at positive behaviour, looking for *teachable* moments, when some **kid** is beginning to struggle and is referred are some *behaviours* that we just tell **kids** are just flat out *unacceptable* at school from... a friendship or loose affiliation of **kids**... small kids and there becomes some *dysfunction* reacting to *negative behaviours*, it's to make **kids** feel *connected*, ahh, we do, we survey the have school-based team meetings we talk about **kids** who are *at-risk* in their classrooms, or do believe the best place for that **kid**, even if they've done something... *seriously inappropriate* that is part of our mandate to help **kids** *learn from their mistakes*, it's not always

The concordance lines in Table 5.8 appear to associate Kids with a less judgmental perspective of their actions. In addition, the pronouns present in the concordance lines suggest that there was someone to take responsibility for teaching them when they made mistakes. For example (see Table 5.9), when “we” reinforce positive behaviours, “we” can show them the behaviours “we” expect from them: respect; social responsibility; positive influence over younger kids. This also allows for Kids to develop a connection with adults in the school, teachers, although they are not named, who can help with this process of learning.

**Table 5.9 Excerpts of Kids and "Good Behaviours"**

with kids, we need to know the **kids**, we need to *reinforce positive behaviours* whenever want kids to be *respectful*, ahh, we want **kids** to be social, *socially responsible* and, have you do will, will resonate with younger **kids**, *you have influence* over younger kids, now goes back to, if, if you *feel connected*, every **kid** has at least one adult they can the most part is, it's about helping **kids** understand, and building, *bridging a gap* so the process and 98% of the time the **kids** actually *want to*, *ahh, resolve it* because they seems like something that's kind of surprising, but **kids** don't always have the *skill set* on years, they realize that ahhmm, to me the **kids** *come first*, and I don't believe, I while but overwhelmingly the *best place* for that **kid** is here in our community and, we

It was in reference to the social actor Kid that high school principals more readily expressed concern as demonstrated in the social practices identified in the next Chapter. For example, they

noted that “kids come first” and that the best place for “that kid is here in our community.” In this way, the Kid became the responsibility of two other social actors: the Principal and the School Community.

### **Student as Activated or Passivated**

In Transcripts of the interviews with Principals, Student was analyzed to determine the representation as activated or passivated social actors. Similar to what was found in policy texts, Table 5.10 shows that all lexical choices were represented as passivated, but that the proportion of times differed. In addition, the lexical choice Youth was only represented as passivated and Children were overwhelmingly passivated (2 times versus 24 times). Noteworthy in this study, is that representations of Kids as activated versus passivated varied the least. Student and Kid were explored in more detail.

**Table 5.10 Lexical Choices for Student as Activated and Passivated in Transcripts**

<b>Social Actor</b>	<i>Activated</i>	<i>Passivated</i>
<b>Student</b>	75	182
<b>Children</b>	2	24
<b>Youth</b>	0	6
<b>Kid(s)</b>	112	174

#### **Activated Student**

First, data was used to determine how the lexical choice of Student was represented as Activated. As was done with policy texts, concordance lines that were identified as activated were then categorized. The categories used were initially used were the same as in policy texts: “Expectations,” “Consequences/negative Behaviours,” and “Student Rights and Responsibilities.” After the analysis, a separate category specific to Transcripts was identified, “Safety.” Notable is that the categories for “Consequences/negative Behaviours” (32 times) and Student Rights and Responsibilities (19 times) appeared the most frequently in Transcripts,

“Expectations” (11 times), and “Safety” (5 times) occurred the fewest times. These categories were examined to see how Students appeared.

Table 5.11 Students as Activated

<b>Consequence/Negative Behaviours</b>	<b>Rights and Responsibilities</b>	<b>Expectations</b>
student's <b>not attending,</b> <i>a student skipping out</i> <i>a student offence,</i> <b>compliant student isn't necessarily</b> <b>intimidation of another student</b> student <b>strikes out and hurts</b> <i>the student brought a knife</i> <i>the student who did something wrong</i> student <b>finally had, has had enough</b> student <b>denies it</b> student's <b>brought a weapon</b> <i>the student has broken the law</i>	<b>students</b> have the right <b>student</b> has a choice a <b>student's</b> decision after	<b>students</b> understand returning <b>students</b> are aware <b>students</b> and teachers are all aware the <b>students</b> know, that <b>students</b> know that

One observation from the excerpts of concordance lines is that under the category of “consequences/negative behaviours” (see Table 5.11), there were specific examples of what the Student did including: “skipping out,” “intimidating,” “striking,” or “brought a knife” or “weapon.” These were all examples of behaviours that—within the policy texts—required the application of consequences. What is interesting is that in the policy texts the consequences were directly linked to behaviours while, in the transcripts, talk about consequences for those examples of negative behaviours was not present. In terms of “rights/responsibilities,” key words that appeared were “right,” “choice,” and “decision.” These all suggest that Students played an active role in making those choices or decisions. Expectations seemed to be related to an expectation of knowledge about the expectations of the school.

### Activated Kid(s)

When Kid was activated in Transcripts it was under different categories than when associated with the lexical choices of Student, Youth and Child. As Table 5.12 shows, there was

a need to examine each category to identify sub-categories for how this lexical choice was represented.

**Table 5.12: Activated Social Actor Kid(s) at the Interview Level**

Category	Sub-Category (if applicable)	Frequency
<b>Struggling</b>	-	12
<b>Supportive environment and relationships</b>	Supportive environment	6
	Relationships	6
<b>Expectations and relationships</b>	Experience	4
	Maturity	12
	Positive behaviours	17
<b>Consequences/Behaviours (-)</b>	Discipline/suspension	13
	Negative behaviours	10
<b>Student rights and Responsibilities</b>	-	7
<b>Safe</b>	-	7

In Transcripts, an entirely new category emerged: Kids were positioned as “struggling.” While Youth were simply associated with crime and violence across policy texts, Kids were seen as “struggling” and as having problems that they struggle with, and as “making mistakes” (see Table 5.13).

**Table 5.13 Kids Category Struggling and Supportive Environments**

Category: Struggling	Category: Supportive Environments
kids <b>who are struggling</b> kids <b>struggle based</b> kid <b>is beginning to struggle</b> <b>some kids have...significant problems</b> kid <b>ahhmm, and very difficult</b> kid's <b>made a mistake they support</b> <b>when kids were upset</b>	<b>kids</b> to reflect on the kids see the RCMP as a person <b>kids</b> listen to them how connected do <b>kids</b> feel, every <b>kid</b> has at least one adult <b>kids</b> get involved <b>kids</b> would tell some adults <b>kids</b> or parents tell us <b>kids</b> would know the RCMP officer

This language around Kids suggests a gentler attitude toward the negative behaviours of students. Despite there being more instances of Kids as passivated, it was also clear that Kids were seen as growing, as struggling, and trying to learn.

Under the category of “expectations,” expectations were about Kid’s “experience” and “maturity” (see Table 5.12). In addition, in the category of “supportive environments” and “relationships” (see Table 5.13)—which will be discussed in terms of passivated social actors—

emerged in relation to Students who participated in “supportive environments.” For example, Kids “see the RCMP as a person,” “kids listen,” and “get involved.” These are places where Kids participate in ways that make the school environment supportive.

### Passivated Student

The same categories used to classify Students as passivated in policy documents were applied to the Transcripts. These categories included: supportive environments, support programs, protocols, other social actors, safety, expectations and consequences/negative behaviours. The results were distributed in the concordance lines of passivated Students in Transcripts in the following way: “Supportive environment” (97 times,) “support programs” (19 times,) “protocols” (24 times,), “safety” (40 times,) “expectations” (69 times,) and “consequences/negative behaviours” (29 times). It is important to note that the tone of these categories in Transcripts differed from their tone in Ministry texts (see Table 5.14).

**Table 5.14 Students Passivated Category, Supportive Environments**

Ministry	Transcripts
<div style="text-align: center;">diverse needs of <b>students</b></div> community embraces individuality and diversity. • <b>Students</b> community relate to one another in supportive ways • <div style="text-align: center;"><b>Students</b></div> a welcoming place for <b>students</b> community embraces individuality and diversity. • <b>Students</b> and welcoming place for <b>students</b> , <b>Students</b> are given structured establishing rapport that will support <b>student</b> achievement <div style="text-align: center;"><b>Students</b> are encouraged</div>	an advocate for <b>students</b> always open to <b>students</b> , I'm I'm visible with <b>students</b> relationship with the <b>students</b> for <b>students</b> to be engaged interacting with <b>students</b> happening in a <b>student's</b> life? benefit of most <b>students</b> if a <b>student's</b> at risk academically

Table 5.14 provides insight into how, in Ministry texts and Transcripts where the category of “supportive environments” was most common, the positioning of Students was different. One difference that is immediately noted is in terms of the ownership of the Student. In Ministry texts, the language was unclear as to who was to provide this kind of environment for Students. In contrast, in Transcripts the pronoun “I” was used by principals. This suggested that Principals

claim, understand, and hold themselves individually responsibility to provide supportive environments for Students.

As with “supportive environments,” Ministry texts suggested that “support programs and services” need to be present (see Table 5.15). But the references to these programs and services was impersonal and without ownership. For example, “that each student is provided,” does not respond to the question of “who” is providing to the students, only that it “is provided.” However, in the Transcripts, two differences surfaced. First, there were more details about the kinds of programs or services available for students at their schools, for example, IEP’s and ESL programs. Second, there were pronouns associated with the provision of these programs, for example, “our IEP programs,” and “we have 79 students” that again indicated ownership on the part of Principals for providing these support programs and services.

**Table 5.15 Students Passivated, Support Programs**

<b>Ministry</b>	<b>Transcripts</b>
to meet the full range of <b>student</b> needs providing instruction to <b>students</b> to ensure that each <b>student</b> is provided delivery of non-educational support services to <b>students</b> that schools provide <b>students</b> delivery of non-educational support services to <b>students</b> the education system provides <b>students</b> responsible for providing services and supports to <b>student</b> placing and programming of <b>students</b> <b>student</b> evaluation and assessment educational programs for suspended <b>students</b>	quite a few <b>students</b> who are in our IEP program <b>students</b> who are receiving ESL we have 79 <b>students</b> there's more <b>students</b> that have IEPs programs for <b>students</b>

In the category of Safety, again Ministry texts seemed vague and at arms-length, while in Transcripts, principals showed a relationship with Student and other social actors. As well, there was more detail found in Transcripts about these programs than in Ministry texts (see Table 5.16).

**Table 5.16 Students Passivated, Category, Safety**

Ministry	Transcripts
<p>Student safety is paramount  <b>students</b> are free from harm,  standards to address <b>student</b> safe  • make it easy and safe for <b>students</b>  heightened concern for <b>student</b> safety  Safe schools make it easy and safe for <b>students</b>  information related to <b>student</b> safety</p>	<p>being bullied by a <b>student</b>  specifically, about <b>student</b> safety and  <b>student</b> who is being...subjected to...to constant teasing  to a <b>student</b>, you're harassing that student  you're harassing that <b>student</b>  safety of all our <b>students</b>  safety bit where <b>students</b> feel  punching that <b>student</b> in the arm  <b>student</b> really does need to have criminal charges  intimidate <b>students</b> to control them  one of their <b>students</b> are being bullied</p>

While Ministry texts mentioned the importance of keeping students' safe from harm, the Transcripts presented examples of specific things that make Students unsafe. For example, "bullying," "teasing," "harassing," "punching," and "intimidation."

The nature of the category of "Protocols" revealed similarities in how this category was used in Ministry texts and Transcripts. This similarity was that records are about making, keeping, examining, and providing records about Students (see Table 5.17).

**Table 5.17 Students Passivated, Category Processes and Protocols**

Ministry	Transcripts
<p>school administrators regarding <b>student</b> reports  review behaviour records on a <b>student</b>-by-student  maintained records of <b>student</b>  the files of individual <b>students</b>.  review behaviour records on a <b>student</b>  with reports in respect of the student's school  examine all <b>student</b> records  to receive a copy of any <b>student</b> record  any copies of <b>student</b> records provided</p>	<p>reporting of <b>students</b>,  through the <b>student</b> file,  looking for is that <b>students</b> report  was the last <b>student</b> code,  a history of the <b>student</b></p>

In both Ministry texts and in Transcripts, the relationship of reports and Students was impersonal. The reports were about Students, not for Students or by Students. This relationship was notable in that it made clear that reports were intended to be used by others when making decisions about Students. Students in reports were positioned as objects without a say about what was contained in these records.

Table 5.18 presents a sample list of “expectations” of Students as passivated in Transcripts, where this category was prevalent. The sample concordance lines show what Students were to expect. For example, expectations about helping students, dealing with students, what needs to take place before learning occurs, and issues surrounding students.

**Table 5.18 Student Passivated, Category, Expectations**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Transcripts</b> to help the <b>student</b> disenfranchising the <b>student</b> versus, <b>student</b> issue and dealing with kids and <b>students</b> responsible for the <b>students</b> dealing with the <b>students</b>, before <b>student</b> learning occurs, place those types of <b>students</b> the issues around these <b>students</b> that might place <b>students</b></p>
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What is notable about the relationship of passivated Student under the category of “expectations,” is that there is also an impersonality about dealing with Students. There were no pronouns in the concordance lines. Someone needed to “help the student” and “place those types of students.” So, the expectation that Students would receive something was there, but there was no other social actor to make sure this expectation happened. A teacher or a principal might have been a good candidate to play this role.

The last category for passivated Students was “Consequences/negative behaviours.” In this instance, the category was most prevalent in School Board texts (35 occurrences) followed by Transcripts (29 occurrences). As the category title suggests, these concordance lines were associated with negative behaviours, and the relationship of Student to these negative words represented them in a negative way. The assumptions related to words like “suspended,” referral,” and “due warning” all positioned Students negatively.

**Table 5.19 Student Passivated, Consequence/Neg Behaviours**

School Board	Transcripts
suspend a <b>student</b> referral to <b>Student</b> Services suspending the <b>student</b> , suspended <b>student</b> can be released the case to level three <b>student</b> suspension give the <b>student</b> due warning <b>student</b> suspension review committee suspended <b>student</b> and his/her parents/guardians recognized that all <b>student</b> discipline discipline of a <b>student</b> while attending	<b>student</b> is suspended need to discipline <b>students</b> consequences to <b>students</b> <b>student</b> is suspended a <b>student</b> may be asked to leave marijuana on a <b>student</b> , about <b>student</b> discipline, discipline consequences of <b>students</b> progressive discipline, this other <b>student</b> just punish that <b>student</b> consequences to <b>students</b> right choice for that specific <b>student</b> wasn't harsh enough on the <b>student</b> , they made aware of the <b>student</b> code this <b>student</b> is excluded from school exclude the <b>student</b> ? about the.. <b>student</b> code of conduct

Table 5.19 contains sample concordance lines for the category of “consequences/negative behaviour,” and it highlights the word “suspension” in both School Board texts and in Transcripts. The prevalence of the word suspension suggested that the most common form of consequence for negative behaviours, was indeed, suspension. While there was no mention of the word zero tolerance, there were mentions of discipline, and due warning, as well as the student code. The most common consequence appeared to be suspension.

### **Passivated Kid**

As previously noted, Kid(s) only appeared in Transcripts. What is interesting about this social actor is that the categories that it appeared most frequently associated with were “expectations,” which appeared almost twice as frequently as the next two most frequent categories: “protocols” and “supportive environments.” These were followed by “supportive environments” and “universalizing comments” about Kids (see Table 5.20). Clearly, the frequency of “expectations” suggests a focus on these in Transcripts.

**Table 5.20 Passivated Social Actor Kid(s) at the Interview Level**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
<b>Expectations and relationships</b>	62
<b>Protocols</b>	37
<b>Supportive environment</b>	36
<b>Universalizing comments</b>	28
<b>Consequences/Behaviours (-)</b>	11
<b>Safe</b>	6

Other categories that were present to a much lesser extent were “Consequences/negative behaviours” (11 times) and “safe” (6 times). Sample concordance lines for the four most frequent categories can be found in Table 5.21. This table shows the relationships within each of these categories. One observation across this genre was the presence of pronouns associated with Kid under every category except for Protocols. These included pronouns like “I,” “my,” “we,” and “our.” It was clear that for Principals, there was a personal relationship with Kids.

**Table 5.21 Kids Passivated: Expectations; Protocols; Supportive Environments; Universalizing Comments**

<b>Expectations</b>	<b>Protocols</b>	<b>Supportive Environments</b>	<b>Universalizing Comments</b>
relationships with these <b>kids</b> to make <b>kids</b> feel connected very helpful speaking to <b>kids</b> we survey the <b>kids</b> frequently I have expectations for <b>kids</b> they also mentor these <b>kids</b> did you talk to the <b>kids</b> expect it of all the <b>kids</b> expect my own <b>kids</b> , about helping <b>kids</b> understand	decision for the school and the <b>kid</b> things are organized and <b>kids</b> process to arrive at these <b>kids</b> prevented because <b>kids</b> put the whole <b>kid</b> into context process which just blows the <b>kids</b> minds <b>kids</b> at grade assemblies	overwhelmingly the best place for that <b>kid</b> our mandate to help <b>kids</b> we encourage our <b>kids</b> to, one <b>kid</b> to talk about strategies we talk about all the <b>kids</b> in the school necessary supports for those <b>kids</b> you know usually when <b>kids</b> have issues to me the <b>kids</b> come first our at-risk <b>kid</b> we work with those <b>kids</b>	nature of most of the <b>kids</b> we live in a culture where <b>kids</b> because the other <b>kids</b> we know there are <b>kids</b> at-risk <b>kids</b> seem

In terms of “expectations,” these were of behaviours expected of or from Kids. “Protocols” seemed more about maintaining order so that everyone knew what was expected of them to keep the school safe, and was related to “expectations” in that social actors were expected to know the protocols to which they would be held accountable. “Supportive

environments” differed from providing “Supports.” Supports had appeared previously for other lexical choices, but were about programs and services. Supportive environments, as they appeared in Transcripts, were about relationships in which an adult helped a Kid. In terms of the last section, “universalizing comments,” this was the first use of this category. In this case, it appeared as if the Kid(s) were being grouped together as one group, “the nature of kids,” “in a culture where kids,” and “at-risk kids.” This suggested that as a group, Kids were being positioned as a universal group with specific meanings attached. The purpose of this universalizing may be explained through the notion that “[s]eeking hegemony is a matter of seeking to universalize particular meanings in the service of achieving and maintaining dominance, and this is ideological work” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 58). This suggests that by grouping Kids under a category with specific expectations of that group justifies why adults needed to address and monitor them as an entity. This might lead to an assumption that treating all Kids the same way is best.

Sample concordance lines in Table 5.22 show how Principals, under the category of “universalizing comments” seemed to position Kid simultaneously as “that kid” and as “their kid” and recipients of what “I” have done. At the same time, under the category of “safe,” Safe was about providing that safety for “our” kids even when “*those kids* have done wrong.” The use of this lexical choice seems to sometimes place Kids at arms-length, and at other times to bring them into a closer relationship with the Principal. To refer to individual students as “a kid,” and universally as “those kids,” seemed a lexical choice with potentially different outcomes for students. This begs the question of which Kids are brought closer, which are pushed away, and under what conditions are they seen as individuals, rather than as homogenized category.

Table 5.22 Kid(s) Passivated, “Universalizing” and “Safe.”

Universalizing Comments	Safe
<p> <b>you hammer every kid</b>  <b>you have to let kids know</b>  <b>informed because their kids</b>  <b>there's an issue with a kid,</b>  <b>we would never refer kids</b>  <b>following up on those kids,</b>  <b>I have transferred kids</b>  <b>kids are suspended for drug use,</b>  <b>I gave a kid a second chance</b>                      what those <b>kids</b> have done wrong                 </p>	<p>                     creating emotional safety for the <b>kids</b>                      transition your kids to <b>safe</b>  <b>kids</b> need to feel safe                      safety of all the <b>kids</b> in the school                 </p>

### Discourse of Student

As in policy texts, in Transcripts there was a narrowing effect of positioning Students in specific ways related to specific lexical choices. Students as Child/Children, Youth, and Kid appeared in different ways within and across the genre chain and interviews. Students were associated with expectations, behaviours, and consequences. In addition, a pattern emerged through lexical choices, collocations, and whether social actors were passivated or activated that positioned Students as one large social actor, as perpetrators of behaviours that were negative, unsafe, violent, and simultaneously related to crime (as perpetrators), and as related to safe (as victims).

The process of this particular view of Students began with separating them from other social actors and, universalizing them under a seemingly single category. Then they were positioned as making choices that necessitate adults stepping in to make decisions for them in schools. Finally, they were represented as needing principals to make decisions for them, such as accepting that this school was not the best “fit” a that particular student. This process ended with the narrowest exclusionary practice—suspension—which led to recommendations for finding other programs, outside of the school, for a student.

## **Social Difference: Students Represented as Alike**

Previously, this chapter showed how Safe was defined by principals and the lexical choices for the Student, as well as whether they were activated or as passivated, and highlighted different ways Students were positioned. In Ministry texts, Students were represented as active when they were not following rules. In Transcripts, Students were represented as active specifically when they were “not attending,” “skipping out,” committing an “offence,” coming with a “discipline history,” and “stealing.”

While in Ministry texts there was a Youth-crime relationship—justifying why Youth should be treated as adults responsible for their actions—Kid was mostly used in Transcripts, and was specifically about needing nurturing, while still under the responsibility of adults. Principals used this lexical choice, and positioned these social actors as struggling, learning, and in need of advocates. This suggests that Principals recognized that relationships were needed to help Students learn to be members of their school community; learning to be a member of a school community was one part of an educational experience.

When Students appeared as activated, it was mostly to fulfill some expectation imposed by an adult social actor. Instances where Students appeared as activated were related to negative behaviours, for example, “stealing,” “driving recklessly,” “intimidating other students,” “arriving late,” “misusing their phones,” and “skipping class.” Other words included, “offences that intimidate,” “hurt,” “involve weapons,” “broke the law,” and where students denied these “(negative) behaviours.” Children were also only activated in terms of “violence among children.” As passivated, there were many instances of actions that were done or provided to Students. This was true especially in terms of supportive environments, support programs, processes and protocols, and consequences.

Protocols, whether in Ministry texts or in Transcripts, were consistently about reports about behaviours of Students. As for the category of consequences, the words that appeared most frequently were discipline and suspension. While other words appeared—for example, excluded, and consequences—exclusion from school was used to mean suspension from school and consequences were what happened after an incident occurred. Consequences could mean a variety of different things, from a warning to community service. However, in all instances the consequence usually referred to some form of exclusion from school, and most often the word consequence was used to mean, suspension. This suggests a narrowing of the category of consequence to suspension.

In combination, when the social actor Student is only perceived as activated when performing a negative behaviour, and the consequence of this behaviour is limited to suspension, then the idea that policies of school safety lead to Students being pushed out of school becomes justified and plausible.

### **Students as Immature**

Throughout the analysis, Students were mostly represented as passivated. When they made bad choices then Students were positioned as activated. Activation in terms of negative choices seems a contradiction. On the one hand, students are doing something which shows that they can affect the world, however, on the other hand, their choice of actions, positions them as immature and in need of adult supervision. Mr. Holmes, for example, suggested that if a Student performs a behaviour that they were already warned against, the Student, through their own actions, has “chosen to bring an adult into their life to make decisions for them” (Mr. Holmes, 406-407). Mr. Holmes’ phrasing suggests that Students have a choice, they have “chosen.” This relationship between acting and immaturity, sets up the argument that students are acting in ways

that will lead to their exclusion from schooling and that they are solely responsible for these actions.

As detailed earlier, there were only two instances of Students as activated. The first instance was when they were activated to perform negative behaviours. The second instance was when Students were activated to perform an expected behaviour that was guided or a response to a request by an adult in school. The suggestion made by Mr. Holmes, that Student's choose to "bring an adult" to make a decision for them, is therefore questionable. The suggestion that a student chooses to bring in an adult to make disciplinary decisions for them assumes that Students are incapable of making good choices because they are immature. It is, therefore, the immaturity of Students, not their ability to choose, that rationalizes why the adults must step in to make decisions for the Student.

In terms of whether Students had a say in consequences of their behaviours, Mr. Murphy said, "you've been gone 30 days, you've cut class, you can't follow a contract, we've given every benefit of the doubt, we don't like suspending, but you're failing everything, what do you want us to do?" (Mr. Murphy, 342-344). Again, the apparent choice of Students comes up in the rhetorical question of "what do you want us to do?" In addition, what this phrase raises is the apparent lack of choice a Principal has as to the course of action. Principals in this case, have been left no choice—by the Student's immature behaviour—and must now follow protocol. For example, Ms. Peters suggested that "unfortunately, it's [suspension] one of the few strategies that we have, you know after you've done talking and mediation, there isn't a whole lot of other things out there, so a minor thing [behaviour] is an in-school suspension, and a more extreme thing [behaviour] is an outside-of-school suspension" (Ms. Peters, 133-136). This is consistent with the narrowing of consequences to mean "suspension," while Ms. Peters refers to this final

consequence as “unfortunate,” and Mr. Murphy suggests that the Student has left them no choice, given that suspension is the consequence made available through Ministry and School Board policies and in the Codes of Conduct, it would appear that even Principals have no other choice. Suspension is the final consequence.

The narrowing of Students in terms of their negative behaviours, in combination with the narrowing of consequences to suspension, seems in line with a narrowing in the discourse of Students. In terms of school safety, Students appeared most associated with negative behaviours, and when they repeated those negative behaviors, these students were treated with the same consequences as if they had committed a criminal offence, and therefore were subject to the consequence of suspension. For instance, in the example provided by Mr. Murphy, where “you've been gone 30 days, you've cut class” (Mr. Murphy, 342), absence becomes translated to an offence, repeated absences become “an offence.” As noted in the interviews, all offences are subject to school board guidelines and receive the maximum consequence, suspension. This is the same whether the behaviour was a repeated minor behaviour or a single criminal offence. The only response to a criminal offence—which in this case can mean repeated school absence through progressive discipline—is school exclusion through suspension. The punishment for missing school, is therefore, missing more school. Students who are suspended can therefore all be classified under the same umbrella term, as offenders or even criminal, and any student who is repeatedly absent, can more easily be given this progressively increasing suspensions

### **Students as Square Pegs: Justifying Suspension**

One of the major critiques of applying suspension in a prescriptive manner is that it impacts students differently, potentially exacerbating inequities. When suspensions are applied to students who already feel as if they do not fit in school, the results can lead to early school

leaving. For these students, staying in school would be accepting the negative assumptions adults have about them in school. Students who are suspended are more likely to leave school, cease to be students, and cease to be a responsibility of the school. It could be argued that under conditions where Students are universalized as “bad,” it is conceivable that for any Student, school leaving might be a better option than being subjected to consequences based on negative assumptions about them.

We also talk to them about; “you know, it’s ok, this is a big box, and sometimes square pegs don’t fit in a round box, and we’re a big round box, and you know, there’s other places we can help you learn, and clearly we’re not engaging you enough, we’re not giving you what you need, and away you go.” (Mr. Murphy, 344-348)

In this quote, by Mr. Murphy, tried to rationalize the process of pushing a student out of school. He lamented that the student is not getting from school what they need, which is to learn, and that the adults at the school are not engaging them and giving them what they need. In this statement, the purpose of school, according to Mr. Murphy, is to engage Students in learning, and that in not being able to make that happen, pushing a student out of school is a reasonable response. That principals rationalize how they use policy to push students out of school, and that they justify to themselves that students do not fit in their school, also hints that they are possibly conflicted about this consequence.

That principals expressed that there were students who did not fit in their school, and that negative behaviours of Students inevitably lead to suspension, is discouraging. These statements by principals show the recontextualizing effects of zero tolerance policies where school exclusion is the final consequence. This recontextualization of a policy intended for adult criminals targeted by the United States Customs Agency in schools has potential long-term and

life-long effects. In this example, what starts out as a student who is cutting class, or missing school, becomes an in-school suspension, that through “progressive” discipline, leads to out of school suspension, and eventually, early school leaving. This despite the mounting research that consistently shows that suspensions are often the first step out of school for students (e.g., Kelly, 1993; Velloso & Vadeboncoeur, 2014).

### **Kind of “Student”**

Students appeared in different ways, for example, as perpetrators, victims, children to be protected, and kids who are learning, but make bad choices. However, in all cases, Students appeared as passivated and as subjected to the actions of others. The only times that Students were assumed to be acting and having an effect on others was when a negative action was enacted. Thus, Students were assumed to be choosing, from a number of options, to perform this negative action. This study highlights how Students, who were mostly passivated as a group, are made individually responsible, held accountable for making schools unsafe, and bear the consequences.

The definition of school safety was focused on keeping Students safe from the unsafe actions of other Students. In this definition, unsafe actions fell under two categories: 1. criminal behaviours, which required police intervention, and 2. any of a list of unacceptable behaviours, which, if they occurred frequently enough, the repetition alone could shift them from being a minor infraction to a criminal offence. This definition highlights the way in which Students were represented across the genre chain: as a common offender, as actively choosing to enact an unsafe action, and, in fewer instances, as the victim. Within this complicated positioning of Students in policy texts, Principals had to make decisions about school safety.

As ideological, discourses constitute a framework that both reflects and works to normalize ideological perspectives. This normalization contributes to hegemony and the construction of a common sense about school safety. Skiba and Peterson (2000) examined behaviours that led to school suspension. They found that the definition of misbehaviour changed with every repeated behaviour; every time a behaviour was repeated by the same student, a progressively harsher consequence was applied. This was evidenced through the genre chain, and suggests that the tardiness of a student, the first time, may not be considered an unsafe incident. Being repeatedly late becomes defined as an incident that requires consequences. The criminalizing of everyday behaviours also represents a student who is performing these behaviours as a criminal.

The positioning of the Student as criminal was noted in the collocation of Youth with the word “criminal.” The number of times that this collocation appeared across the genre chain served to normalize the phrase “Youth Criminal” and the relationship between these words made it appear as if this word was representative of Youth. The more often these words were used together, the easier it became for the term “youth criminal” to be reduced to “criminal.” Accepting this relationship becomes an example of the process of hegemony. Youth are unquestioningly accepted in texts and Transcripts, as likely to enact criminal behaviours. Students, therefore, were positioned as obstacles to school safety.

Barnett (2005) identified a process through which the individual—given an emphasis on liberty and equality—is made responsible for his or her own actions. This was evident throughout the data as Students were represented as activated, but only in instances where the actions were negative and led to consequences. This is an example of how the individual student is made responsible for the suspension he or she will receive for their “chosen” behaviour and,

therefore, is implicated in their own way out of school and the economic costs associated with that choice. No other options, other than school exclusion, were ultimately available to principals, or to students.

Policy texts offered few avenues other than what was written in protocol, and these were already imbued with a discourse of Students as immature. While some Principals countered policy through their use of discretion, and provided students with alternative consequences—and in one case used the concept of Restorative Justice in the Codes of Conduct—School Board requirements still eventually ended with suspension. In combination, across the genre chain, Students became narrowly defined through their negative and/or potentially criminalized behaviours, a perceptive simultaneously challenged by principals use of discretion, and justified when they accepted that some students might benefit from a different learning environment. Policy texts about safety, were probably written with a certain intention to address problematic behaviors, and may not emphasized positive behaviours that may have also been present. This suggests a circular argument where behaviours lead to policies to deal with problematic behaviours, which are only looking for specific kinds of problematic behaviours, which justify the need for keeping the policies to deal with predefined problematic behaviours.

Negative behaviours were assumed to be a result of individual student choices and, therefore, allowed for students to be individually subjected to policy consequences. The most likely consequence, stated repeatedly across the genre chain and interviews, was suspension. In an environment where all students are grouped as one and treated the same way, it is difficult to conceptualize the possibility of alternatives like Restorative Justice being successful.

## **Summary**

This chapter defined the social actors Safety and Student in Transcripts by using linguistic analysis to exemplify how they appeared in Transcripts and how this differed from policy texts. This analysis defined school safety based on conceptions of the school as a community, where principals take responsibility for the process of educating students and kids. This chapter also noted how students were represented as passivated, except in cases where they behaved in ways that were contrary to school expectations and rules. Overall, Students were positioned as similar to each other, especially in terms of making poor choices, thereby justifying the need for consequences that lead to suspension.

## **Chapter 6 Principals' Descriptions of Policy to Applications of Policy to Practice**

This chapter brings together how Safe and Student were represented by utilizing Fairclough's Levels of Social Life to illustrate the relationship between policy and practice through Principals descriptions of social practice in interviews (see Figure 6.1). In this study, social structure of schooling was compromised by the policy texts from the Ministry, School Board, and Codes of Conduct. Principals' descriptions of an incident comprised the social event. Principals' social practices were described in interviews as the Principals interpreted incidents and used their discretion to respond. Two different constellations of styles for how Principals described their responses were identified.

This chapter is divided in three sections. The first section introduces four different social practices described by Principals. The second section identifies two different constellations of styles principals' styles described by Principals as informing their social practices about school safety. The third section discusses different kinds of influences on principals' social practices.

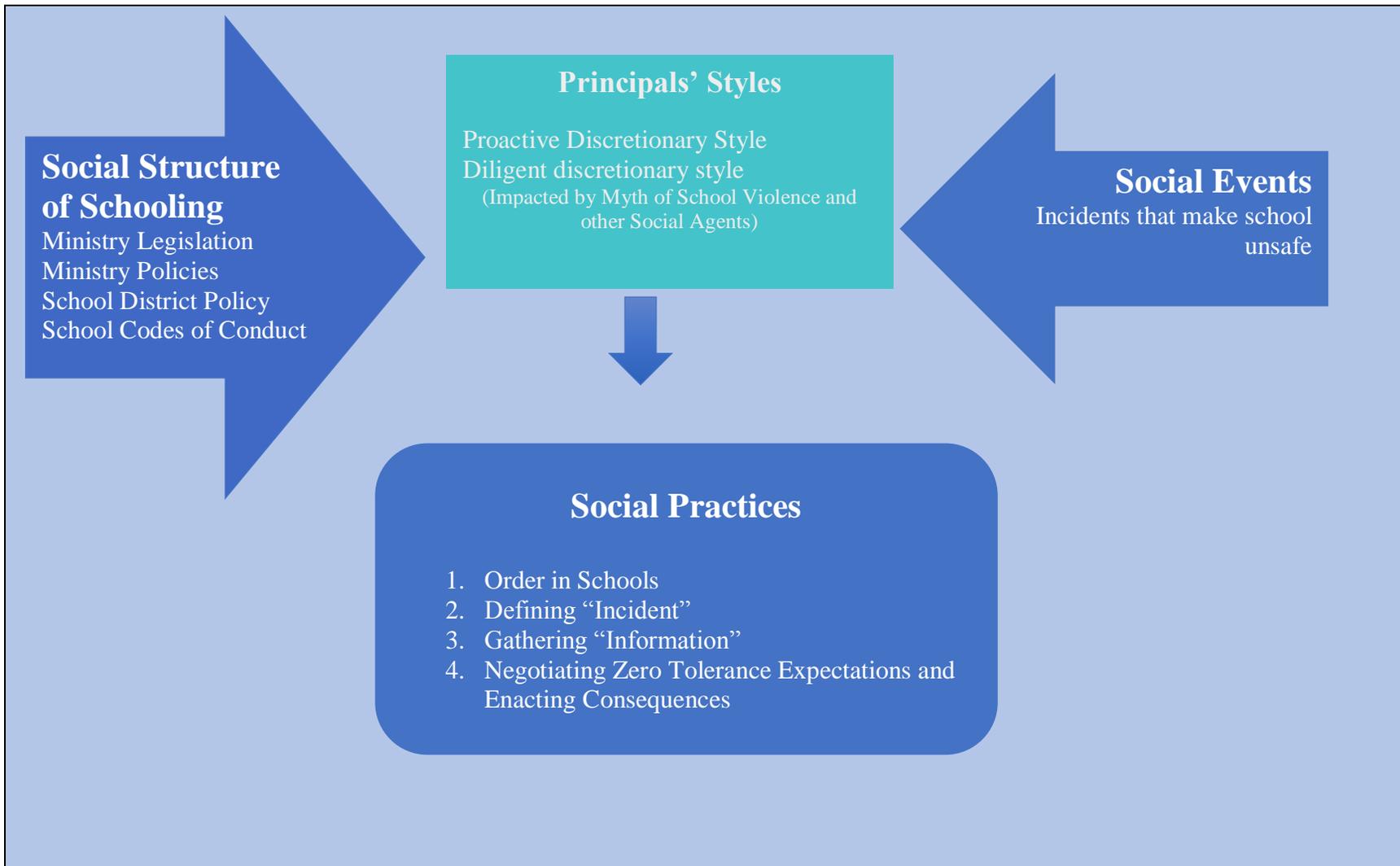


Figure 6.1 Illustration of the Practice of Policy Using Fairclough's Levels of Social Life

## **Principals' Practices Keeping Schools Safe**

The interviews included a comparison of the protocols for school safety, provided by the School Boards, with the procedures Principals described in examples of decisions about school safety. During the interviews, principals were also asked to provide an example of an incident including steps they would take: from being informed about a possible incident through tracing their steps to making a decision. This example also needed to include the different people involved at different stages of the process.

The procedures that Principals reported in the interviews were similar, but of the six, only four Principals provided specific incidents they had experienced. During the interview, Mr. Murphy pointed to three framed School Board commendations on his wall. As he explained, each was for placing a student's safety ahead of his own during different incidents that happened at his respective schools. In one example, he was hit in the head with a baseball bat while trying to get a student out of danger. Mr. Murphy was able to provide several examples of the process of addressing school safety incidents he had experienced in his time as Principal in several schools.

The examples provided by Principals were categorized into four social practices in dealing with situations about school safety. The first was the role of order that each principal used in their practices of school safety. Second, Principals use of discretion as they defined "incidents" that made school unsafe. Third, Principals' practice of gathering information about incidents to help make decisions about school safety. Fourth, the use of protocol to support or challenge zero tolerance consequences, like suspension, or use alternatives.

## Social Practice 1: Role of Order

The *Safe and Caring Communities' Policy* (2012) no longer includes the word “orderly” in the title (it was present in the 2008 version), but Maintenance of Order in Section 177 of the *School Act* (October 2, 2017 version) still applies<sup>2</sup>. A question about the role of order on school safety was followed up in the interviews. Mr. Murphy stated that “there's got to be order before learning, so you gotta have a structure that gets them to class on time ...make sure that we can transition from class to class in an orderly fashion” (Mr. Murphy, 167-170). Ms. Peters responded saying, “if those 700 kids when the bell rang, if they tore through the halls like race horses instead of walking quietly from class to class it would become a more physically dangerous place” (Ms. Peters, 210-212). For Ms. Peters,

we create a culture of orderliness and respect and following rules, and, and we often have conversations about, yeah, this rule might seem silly, but it's what we need to do because we all have to live in this big building together, and kids understand that, they understand that you know, putting their garbage in the garbage can, and recycling in the recycling, and walking in the halls, and they understand that that's what we need to do to be together in this building. (Ms. Peters, 217-222)

The need for order seemed to focus on the physical environment for most of the Principals; their examples were about structure that allowed the large number of people within the building to function together in a smooth way. Principals also acknowledged that when the rules were explained to students, they were more willing to follow them, even if they thought the rules were “silly.”

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<sup>2</sup> Section 177 of the School Act entitled Maintenance of Order, states (1) A person must not disturb or interrupt the proceedings of a school or an official school function. And (4) A principal, vice-principal, or director of instruction of a school or a person authorized by the board may, in order to restore order on school premises, require adequate assistance from a peace officer.

Despite the recognized need for order, this concept was defined in different ways by different Principals. For example, Mr. Franks suggested:

orderly may mean more sort of routines, and things are organized and kids are going to the appropriate classes and those types of things, but then that can be at times in conflict with a caring school, because the caring piece doesn't necessarily fit into that organized box. (Mr. Franks, 219-222)

Mr. Franks recognized that there were reasons for the rules, in spite of a conflict with a caring school, since a caring school isn't always an "organized box." However, at the other end of the spectrum in the discussion on order was this statement by Mr. Cahill:

we don't have a lot of rules for the sake of rules, we don't have, what I like to refer to as arbitrary "because I said so" adult rules, for instance you can't wear a hat, you can't do this or you can't do that, we don't have any rules like that, we have two very simple terms and we refer to them all the time, and its care and respect, and that means that at all times you must demonstrate care and respect. (Mr. Cahill, 83-89)

Mr. Cahill expressed that in promoting the concepts of care and respect, he could perhaps help students arrive at an environment that was physically and emotionally safe. He explained that at his school, students were not subjected to a multitude of rules about what was allowed, and what was not allowed. Mr. Cahill expressed an expectation that a student's behaviour would be guided by whether it demonstrated care to others and respect. If the answer was no, then that student's behaviour was in violation of the school code. Mr. Cahill's reference to the "hat rule" was interesting because his was the only one of the six schools that had a rule about not wearing hats while at school.

Only one other principal mentioned the hat rule; Mr. Murphy mentioned it justifying why his school did not have a hat rule. He stated, “our kids don't like to mess up their hair with the hats” (Mr. Murphy, 396-397). Additionally, he suggested that the reason “most schools have a hat policy in Ocean, it’s gang stuff, it’s hiding behind stuff, it’s being able to identify intruders” (389-391). The implications of this statement seemed in direct reference to the demographics of his school, as related to income, and implied a culture of gang activity, usually associated with urban poverty.

Mr. Murphy’s comments had additional implications, for example, his suggestion was that kids at his school were from a high-income background, were concerned about their appearance, and wearing a hat was not in line with that appearance. Additionally, his comment also suggested that he did not believe students from his school would belong to gangs. His suggestion implied that he thought his students did not have anything to hide, and would not be identified as intruders while visiting any other school. Given that the closest school was in the same geographic and demographic high income area, this implied that his students would probably fit. Mr. Murphy’s statement about gangs also emphasized that, for him, gangs were only present in schools where income levels are lower, and where the culture of the neighbourhood allowed for the presence of gangs. Neither of which would happen at his school.

From this discussion about order and rules, Principals appeared to use their knowledge or assumptions about the “kind” of students they had at their schools to define order and to make decisions about what kind of rules their schools needed. Given that these assumptions seemed to be based on things, like whether students had access to cars and did not want to mess their hair, then decisions about school safety appeared to be based, at least in part, on the demographic makeup of the school. Instances that demonstrated the ways in which educators make

assumptions about schooling and what “students” should be, have been historically documented (Gorski, 2008), however, it is interesting that ideas seemingly rooted in the past, persist. In this instance, the assumption was that violence and gangs are issues related to people with lower incomes, in other words, reifying the “myth of a culture of poverty.”

### **Social Practice 2: Defining Incident.**

During the interviews Principals mentioned their School District’s *Threat Assessment Protocols* and their *Critical Incident Quick Reference* for when potential incidents were reported in schools. I located copies of the texts, and coupled these with the examples of incidents reported by the Principals. For example, the steps recommended for the Ocean School District can be found in the *Threat Assessment Protocol* (rev 2007) and shared with parents through the *Threat Assessment Protocol – Fair Notice* (rev 2013). There were three steps to the active phase, followed by a final stage which involved returning the school to normal and debriefing parents and the school teams. These are explained in detail next, however, it is important to note that the *Critical Incident Quick Reference* detailed steps with names and phone numbers for who to contact based on the type of incident; especially for information pertaining to natural disasters, and cases of intruders on school grounds. Interestingly, even though the discussions about school safety appeared to focus on students as potential perpetrators, the *Critical Incident Quick Reference* did not play an integral role in the interviews.

In the *Threat Assessment Protocol*, step one after a potential incident at school was reported, was assessing the immediate risk involved. If the incident was determined to be a serious threat, and the person making the threat had a weapon, then 911 would immediately be called. The Assistant Superintendent and the Principals would initiate their critical incident plan (from the *Critical Incident Quick Reference*), including a complete school lockdown—the doors

were locked and no unauthorized person was allowed in or out—commonly referred to as a ‘code red.’

Step two was to activate the school’s Threat Assessment Team (TAT). This team consisted of school administrators, counselors, and police resource officers. In the interviews, principals distinguished in their report of an incident whether the source of the threat was a student or someone outside the school. The TAT then called the School District team with as much information as had been gathered and a plan for immediate risk reduction that was ready to be put in place if required. In addition, if the incident pointed to a student, parents were contacted. Both school boards offered Principals further threat assessment training. Mr. Murphy revealed during the interview that he had completed every training session offered by his school board.

Step three involved assessing the behaviour: whether it was a threat making behaviour, a worrisome behaviour, or exceptional cases, like a high profile worrisome behaviour. A threat making behaviour was specific to a person 12 years or older “who in any manner, knowingly utters, conveys or causes any person to receive a threat...to cause death or bodily harm” (Criminal Code of Canada, Section 264.1). Worrisome behaviours were behaviours that “cause concern for members of the school system and may indicate that a student is moving toward a greater risk of violent behaviour” (p. 5). A high profile worrisome behaviour was a behaviour that occurs in a school where the school community may be traumatized by a previous incident of school violence, and so “reactions to the incident may trigger a broader trauma response in the school and community system” (p. 5).

Each of these required a different set of responses and was assessed initially by compiling as much information as possible about the student, including their school and behaviour history,

their family history, school dynamics, and social dynamics. This step determined if additional members of the TAT team needed to be contacted, such as mental health workers, psychologists, and psychiatrists. All steps taken were documented and any recommendations, responses taken, intervention plans, and plans for ensuring the school gets 'back to normal' were developed and carried out. The final step was getting the school back to normal, assuring parents that everything was fine and debriefing to see what worked and what could be done differently should something similar occur. These threat assessment protocols, as well as the school district training on threat assessment were all based on FBI threat assessment recommendations (O'Toole, 1999).

The Principals interviewed all had critical incident plans for their schools, and had their critical incident checklist on the wall of their office. What was interesting, though, was their perspective on the kinds of student behaviours that fell under "threats." Specifically, when is a weapon a "threat?" For example, Mr. Cahill stated:

if you bring a weapon to school, it's extremely serious and there's only one reason to bring a weapon to school, it's either to intimidate, to show, or the use in threat, you know, in worse-case scenario, you know, it could actually hurt someone, stab, shoot, beat, that's, ahh, no no-one therefore feels safe. (Mr. Cahill, 454-457)

The only reason to bring a weapon, in this example, was to intimidate someone with it and/or use it to hurt someone. In this instance, the weapon is a clear threat to school safety, and would probably warrant an immediate response. But not all Principals attributed the presence of a "weapon" in the same way. For example, Mr. Holmes stated:

it could be that a kid feels that over, word of mouth, gossip, social media all that kind of stuff, feels threatened for his life so now he brings something into the school to protect

him that actually is considered to be under the school code of conduct could be a weapon.

(Mr. Holmes, 114-117)

For Mr. Holmes, one reason to bring a weapon was in order to feel safe. The intent in this case was self-defense, especially if no threat had been uttered, and there did not appear to be an imminent threat to school safety. In this case, the student's "worrisome" behaviour might warrant his parents being called and for him to be referred to any list of supports. How a behaviour is assessed can potentially lead to different responses by the principal, and therefore different kinds of steps taken by the principal and by the Threat Assessment Team. It is interesting that Mr. Holmes acknowledged that some kids still feel the need to bring a weapon with them, precisely in order to feel safe at school.

A final example by Ms. Peters identified student lack of thought to consequences, and gave an example of an act in which an object that could be labelled a weapon was not interpreted as a threat. She described:

we've had situations where kids, they got this cool knife for Christmas and they want to bring it and show it to their friends. And then you have these weird conversations with kids about, "you brought a knife to school?" "No no it's just a..." and then they go... "ohhh," and then you know, yeah, no intention of using it, they're just bring it to show it off to their friends. (271-275)

Ms. Peters suggested that unless the Student had the intention to use an object, like a knife, as a weapon, there was no need to initiate School District protocols related to school safety. Her reference to the object as a gift, and treating the behaviour of bringing it to school as an error in judgement, allowed the Student to experience a "learning experience," versus a "bringing the hammer down" experience.

Mr. Murphy, however, described a situation where a student had brought a replica water gun that, from a distance, could be confused with a real gun, and called the student into his office. According to Mr. Murphy, the kid “doesn't really understand what the big to-do is” (361), and in response the school “followed the whole procedure just to scare that kid because we know that if he did that out on the streets, up in Bluewater or in Kimi, or one of the other places, you may be shot” (365-367). In this case, though the “weapon” was identified as a replica, the student’s unwillingness or inability to accept that it was a mistake, led the principal to use his discretion and follow protocol “to scare the kid.” This incident is telling given the fact that 1. The student felt he had the right to challenge the principal’s accusation, and 2. The principal felt that the student’s sheltered life might lead him to make real-life mistakes that could harm him. This was one example where the threat assessment protocol was used to teach a lesson to a student from a school in a high-income neighbourhood.

In the discussion focused on keeping students’ safe, it was important to note that when speaking of incidents, Principals’ references were mostly about students who brought “weapons” or were a threat to the safety of others. Even in examples where it seemed the threat was from an intruder, the result was that the student was in some way connected to the school. For example, Mr. Richard spoke of an incident where a student had an issue with someone in the community and that person came to the school to initiate a fight that left that student and the principal injured. Mr. Murphy spoke about a different incident when he had to call “Code Red,” or school lockdown, because two kids wearing black hoodies and masks, and who had guns were seen near the school. In both cases, however, students were somehow involved. In the first example, the student had conflict with someone from outside the school, and that person followed him to the

school. In the second, one of the kids with the gun had been “kicked out” (p. 590) of the school shortly before the incident.

In terms of outside threats, Principals had different processes for determining what could be interpreted as a threat. Mr. Richard spoke about how he made decisions about what could be a threat to school safety, and noted:

well you've, ok, depending on the location of the school, where is it, is it by the Sky Train? is by any shopping area, you know, do you have people, more intruders coming into your school site because of just location, those are safety issues. Here, you don't have, you're not on a major bus route, you're not....so I mean right there you are taking some variables away. (Mr. Richard 356-359)

Mr. Richard's reference in this case was that at his school, where for the most part students came from high income families, he had fewer issues related to intruders, based simply on location. One observation made during the visit to Mr. Richard's school was that while there was a designated teacher area in the parking lot, which was fairly well-occupied, there was also a high number of vehicles in the remainder of the parking lot. The high number of vehicles was possibly a reflection of the distance between this school and areas in the city that were more frequently served by public transit. While the discussion referred to the accessibility of the school, this school was located in a suburban part of the city that was difficult to access for the more urban “inner city” population, thus, the number of cars could also have been a reflection of a population of students who used private vehicles to get to school.

Mr. Murphy, whose school was also located in the suburbs of the city in another area with high socioeconomic demographics, also pointed to the lack of intruders at his school. He stated:

rarely do we get an intruder and if they are, they are from the local other south-end school and...they know each other because they play on the same soccer team, they didn't think it was a big deal to come here to say hi to their girlfriend or whatever. (Mr. Murphy, 393-396)

Mr. Murphy suggested that the intruders who did show up were from a similar demographic area, and had either a team affiliation, or an ongoing relationship with a student in the school. This made them familiar or possibly even extended members of the community. Therefore, they posed no threat to the safety of students. One inference from this statement was that if public transit was more accessible, it could make it easier for “intruders” to come to the school, for example, youth from inner city schools who would more likely stand out, and be identifiable as threats. However, kids from the neighbouring school, with similar demographics and who had their own cars to get there were not likely to be considered threats.

### **Social Practice 3: Gathering Information**

As part of the decision-making process, Principals noted the importance of gathering information. Ms. Peters, for example, stated:

I've learnt as a principal, you must talk to both sides, because it's so classic, guy comes in crying, he's saying "oh those guys they attacked me" and so you go, Oh my god this poor child, he's been attacked, and, you can never assume you have the whole story, you must always sit down and talk to the student, talk to the person who supposedly attacked him, and make sure you have the whole picture. (Ms. Peters, 116-120)

For Ms. Peters, it was important to find out as much as is possible so that she could have a better idea of what happened. Ms. Peter's concern appeared to focused on the school community, not just on the assumption that one person was a victim and, therefore, the other was a perpetrator.

Rather, in conversation, the “whole story” could be examined. In following up with the idea of getting as much information as possible, Mr. Holmes suggested that:

once you know you have all the information you can actually help guide that individual to take responsibility for their action, so that's the first step, rather than us saying that you've done something wrong, really what we want the individual to say that you know, they take responsibility for that action and that they are actually open to discuss it. (Mr. Holmes, 374-378)

From Mr. Holmes’s perspective, saying “we know you did this...defeats the purpose of caring” (Mr. Holmes, 382). Instead, it is important that the student take responsibility first, and “getting them involved in the process and 98% of the time, kids actually want to resolve (the issue) because they know they are cared for” (Mr. Holmes, 385-387). As far as these Principals were concerned, gathering all the information was important to their decision-making process, as well as helping the student take responsibility for their behaviour and take part in the resolution. In this way, the student could restore the relationship in the community and the school community would benefit. Also important is how Mr. Holmes framed his argument in terms of the “purpose of caring,” which was different than the way this word appeared in Ministry texts, as the name of documents related to “safe, caring, and orderly” or “safe and caring.” Caring, in this way was used as an action, not as a goal.

Despite Principals’ stated intentions to make situations into learning experiences, there were situations when Principals focused on “we've done all our due diligence, we've done all our warnings” (Mr. Murphy, 325-326). In this case, Mr. Murphy was referring to incidents where parents did not agree with the disciplinary measure taken by the school and took the case to the

Superintendent. In cases like these, ensuring that processes are followed was central. Mr. Cahill reiterated this when he stated:

parents, occasionally, usually rarely, but occasionally parents are dissatisfied with how something went, they feel that their child's been singled out or they feel that their child, that the penalty is too excessive, and that's unfortunate. (Mr. Cahill, 473-475)

Mr. Cahill hinted that communication between the school and the home was essential, as was making sure parents were aware of any behaviours or incidents in which their child was involved. Despite Principals saying that they welcomed open communication with parents, it appeared that in some cases, the process was more about the school informing parents about decisions that had already been made about their children.

This practice was one that was previously associated with the kind of questioning that might take place after an incident outside of schools occurs. As part of this practice, Principals informed parents about what had already taken place, this highlighted that in questioning the Student, a Principal may have invoked the *in loco parentis* clause of *The School Act* (1996). But if the parent had been called prior to the Student being questioned, how different would this practice look, and what could it mean for the kinds of outcomes Students might experience?

#### **Social Practice 4: Negotiating Zero Tolerance Expectations and Enacting Consequences**

The School Board protocols for both districts that were represented were clear about instances when the “district will react according to protocol” (Paragraph 1, Threat Assessment Protocol, 2013). These instances included when a weapon involved and someone made a threat to self-harm or harm someone else. In each case, the consequences in protocols for school safety called for swift action—though never mentioned explicitly in either Ministry or School Board, or Codes of Conduct—and were described by two Principals as “zero tolerance.”

Kevin Cameron, author of the guide *Assessing Violence Potential: Protocol for Dealing with High-Risk Student Behaviors, 8<sup>th</sup> Edition* (2009), which was adapted by the Ocean School Board, included a list of high risk behaviours. The high-risk behaviours included: verbal/written threats to kill or cause grievous bodily harm, internet website threats to kill or cause grievous bodily harm, possession of weapons (including replicas), bomb threats, fire setting at school, group related intimidation and violence, and sexual intimidation or assault. The response required by the School Board included immediate police involvement and addressing the situation as a criminal matter. However, when Principals provided examples of incidents they had experienced, they had different responses. For example, Mr. Richard stated:

I mean it's [School Board Policy] based on, you know, zero tolerance to drugs, zero tolerance to weapons, zero tolerance to bullying, I mean, bullying occurs-zero tolerance, zero tolerance... I mean you [principals] have to look at the situation and how you're gonna deal with it, some people may interpret zero tolerance as "you hammer every kid!" Is that really the way to go? and, "No, you[student], you're not gonna get that support?" No. I'm saying you have to look at each individual case and make the decision on what's best for the school [...] I'd hate to have my hands tied where I couldn't make a decision based on interpretation of policies and procedures and what I feel is best for my school and the students at this school. (Mr. Richard, 206-216)

Mr. Richard admitted that some of the policies he dealt with were based on zero tolerance, but he also problematized their use. In these instances, he needed to make decisions that were best for the student and the school, using his own interpretation of the policies and what was best for his school. In addition, Mr. Richard noted that there needed to be supports for the student, even if the incident involved a zero-tolerance approach.

Mr. Franks observed that the situations he dealt with in school were complex and did not readily lend themselves to the prescriptive application of consequences suggested by the Ministry:

my experience has been there's a lot of complexity associated with some of the scenarios and as with a lot of the things coming from the Ministry and around that bullying, harassment and intimidation (policies), is that it creates some difficulties for us sometimes in school, because there is zero tolerance for it, and it becomes the levels of grey associated with it that, who's right? who's wrong? And then people can point to expectations of "you're not supposed to tolerate that person doing that," but then you look into it deeper and it becomes very complex issues that there ends up being no winners sometimes [R: uhum] and the school's the loser in it too. (Mr. Franks, 293- 301)

Mr. Franks provided an example of a custodian who found a small piece of paper that had been burned in one of the washrooms. Based on security camera evidence, they were able to identify the student and had a conversation with the student. Mr. Franks' concern was that under the present protocols, all fires are on the list of high-risk behaviours. High-risk behaviours are considered criminal offences, and not just instances of "a student who was being silly" (Mr. Franks, 548). For this incident, Mr. Franks "ended up being questioned further up. 'Well, where's the police file number for this?' and 'Why haven't you contacted our insurance company to say that there was a fire in your building?'" (Mr. Franks, 554-556). Yet, in Mr. Franks opinion, there was no need to follow protocols over a "little piece of paper that was lit on fire" (Mr. Franks, 554-557). Mr. Franks also recollected an instance when a gifted student, who was "disengaged because school's easy for him" (Mr. Franks, 403), set off a smoke bomb that cost the school \$7000 to clean the ventilation system. On this occasion, he described a "conflict

between what's good for this boy, what's good for the peers, who all know he's done this because now he's done this act, creating an unsafe environment for all the students” (Mr. Franks, 406-409), and understanding that the student comes from a low income family and “they’ll never be able to pay the bill” (Mr. Franks, 414). Eventually, the student was given a Level 2 suspension, over five days, due to “over five is sort of a minimum as far as perception from a school goes” (Mr. Franks, 419) with support from the school board. Mr. Franks admitted that after the suspension was over the student “returned but he's faded on us again” (Mr. Franks, 434).

In these examples, these two Principals expressed resistance to the idea of zero tolerance, and a willingness to be questioned by their superiors on the decisions they made, as long as they felt that it was in the best interest of the student and the school. However, when they had to make a choice, it would be the school that would take priority. This was especially noted when it came to perspectives about “non-negotiable” incidents. For example, Mr. Cahill stated:

some things that are non-negotiable and they are: any kind of ongoing harassment, bullying, or intimidation of another student, so it’s an ongoing thing, and we've tried to intervene with these persistent behaviours, that will, that will mean a suspension from our school [R: ok], if you steal something, are involved in the theft of something from another student, that's a violation of the Criminal Code of Canada, we'll involve the RCMP and you will be suspended from school, any kind of a weapon, any kind of a fist fight, any kind of a physical interruption of another person, we'll also, you will also be suspended from school cause it’s just not tolerated, and the last one is, any kind of involvement with drugs or alcohol or controlled substances while at school, distributing in possession or in use of them, will also meet with a suspension. (Mr. Cahill, 298-308)

Mr. Cahill's statement recontextualized violations of the criminal code as they appeared in the threat assessment protocol under definitions threatening behaviours and of weapon. His response was also in line with aspects of the protocol that Mr. Richard had identified as based on "zero tolerance." However, Mr. Cahill's response was consistent with his own previous thinking: that a weapon was only ever brought with the intention to use or intimidate.

So, while Mr. Cahill spoke about specific instances that required specific responses, Ms. Peters, who gave an example of when a knife was not a weapon, appeared to focus on the bigger picture. Rather than calling the police and automatically suspending the student, Ms. Peters looked at the intent behind the student's behaviour. Based on the different responses to the presence of a knife at school, these Principals likely enacted different consequences for the students involved.

Here, there appears to be a link in the linguistic analysis of Transcripts, where the word most collocated with "consequences" was "suspension." Suspension was a word introduced in the *School Act* (1996), in the section where Principals were given the authority to suspend. Suspension was also present in School Board policies, especially through the *Ocean School District Disciplinary Guide*. Suspension was also explicitly stated in four of the six Codes of Conduct, and inferred in the other two by deferral to the *Disciplinary Guide*. Examining the interdiscursive nature of suspension as it appeared through the genre chain is important to understanding how Principals made decisions about consequences for behaviours that were considered unacceptable, however, the Transcripts also provide evidence for the discretion they used in identifying an incident.

**Principals' relationships to the Codes of Conduct.** Though the Codes of Conduct was a ministerial requirement, and each School Board had specific guides with templates for how these

should look and what should be contained in them, during the interviews, the Principals acknowledged different levels of their personal input in the writing of their School's Code of Conduct. Depending on the level of input that each principal felt they had in the writing of the Codes of Conduct, there were differences in how these codes influenced how Principals used them to make decisions concerning breaches in the Code.

For example, Mr. Richard suggested that codes are “pretty standard motherhood statements” (Mr. Richard, 302) and when asked about any other participants in the process, specifically parent input, he responded “*we're governing based on Ministry guidelines and the school district guidelines, not what parents are saying*” (Mr. Richard, 318-319). It appeared, at least for Mr. Richard, Codes of Conduct are handed down and must follow ministry guidelines. This was perhaps an indication that for this principal, following the specified policies and protocols to the letter of the law was important, and he held those above the participation of other parties in the writing of the School's Code of Conduct.

On the other hand, Mr. Holmes responded, “Ocean's School Board has some cores that we go through, and then there's one or two what I call the ‘personal flavors’ of each school that have been added over the time and through the history of the admin and the culture of the school” (Mr. Holmes, 339-341). Further, “there are some basic core expectations, and accepted behaviour that every school has, and the district pumps out to us as well, just as quickly as we add to our own” (Mr. Holmes, 343-344). While the district has some “cores” that it “pumps out,” as far as this principal was concerned, he was able to “add” his “personal flavors” to make the code align with the school culture. Mr. Franks shared this sentiment and explained, “Ocean has a template that might be worked on and provided us” (Mr. Franks, 308-309) and as a new principal at a school where the codes “hadn't been reviewed for quite some time and they were not

reflective of the way they should look in my view and so I initiated a review” (Mr. Franks 310-312). Mr. Franks’ impression of the Code of Conduct he found was that it did not reflect his style and so, he “was looking to embedded a bit more the neutral language where it provides different avenues of dealing with things rather than a lock-step-consequence process” (Mr. Franks, 316-319). Mr. Franks was also a principal who mentioned that when school teams did not agree, that negotiations had to be made, and there was more work to be done to get everybody on board.

Mr. Murphy, whose Code of Conduct was one of the shortest examined, suggested that the Code of Conduct was “based in consultation with him [School Board Representative] and making sure we follow district policy and incorporated it with our own... I know with ours we're not as prescriptive here as I have been in other school districts” (Mr. Murphy, 385-388). Again, Mr. Murphy made reference to consulting with the School Board, but also, he made reference to differences from other Codes of Conduct he had used in the past as well. Mr. Murphy, whose school was in a neighbourhood with reported high incomes, and had worked in other neighbourhoods was quick to point out that this school was different and as a result of these differences, the Codes of Conduct could be shorter and less prescriptive.

The descriptions that Principals used to explain the process of how the Codes of Conduct were either made, or revised, suggested that overall there was minimal participation from other social actors. This is interesting since for example Kelly (2014) and Rossi (2013, 2014) demonstrated how student participation in writing their own digital code gave them ownership over the code and enhanced the sense of community.

**Suspension as the final consequence.** As each principal had an understanding of how much input they had in creation of the codes, it was not entirely surprising that what was contained in these codes in terms of consequences would also be slightly different. For example,

the Fernhill High School Code of Conduct, where Mr. Franks was principal, had an “expulsion from School” clause, probably one of the clauses that had been a result of negotiation, and possibly a concession on his part, to gain team agreement. This was also the Code of Conduct that contained a clause that stated, “consequences for unacceptable conduct, whenever possible and appropriate, will focus on being restorative rather than punitive in nature” (p. 20). Though the caveat of “whenever possible and appropriate” was present, this was the only Code of Conduct that mentioned the word restorative, as well as expulsion. Restorative justice and expulsion seem to reflect two diametrically opposed styles to addressing incidents: a style that allows for a student to address a behaviour and a style that excludes the student from school as a result of a behaviour.

Interestingly, the Codes of Conduct mentioned some form of “progressive discipline” as directed by the Disciplinary Guide, or traced out consequences in a step-by-step manner as in Paddle Creek’s Code of Conduct. With additional incidents, consequences increased as discussed in the next section. It is also worth noting that the Code of Conduct for Royal Roads was the only one to contain a section specific to Student Rights, which may have reflected the discretion of different Principals in writing those Codes of Conduct. In addition, though Ministry guidelines were prescriptive about the consequence of “suspension,” some Principals, like Mr. Franks, were willing to try other kinds of consequences, when made available by the School Board. Either way, Ministry and School Board texts and Principals accepted that of the use of suspension was the last legally viable option. It could be inferred that suspension, as a final consequence, was symptomatic of zero tolerance though the word had not appeared in policy texts, but appeared in the descriptions of principals.

**Alternatives to suspension.** One of the interview questions asked Principals to review a compiled list of possible consequences for students involved in any kind of behaviour that would lead them to be removed from school. This list contained options like restorative justice and processes of restitution. Principals identified which ones they used at school, and were asked if they used any other consequence that were not on the list. Mr. Richard explained that based on the list:

I would say restitution to victims, restorative justice, community service, those three would go hand in hand working with our safe schools [liaison], and with RCMP in Ocean's Expanse, I mean for me to say restorative justice, that's a process that would be utilized in suspensions with the RCMP, restitution, the same thing, I mean I can say it but I can't force it, so you know, I think it would be something we would hope for, but I can't make somebody pay. (Mr. Richard, 423-427)

This principal felt that the options of restitution, restorative justice, and community service were not options that he would use, but rather were options that the safe school liaisons or the RCMP might use as part of a suspension. In addition, given his response about restitution as to “make someone pay,” his experience with the approach had been limited.

It was also noted that Mr. Richard, when asked about supports offered to students who were on suspension, made reference to student “choice.” As he explained, “we would be giving them options, whether its work and learn, or grade 10 challenge, student has a choice, if they don't attend, that's their choice, and their parents, but, it's not expulsion” (Mr. Richard, 438-440).

He also stated that when a student who was suspended did not attend these programs, it was:

their choice, especially at 16, you're supposed to theoretically be in school, but I mean, we know that some students don't attend, that's their parents [responsibility], our

responsibility is to allow all parents to know if a student's not attending, but I can't make them attend. (Mr. Richard, 443-445)

What is interesting about Mr. Richard's comments was first, he used the word "theoretically," which suggested that in his view, there were alternatives to being in school. Second, he also placed responsibility for student attendance to programs during suspension on parents, taking only responsibility for informing parents. This perspective is interesting when contrasted with Mr. Cahill's response to the same question,

alternate measures that are just as effective, especially if the home situation is such that the kid's not gonna do anything other than sleep in and watch TV, play video games all day, it doesn't sound really much of a consequence at all...and if a student's at risk academically, they don't need to miss school. (Mr. Cahill, 493-496)

Though he was not specific about alternatives to suspension, Mr. Cahill specified that suspension was not always the best option. And he clearly considered it part of his responsibility to think about what a suspension might look like for a student in his school. Mr. Cahill expressed concern over his student's "home life," especially with reference to students who were on their own, or with a host family, away from their parents. He also recognized that, for a student who was having issues academically, requiring time away from school would not likely help the student. Especially when he suspected that suspending a student might mean that the student would just be at home unsupervised, and with no real lesson associated to the suspension.

Discussing consequences, Ms. Peters stated she had personally used restitution practices and restorative justice. In addition, when it came to other programs to which she referred students, she mentioned one program in particular, an addiction services program, even when the student was not suffering from any addiction. Her choice of this program was because they "they

go to sort of everyday, they have a little training sessions and then they do follow-up visits” (Ms. Peters, 406). Her response was to try to get her students support, where she felt she could. Despite avoiding suspension for her students, she admitted that sometimes “you know after you've done talking and mediation there isn't a whole lot of other things out there so, a more minor thing is an in-school suspension, and more extreme thing is an outside of school suspension” (Ms. Peters, 134-136). In these rare cases when she felt the need to suspend a student, she sent them to this addiction services program, because the student had to attend daily. In addition, the program offered training sessions, so learning continued, and the program followed up with students once they were back in school so the student had additional supports. This was one of a few occasions when a principal identified by name a program they used with suspension.

Mr. Holmes, in dealing with students involved in incidents, created an approach that was an alternative to suspension. He sent students to the local food bank to do community service. “We” as a school help the student because “they didn't have the emotional understanding of the impact they had on everybody” (Mr. Holmes, 400). However, even he admitted that on issues like when students bring weapons to school, “it's about due process” (Mr. Holmes, 418), and that in those cases, when he had to suspend students, though not ideal for the student, it was what was necessary for the school.

Despite discussion alternatives, principals suggested these as occurring as a part of, or along with suspensions, not instead of suspensions. In combination, social practices identified in interviews allowed insight about different ways in which principals used their discretion and interpreted policies that informed their practices about school safety. Two different styles are discussed in the following section.

## Principals' Discretionary Styles

Based on the analysis of the data presented in this chapter, the research question, “*How do Principals interpret policy to inform their practices of school safety?*” presented some complicated findings. What can be deduced from the social practices described the role of principals' discretion as they interpreted policy. The complexity of implementing policy was exemplified by Mr. Holmes when tried to help his students gain an understanding of how their decisions affected others in the school community, but simultaneously having “hard and fast rules” about some things, especially in instances when the safety of the “whole community” took priority over the individual student. Though he was conflicted about applying school district required consequences, in some cases, he followed the due process stated in the School Board disciplinary guide.

Despite this complexity, two different ways in which principals' used their discretion were identified through the social practices. I use the term “discretionary style” to make the distinction between these different ways Principals used discretion about school safety, understanding that styles have been used in other ways; especially, to discuss principal leadership styles like transactional, transformational, bureaucratic, and laissez-faire (e.g., Amanchukwu, Stanley, & Ololube, 2015; Cohen, 2015). The two discretionary styles are proactive discretionary style and diligent discretionary style.

The first, *a proactive discretionary style*, was associated with creating a supportive school environment for the entire school community. Principals who used this style tended to focus on building school climate and work alongside the school community. This style focused on building relationships as a means of keeping the school safe and is exemplified in this quote by Mr. Franks:

a safe school is, a sense for students where they're feeling comfortable coming to school, that they're feeling safe, respected by the adults, their fellow students, older students welcoming younger students and ...school is a good place, good feeling for them to be learning and that's not only in the classroom environment but in the, between classes during the free time as well as to and from school as well, so sort of extending from that whole piece from home to a safe place at, at school. (Mr. Franks, 67-72)

The second style, the *diligent discretionary style*, defined safety through ways of finding solutions to problems that might arise in school, and ensuring visible responses so that life at school returns to normalcy as quickly as possible. Principals who used this style spoke in terms of “somebody doing something” or that “due diligence of things you need to do are there.” These statements exemplify a style of ensuring safety by making sure policy and protocol are followed.

For example, Mr. Holmes stated:

school safety is making sure all the due diligence of things you need to do are there, so it actually prevents things from happening, that's what school safety is, you can't stop everything, but your job at school safety is to make sure you've done all the things you can to make the school safe, all the procedures are in place, all the systems are in place so that you don't actually have to deal with any real issues. (Mr. Holmes, 56-61)

Principals' social practices in dealing with school safety, reflect these two different discretionary styles. These styles impacted the ways through which policy texts, and all the processes and protocols in them, helped to maintain school safety, but they were not used exclusively by principals.

## **The Proactive Discretionary Style**

The proactive discretionary style was based on Principals thinking about the impacts of what students learned in terms of how it could help them in their future. For Principals using this style, lessons learned today might help students improve the schooling experiences for other students in the future. Key features of a proactive discretionary style were: 1) that they provided supports through relationships, and 2) viewed negative student behaviours as “teachable moments.”

The first feature of this proactive discretionary style began with setting the stage for learning to take place in a comfortable environment. This was done through built-in supports for students that might help alleviate the possibility of serious issues arising within the school; for example, “operating everyday with an underlying philosophy that...we want a place for students to feel comfortable” (Mr. Richard, 116-117). The built-in supports took the form of building an inclusive school community with active adult participation through building relationships and advocacy for students. The first step to building relationships was creating a space where the expectation was that everyone would be treated with respect and dignity. As Mr. Richard stated, “if everybody is functioning with respect and dignity why would I have to discipline?” (Mr. Richard, 74-275). In other words, the goal of the school was to be a place where students felt comfortable, safe, included, and had adults who advocated for them. Built-in supports also required that there were relationships between members of this community. In a proactive discretionary style, Principals appeared to be “hands-on.” They were actively involved in their communities through their relationships with students. For example, Mr. Murphy, Mr. Richard, Mr. Franks, and Ms. Peters indicated that they walked through the halls as often as possible. This walking served two purposes. First, it allowed students to know they were approachable and

opened the possibility of conversations and relationships to be made. Second, Principals suggested that walks let them get a feel for the “tone” of the school community; they were able to feel if things were out of the ordinary, if the mood was active and lively versus if the mood was anxious and tense.

Principals who described using a proactive discretionary style, stressed the importance and the contributions of other adults, in creating the school community. These Principals were also more likely to refer to their “school teams” during the interviews. These teams usually included their administrative staff, counselors, safe school liaison officers and any other adult who also participated in walking the hall. Key to adult participation in these communities was that the whole team was visible and accessible to students. Being seen and approachable, the assumption was that students would identify them as “tellable” adults; adults to whom they could share information about safety concerns or simply just information more generally. Asking other adults to walk the halls, as well, kept “ears on the hallways” and ensured that all students felt safe.

In addition, Principals also spoke about relationships they had with teachers and the communication that they needed to maintain to help teachers to keep the space safe. Mr. Murphy provided an example of an incident where a teacher made a comment that was hurtful to a student who was experiencing issues that impacted his behaviour: “we gotta let the teachers know who they're dealing with; I mean she shouldn't have said that, but she also should've known what some of the issues around these students are” (Mr. Murphy, 168-170). The issue the student was experiencing was known to the administrative staff, but it had not been made available to the teachers of the student. In speaking about this incident, Mr. Murphy’s concern that vital information had failed to be communicated was an indication that in most cases he

attempted to ensure that pertinent information was passed along to whoever was able to help the student.

In addition to “walking the halls” to be visible and approachable, an important feature of the relationships that allowed for the built-in supports was that adults also acted as advocates for the students. In the words of Mr. Murphy,

A culture that's inclusive, that the students feel comfortable with the adults, that they feel that they have an adult that's an advocate for them, at least one in the building, if not more, hopefully more, and that if they don't feel safe, they have a place or a person that they can go and talk to, a safe adult at the school. (Mr. Murphy, 110-114)

Mr. Murphy, who cited the *School Act* (1996) as his guiding policy, extended the idea of being comfortable to include the possibility that students can get help when they need it. Beyond feeling comfortable, Mr. Murphy highlighted the important role that adults in schools play for students, the role of advocate; adults are trusted people in schools charged with a duty to keep students safe, and they are also advocates who protect and ensure the safety of students.

The second feature of this style was using “teachable moments”: accepting that mistakes can happen and using them to help guide the students so they took personal responsibility for their mistakes and learned from them. This second feature depended on having and expecting open communication between all members of the community. For example, Mr. Cahill noted that the role of preparing students to be successful, required listening to them and taking advantage of teachable moments. He noted:

you want to have a proactive stance, it's reinforcing positive behaviour, looking for teachable moments, when some kid is beginning to struggle and is referred to the office, talk to them, what is going on, seek first to understand before being understood, because

kids oftentimes, there's a whole lot going on and it's not...I don't believe anyone comes to school wanting to be disruptive. I think it's usually because they have other things going on in their life and they're feeling anxiety or pressure and stress from a variety of different places and it manifests itself in behaviour that is not successful. (Mr. Cahill, 112-119)

Mr. Cahill appeared to be trying to understand the “kids” and what was happening in their lives that may have led to behaviours. He used this to teach the kid who is “struggling” and who has manifested behaviours that are “not successful.” Central to his explanation of what happens is that he separated the “kid” from the “behaviour.” The differentiation between the “kids” who make mistakes, and the mistakes (behaviours) themselves, allowed the kids to continue to be perceived as “teachable.” This distinction becomes important as Principals start making decisions about students whose behaviours may have made the school unsafe.

A proactive discretionary style suggested that there was communication that allowed the school community to function in spite of possible instances of negative behaviour. This communication happened between adults and other adults, and between adults and students was integral in maintaining the relationships that were the cornerstone of the school community. This was in contrast to when communication was used to provide information.

### **The Diligent Discretionary Style**

The diligent discretionary style contained three basic features: 1) prevention, 2) having clear protocols, and 3) having clear consequences that were followed. Principals who described using this style to address an incident were constantly preparing to avoid incidents from happening and ensuring they had a plan to follow should any incident happen. They worked to prevent anything out of the ordinary from happening at their schools. Perhaps this was best

described as prevention through surveillance and consisting of constantly keeping informed about possible incidents, patterns of behaviours, prevention protocols and about any incidents that could happen. Principals would use these to identify a list of possible incidents which they used to make or enhance their response protocols. Additionally, should any incident arise, identifiable procedures were readily available, and consequences for different levels of incidents were clearly defined and ready to be used. This style was reflected by Mr. Holmes:

safe school looks like, just like our school, a school where students feel like they are part of the school community and they share information so that problems get solved before they happen, and so do the parents in our community and so do the teachers in our community, so the communication is so good that when issues are happening they are resolved before they become a bigger issue in our school. (Mr. Holmes, 63-67)

As the explanation for this approach by Mr. Holmes, school safety is about “sharing information” about problems before they happen. Sharing information, or good communication, is expected from students, parents, and teachers. Once information is shared, action follows. Should an issue arise, it is dealt with quickly before it becomes a bigger issue.

In another example, Mr. Franks began by stating that there is a need for everyone to know who they need to go to for different issues, and that schools should have signs that help. This allows for issues to be directed to the appropriate people in the school so they can be dealt with quickly. Signage, which was part of their prevention protocols, also worked with having clear protocols, plans and rules for responding to situations.

In addition to informing the school, or the school administrative team, about issues, there was also a need to ensure that everyone was aware of what is expected of them, through the

second aspect of this style: clear protocols. The best examples of protocols are school Codes of Conduct. As Mr. Cahill explained:

There's an expectation, in our River School District, that there's a district code of conduct and each school will also develop a code of conduct. Our Code of Conduct speaks to care and respect, but it also speaks explicitly to certain things, you know, what's our attendance policy, we have a school dress code, we have an explanation of what happens if you get involved and make certain choices. (Mr. Cahill, 327-331)

In speaking about the code of conduct, Mr. Cahill reiterated that the code of conduct was expected from every school in the district. Each school code of conduct made clear the expectations for attendance, dress, and it also contained a list of the consequences associated with not meeting the stated expectations in a particular school. Codes of Conduct were expected to be consistent across School Boards and schools, and in general they were similar.

The Ministry Policy, *Developing and Reviewing Codes of Conduct: A Companion to the Provincial Standards for Codes of Conduct Ministerial Order and Safe, Caring and Orderly Schools: A Guide 2004* (2007), required that school districts ensured that each school's Code of Conduct contained specific information. This information included: statement of purpose, conduct expectations, both acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, increasing expectations as students mature and considerations for students with special needs, consequences of unacceptable conduct, and an explanation of how the school board will take steps to prevent retaliation for students who have made complaints. In addition, there is a Codes of Conduct Checklist with process and content criteria that all school Codes of Conduct must be approved by their School Boards. School Boards have their own Codes of Conduct that follow the Ministry guidelines and individual schools use these to model their own.

One interesting difference between the school Codes of Conduct was that three of the six that were examined had sections specific to serious offence/misconduct: one had a section about items not tolerated; and two focused on expected behaviours; and one code of conduct only had three rules. Principals played a role in the design of their school's code of conduct, and their style was probably reflected in how detailed they were and how often they used them daily. For example, Mr. Cahill explained:

I refer to it all the time in the beginning of the year and I also use it with students and I'll refer to their agenda [in which the Code of Conduct can be found], yes, they have it. Have you ever read this? 'No, I haven't.' Well you know, let's read it, page 9 together and talk about it. I use it as a learning tool, just because something's in a Code of Conduct, doesn't mean kids are gonna remember it or embrace it. (Mr. Cahill, 327-335)

In this example, Mr. Cahill referenced the student agenda because the Code of Conduct for the school was included in the agenda provided to every student at the beginning of the school year. According to Mr. Cahill, the Code of Conduct was used to help students differentiate acceptable and unacceptable behaviours, and to help students make the right choices. Mr. Cahill recognized that, although students have had a code of conduct every year of school, they might not remember or embrace it.

The differences in the level of detail presented in the Codes of Conduct also signaled a third feature of this style: consequences. In most Codes of Conduct, consequences were either directly stated or were indirectly stated through deferral to School Board policies. How the Code of Conduct would be applied, therefore, also provided clues about discretionary style. For example, Mr. Richard noted that when a student has "gone," or done something unacceptable:

Now if I have a situation where somebody's gone..., we have a *Code of Conduct*, we have a *Progressive Discipline Policy*, so at least students understand, I think it's important that they understand, these are situations that could cause you to be disciplined. (Mr. Richard, 274-277)

This was one of the few instances when the term “progressive discipline policy” was used, and it was used to help students understand “the situations” that “cause you to be disciplined.” It is important to note that, in this case, Mr. Richard’s School Board provided Principals with the list of consequences in *The Guide*, and that most situations students could be involved in were found in the table with prescribed consequences for students depending on the behaviour. The consequences in *The Guide* were progressive and increased in intensity based on the frequency and severity of each behaviour. Striking, is that in terms of alternatives to suspension, “Progressive Discipline” which used by the Ontario School Board to mean more flexibility, use of discretion, and participation from multiple agents in helping Students improve their behaviours in school (Milne & Aurini, 2015), was not the definition used in *The Guide*.

Despite the style used in different situations by different Principals, their goals were still the same: to ensure that schools were safe. This also suggested that most Principals were willing to spend time in training—whether on Threat Assessment Protocols or workshops for teachers—to make them aware of student supports in the school system.

### **Influences on Principals and School Safety**

Through CDA and identifying social practices of Principals in schools, two different principal styles were identified. However, discretionary styles did not occur separately or independently of each other. In some instances, Principals alternated between the two styles. This suggested the principal styles are not rigid, but may be influenced by what happens around

them. There are two major influences on principals' discretionary styles: one, the myth and perceptions of school violence and two, other social actors

### **The Myth of School Violence**

The policy texts examined in this study responded to the text *Facing Our Fears: Accepting Responsibility: Bullying, Harassment, and Intimidation. Report of the Safe Schools Task Force* (2003), that requested alternatives to “traditional discipline techniques [that] may no longer be sufficient for managing behavior in today’s schools” (Naylor, 1999, p. 1). The *Safe Schools Act* (2006) was also responding to Statistics Canada reports about an increase in the number of youth implicated in criminal code violations in 2006. However, though youth implicated in crime peaked in 1991, by 2006 crime had fallen 42% since 2000, faster than for the rest of the population. Of crimes where youth were implicated, theft of \$5000 and under was the most common offence (960 per 100,000), followed by mischief (574 per 100,000), common assault (546 per 100,000), and the lowest number related to violations under the Youth Criminal Code (207 per 100,000). As for weapons in schools, it was noted that in 2006, less than 7% of all youth crimes on school grounds involved weapons, and less than 1% of all school crimes in Canada involved firearms. Of the approximately 7% of crimes involving weapons, 36% used a knife or other cutting instrument, 14% used clubs, and 9% used a firearm (Taylor-Butts & Bressan, 2006).

Combine the statistics that show that crime involving youth has decreased, there is still a perception that schools are unsafe, that is made worst by the media. As Mr. Holmes stated,

the media tends to highlight all the negative...it is a little frustrating for me that there is a tremendous amount of weight around the safety of schools, when I don't think the validity of that weight...isn't valid at all. I think schools are safer than people believe. I'm

not saying there aren't issues, but when something happens it makes a tremendous amount of news, but nobody talks about the good stuff that happens (514-521)

In a context where schools are represented in the media as unsafe, principals asserted that their schools were safe. It was principals who described using their discretion to make decisions about what is unsafe, and who made decisions about how to follow up with these situations. Principals are agents of the state and educational leaders, and as interviews with Principals demonstrated, they acted as “creative agents” (Sutton & Levinson, 2001, p. 3) to interpret policy through their discretionary styles. These interviews demonstrated how policy in practice can be interpreted in ways that allow for some room for the required alternatives to “traditional discipline techniques.” Unfortunately, these interviews also highlighted through the few real alternatives to suspension, the limits of their discretion. Even when principals believed they had immense discretion, the final consequence was still the same for students.

In spite of statistics that show safety was not the problem in schools that it had been in 2006, perceptions of schools as unsafe had two main effects: first, it allowed for the recontextualization of policies intended for adult criminals to permeate school policy through zero tolerance approaches to school incidents; second, it allowed for school “safety” to be interpreted as “discipline.” School safety policies, as noted in this study, were consistent with an ideological perspective that assumed individual responsibility and freedom of choice. Combined, these may contribute to undermine public education in a manner consistent with other contextual shifts, such as privatization and marketization of schooling. Despite the change in the name of the policies, foregrounding safety, they do not appear to respond to the appeal for alternatives to “traditional discipline techniques.” The discourses about students remain the same, as do the consequences for students involved in incidents that may make schools unsafe. This suggests that

even policies that were written to foster school safety may be implemented in ways that retain their history in discipline.

### **Other Social Agents.**

Fairclough (2003) suggested that social practices were influenced by social agents who played a role in the shaping of social practices. Alongside Principals, there were a few social actors who were also implicated in the enactments of school safety. Interviews revealed that Principals negotiated with other social actors when making decisions about school safety. The relationship between Principals and other social actors who played a role in making or keeping schools safe included: school leadership teams, including threat assessment teams; educational leaders including assistant superintendents, and their network of Principals, and; parents, who sometimes included, their lawyers. The order in which they appear is similar to the way they were presented by Principals when an incident was reported.

**School leadership teams.** As explicitly stated by the Principals, the safety of schools rested on a team of school leaders. The team was comprised of the principal and, depending on the size or complexity of the school population, several Vice-Principals. Mr. Franks described the relationship with his Vice-Principals this way: “myself and my three Vice-Principals, we're the managers of this particular building” (Mr. Franks, 609-611). Mr. Franks identified the team of Vice-Principals and himself as being the managers responsible for everyone in the building including, the students, teachers, staff, support personnel, custodians, and anyone who worked in the school. The teams were usually made by the School Board, and as Mr. Holmes explained, “generally new Vice-Principals never get put into a school situation with other new Vice-Principals, it is preplanned going in” (Mr. Holmes, 466-468).

As decisions about school safety were discussed, Principals made sure to recognize that they, as the Principals, were responsible for the safety of the school and the decisions about the protocols that needed to be followed. For example, Mr. Murphy described an incident when students saw two people with masks close to the school who appeared to have a gun. Through the course of his description, he mentioned four times that the Vice-Principals all looked to him for guidance and instructions. Mr. Murphy recognized that they work as a team, but ultimately, he represented his occupation as Principal as being the person with final responsibility. A responsibility he explained through examples of times when he had placed himself at risk for the benefit of his school.

In terms of the kinds of decisions that impact students, Mr. Franks spoke about a Vice-Principal he worked with who sometimes had different opinions than he did. He attempted to “try and meet everybody's needs and reach consensus and so, it may be a bit harder than I would have preferred” (Mr. Franks, 328-329). Yet despite the challenges Principals faced in trying to reach consensus, they all recognized the importance of supporting the decisions made by the team, especially when it concerned disagreements by parents. For example, Mr. Richard described “supporting my Vice-Principal where he found, marijuana on a student, and the parent, not liking the decision, and basically going very ballistic in the office” (Mr. Richard, 450-452). Mr. Richard stood by the decision made by his Vice-Principal in the face of the parent’s response. Both Principals reflected the need to support their team and to try to find ways to work with their Vice-Principals, despite differing perspectives, for the benefit of the school.

Ms. Peters also recognized the importance of working with her Vice-Principals. She noted, “after much thought, and talking it over with the other principal, the Vice-Principals, we decided” (462-463). The “we” in this statement emphasized that the Vice-Principals were

respected members and leaders whose opinions mattered, and who needed to have the support of the Principals, even in the face of “ballistic” parents.

Of course, relationships in teams can have challenges, as mentioned by Mr. Murphy:

I've been wrong, I always would len...[lenient] ahmmm yes, actually recently and they err, ribbed me about it but I always say, I'd rather be, I gave a kid a second chance right, every indication, we had every grounds to pump the kid out of here, I mean he was just a bonehead, right, and but was a he's a kid and that's where for me, my heart is, he's a kid and we can give him like one more chance, right one more chance, and so I went back to my VP, I said don't, we're not kicking him out and I kind of over-ruled her, right, because she had made the decision, and ahh, and the kid screwed up again, right, so you know, of course she's gonna razz me. (Mr. Murphy, 639-645)

In this case, Mr. Murphy stated that he made a mistake in “overruling” a decision made by a Vice-Principal. Finding humor in expecting to be “razzed,” admitting he was wrong was also important for this principal.

It was interesting to note that Threat Assessment Teams had a police liaison officer as member, yet the mention of this liaison officer was minimal. For example, Mr. Richards, Ms. Peters, Mr. Cahill, and Mr. Holmes spoke about calling the liaison officer when something serious happened at the school, and if the liaison officer was not available, contacting the police.

Mr. Cahill and Mr. Franks mentioned that, in the past, one liaison officer was attached to one school, and had the opportunity to form relationships with students, but that this model had changed to a liaison officer working across various schools. Mr. Franks recognized police officers were not employed by the School District and so were not required to form relationships with students, and that this depended on the individual liaison officer. And Mr. Murphy felt the

Safe School Liaison was all about walking the halls and “to be our eyes and ears” (Mr. Murphy, 142). As social agents with the capacity to influence the kinds of decisions about school safety made by Principals, these social actors appeared to play a role in helping to determine when a situation would be sent to the Principal’s office, and not only involved when the situation was already determined by the principal to be serious.

**Other educational administrators.** The protocols for school safety required Principals to report incidents to the school district via the Assistant Superintendent. From the interviews, it was clear that Principals spoke about their Assistant Superintendents, from both school boards, as experienced educational leaders. Principals valued the experience and the expertise of the Assistant Superintendent with whom they worked. Mr. Holmes stated it best when he explained that:

I'm isolated, but an area superintendent has four, five high schools, they may have seen this [incident] before and they have the best practice based [knowledge] on those other experiences that's why, it goes back to why we work as a team. So, by going up [to area superintendent], then they'll say “well we know from previous experience that this is what works,” and it comes back to us. That way we keep all our communication going, and then it’s what's best for the community of our school district. (Mr. Holmes, 440-445)

As far as Principals were concerned, the Assistant Superintendent was someone with more experience, who they respected, and who had access to a wider perspective and knowledge from across schools. They were, therefore, more likely to notice patterns that might be occurring in schools. Assistant Superintendents were also identified as supportive to Principals. For example, Mr. Murphy related that his:

current Assistant Superintendent is awesome, and totally supportive, that's why he's been promoted to deputy superintendent, so I'm losing him in the new year, but I think the next one certainly, she will be just as equally as supportive and I think that's one of the things [they have in common] they've all come through the system, they all have been in our chair either at the elementary or secondary level, and they're here to support us. (Mr. Murphy 617-622)

This experience that superintendents had was an important quality that allowed for a good relationship between Principal and Assistant Superintendent, leading to open communication between the Assistant Superintendent and Principal. This is open communication worked so that when there was an incident at school and the safety of the students was at risk: "I would just let, my assistant superintendent knows what I'm up to, and that we're in code red as we speak, and open up the communications, and their first call back is " 'how can I help' " (Mr. Murphy 628-630).

Mr. Franks, also recognizing the experience and expertise of the Assistant Superintendents, suggested that his:

personal style is to be a bit more proactive and as soon as an inquiry is starting to happen, I'm letting my Assistant Superintendent know that this is happening, to make her aware of it and so that she can use some of her expertise and experience to help manage the situation that happens. (Mr. Franks, 523-527)

Here Mr. Franks was ensuring that his Assistant Superintendent is aware of any issues that are starting to happen. In this case, he was referring to an incident where a parent who was likely to take a concern to the Superintendent about a decision the principal had made. While this was an example of keeping the Assistant Superintendent informed, it was also a recognition that

Assistant Superintendents are Principals' immediate superiors. This is why parents who are unhappy with Principals take their case to the Assistant Superintendent.

That Assistant Superintendents were above Principals was also noted when Mr. Frank was asked about his relationship with his Assistant Superintendent. He described that as a new school administrator, he had once been in a situation where he was convinced by the Assistant Superintendent to change his decision. He noted that “not here but at my last school yes, ended up with a meeting until I capitulated [loud chuckle]” (Mr. Franks, 496). What was clear in the examples about the relationships between Principals and Assistant Superintendents, is that the latter, were in a position to influence the decisions Principals made in schools.

However, it was not only assistant superintendents who had an impact on the decisions of Principals; also included were other Principals whose experience was sought out through the various networks of Principals from the School Boards. For example, during an interview one principal—when shown the list of programs offered by the school board to identify which program his school used—referenced which schools in the school board used certain programs. He was aware of which schools participated in which programs because of his participation in the district principal support network system.

Mr. Holmes stated, “our principal's network system when we have concerns about things we do share collectively amongst us, so there is a degree of consistency” (Mr. Holmes, 345-346). In this way, he explained that through the network Principals from across the district were able to keep informed about what was happening in different areas, how it had been dealt with, and from this make decisions about how to handle similar situations should they arise at their schools. In this way, other Principals through their network of Principals also played a role, even at a distance, in the decisions individual Principals made about issues at their schools.

**Parents.** Another social agent implicated in school safety was parents. Mr. Richard stated that a safe school, “I would say it would be a community of teachers, students and parents working together with respect and dignity for each other” (Mr. Richard, 65-66). And that:

the most important thing is keeping parents involved, if you can allow parents to know what is happening, whether it’s attendance, a student skipping out, if they know ahead of time instead of getting a call, two months, three months down the road. (Mr. Richard, 481-484)

Parents, when they were part of the community, were kept informed about their children’s behaviour and performance. However, there were occasions when all the Principals recognized that parents and Principals had students as their priority, but were not always on the same “team.” This was especially important when it came to disciplinary decisions made about students. As Mr. Cahill noted, if there was an incident, he gathered as much information as possible, then he would, “contact the parents and we talk, this is what's going on, this is what's going on to your child, this is what your child was involved in” (Mr. Cahill, 398-399). He proceeded by stating, “do we consult with parents on what the discipline will be? Not usually, usually we inform them, ‘cause usually parents aren't interested in having their children suspended from school” (Mr. Cahill, 412-413). This suggested that though parents were sometimes considered part of the school community, when it came to decisions related to consequences, it was the principal alongside the Vice-Principals who made decisions about consequences for the student.

Considering that parents would not be consulted about consequences for their children, but rather were informed of disciplinary decisions for their children, it is perhaps not surprising that some parents responded in an adversarial manner. During these times, Principals had to

make sure that they had done their “due diligence,” meaning that protocols had been followed, including appropriate warnings to students, and that they had notified parents.

In an example, Mr. Murphy suggested that the reason parents were perhaps not consulted was because they don't like discipline. He stated, “we've had situations here where I have prevented students from crossing the stage, and I've been sued... and that's the nature of our parents, they don't like the discipline” (Mr. Murphy, 324-325). Mr. Murphy suggested that it was the “nature” of the parents to take immediate legal action when their children were involved in a situation at school. In his experience, the “nature” of these parents was to call their lawyers whenever they received a call from the school about their children. He reiterated this by suggesting that “there's always a half dozen times a year where the lawyers are on the phone...and all they're wondering is, did we follow procedure?” (Mr. Murphy, 587-589).

Mr. Murphy suggested that the reason lawyers were involved was because “parents sometimes don't like their kid to be suspended or sent home or removed from a school cause it's inconvenient for them, it doesn't work out with their schedule, their yoga class or whatever it is” (Mr. Murphy, 592-594). Again, this comment appeared to be about a specific population of parents from a specific school, and not a reflection of the majority of parents in all the schools that were visited.

There were differences with respect to how parents' reactions to their children being disciplined was noted to be related to the income levels in the neighbourhoods where the schools were located. Mr. Richard and Mr. Murphy—Principals at schools in neighbourhoods with reportedly high-income levels—were both more likely to refer to parents based on their emotional responses. For example, Mr. Richard recounted an incident where after a student was suspended by the Vice-Principal for having marijuana, the “parent not liking the decision, and

basically going [pause]...very ballistic in the office, [the incident] involving...where police had to be called” (Mr. Richard, 451-453). He also spoke about occasions “when a parent has gone irrational in my opinion, they’ve probably when they’ve phoned the board office, they were irrational” (Mr. Richard, 466-467). Combined, Mr. Murphy and Mr. Richard appeared to suggest that parents at their school were more likely to respond to their child being called to the office, by becoming emotional, calling their board office, and also, by ensuring that their child’s rights were not being violated. For example, “parents on the phone saying, you can't talk to him [student possibly involved in an incident], which is pretty common here, you can't talk to my kid with the RCMP being there until I get there or my lawyer gets there” (Mr. Murphy, 435-437).

Principals from other neighbourhoods also spoke about parents and their responses to decisions made about their children, however, to a lesser extent. For example, Mr. Franks suggested that Principals need to be under control “no matter who’s screaming at you, whether it’s a staff, student or parent” (Mr. Franks, 477). Given his location in a lower income neighbourhood, it appeared that more people than just parents were involved in “screaming.” This suggested that in these instances, parents were present, but in a limited way. Ms. Peters also shared that some parents, when they “don’t like the way I’ve dealt with it, they’re gonna be calling the assistant superintendent” (Ms. Peters, 418). And Mr. Holmes noted that he sometimes made decisions that the parents “don’t agree with, and they are going to try to challenge the decision” (Mr. Holmes, 439). However, neither of these Principals mentioned parents in relation to their emotional responses, nor did they mentioned lawyers. In addition, Ms. Peters was the only principal to mentioned support from parents for her disciplinary decision, “it depends on the parent, some parents are very ahmm, understanding they know they're kids’ made a mistake and they support your discipline” (Ms. Peters, 485-486).

## **Summary**

This chapter used Fairclough's Levels of Social Life to illustrate how policy texts and Principals descriptions of Safety and Students, social practices, and discretionary styles came together to trace how discourses in policy were recontextualized in practice. This chapter highlighted a disconnect between how Safety was defined in policy texts and in Transcripts, as well as different ways of speaking about Students. Each of these were supported through four different social practices that highlighted how Principals described using their discretion to sometimes simultaneously implement and challenge school safety policies.

## **Chapter 7 Conclusion, Implications and Limitations**

Principals, as “agents of the state,” are directed by legislation and policies and are faced with a long list of responsibilities, including school safety. The preamble of the *BC School Act* stated that the goals for schools in BC are to “enable all learners to become literate, to develop their individual potential and to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to contribute to a healthy, democratic and pluralistic society and a prosperous and sustainable economy” (2007, p. C-11). For Principals, one of the enabling conditions toward these goals was school safety. This study examined a genre chain of policy texts that included Ministry and School Board policy, and School Codes of Conduct. This was coupled with Principals’ interpretations of policy to make decisions about school safety in order to analyze the recontextualization of school safety from policy to interpretations for practice.

This chapter is divided into five sections. The first section addresses policy representations of school safety and compares them to principals’ interpretations. The second section problematizes issues in the practices of school safety. The third section notes possible implications of this study. The fourth section describes the limitations of the research. The final section offers possibilities for the direction of future research.

### **Conclusion: Policy to Practice**

Policy is a practice of power, complete with ideological assumptions. This analysis demonstrated a recontextualization of discourses in policy that shaped the social practices described by Principals. This recontextualization was most evident in the ill-defined expectations about safety in Ministry texts that became more defined in School Board texts and Codes of Conduct. In Transcripts of interviews with principals, expectations were addressed with more flexibility, for example, vague concepts like “concerns” and “incidents” in Ministry texts became

“situations” and “issues” until principals used their discretion to decide if they were indeed “incidents.” It also demonstrated that the absence of a word or phrase does not necessarily mean it lacks influence. Specifically, the phrase “zero tolerance,” which did not appear in policy documents, still managed to appear in practice as the “ultimate” consequence of suspension that principals could use, despite their resistance and use of alternatives.

This study also provided insight about the relationships between social actors, and in the differences of how social actors were represented across texts. This study draws attention to how Youth are constructed in educational policy and in schools; and how the lexical turn that changes Students to Kids or Youth influences how policy is enacted. For example, Student is represented as both victim and perpetrator; and in texts the lexical choice Youth was specific to crime, and Student was only activated to perform negative behaviours, but when principals used the colloquialism of Kid, this lexical turn opened new ways of representing this social actor as struggling and learning. This study also showed how through the use of pronouns, Principals, who were not collocated with safe as social actors in Ministry or School Board texts, committed themselves to the responsibility of educating Students. This is important when in the Ministry texts, it was the Ministry that committed itself to providing of educational services.

In effect, this “textually oriented discourse analysis” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 2) identified how safe schools went from idealized notions of “safe, caring, and orderly” through a dynamic of legal obligation and discretion, to inform the social practices of principals. Through this dynamic, Principals’ representations of safe schools as communities, and as places for learning and respect for Students emerged. Principals, through their descriptions and definitions of safety in schools, highlighted the importance of school leadership in making a difference in the lives of students.

This study examined how Principals interpreted policy and enabled a deeper and more critical examination of the social practices of principals related to school safety. This examination identified two discretionary styles when dealing with policy through the social practices of principals. In the first, a proactive discretionary style, Principals used policies as guidelines, and were confident that their practices in keeping schools' safe were justified. When utilized, Principals were willing to challenge aspects of policy that in their experience would not benefit their students and/or their schools. Using the second, a diligent discretionary style, Principals felt that they needed to stay close to policy implementation tools, especially those provided by the school board. However, these styles are not dichotomous, they are dynamic and no one style applied to principals all the time. Principals seemed to oscillate between the two depending on: the given situation; the student; the school; outside perceptions of school unsafety; and other social agents, including their leadership teams and parents.

While Principals represented themselves as having enough power to be flexible in dealing with safety in their schools, students were represented as the passivated receivers of adult allowances. Consistently across Ministry and School Board texts, Codes of Conduct, and Transcripts, Students were described in contradictory ways as immature, as needing to be taken care of, and of being responsible for making bad decisions. This contrasted with Principals' use of the word "kid" where there were attempts to conceive of students through their potential and possibility for growth. However, despite the different ways students were represented across policy texts and in Transcripts, it was clear that there were assumptions about them as a group. Perspectives about student difference as identified through this CDA analysis reveals an orientation toward social difference through:

- (a) an openness to, acceptance of, recognition of difference; an exploration of

difference, as in ‘dialogue’ in the richest sense of the term;

(b) an accentuation of difference, conflict, polemic, a struggle over meaning, norms, power;

(c) an attempt to resolve or overcome difference;

(d) a bracketing of difference, a focus on commonality, solidarity;

(e) consensus, a normalization and acceptance of differences of power which brackets or suppresses differences of meaning and norms.

(Fairclough, 2003, pp. 41-42)

In this case, the textual analysis of the data indicates different ways in which the Principals depicted Students as different than adults, and as similar to each other. Given the power differential between Principals and Students, how Principals accepted or challenged negative policy discourses about Students played a role in how Principals described making decisions about Students as a group, or about individual students.

For example, consider the positioning of Kids and Students. Across the genre chain, Students were passivated and related to negative value assumptions. This led to a focus on what made students “similar” and erased their differences. Students, as social actors, became normalized in a narrow and negative way. Passivated, as a group, Students had little capacity to change the way in which they were positioned. They were constructed as powerless to change how they were represented in text. This led to a focus on what made students “similar” and bracketed their differences.

Losen’s (2011) argument that principals are important to mitigating disparities in suspension rates in schools is supported in Transcripts. This can be seen when through the use of the lexical choice “Kid,” principals were able to broaden the ways in which the social actor

Students were represented. They positioned them as individuals with a capacity for both good and bad. When the principals spoke about Kids who made “mistakes,” and spoke about the social practices they used to determine a Kid’s intention when involved in a situation, they were expressing that they understood that Kids were not all the same; that every Kid was an individual. In this way, principals were able to resist the universalizing language that surfaced across the genre chain that narrowed Students to one category.

It was also Principals who determined whether a situation or concern was in fact an “incident.” Principals used the word “situation” to discuss examples of events that took place in schools. It was in their social practice of gathering information, and talking to students that they used to determine whether a situation required them to follow protocol. In so doing, it was the principals who, depending on their style, chose to be *proactive* and focus on the incident as a teachable moment, or chose to be *diligent* with protocol. In this way, a principal’s discretionary style can show differences in how the school functions and influences the entire school community (Mukuria, 2002).

Some Principals also questioned whether a zero tolerance approach to student behaviours was best and considered the social ramifications of a suspension for that student, as well as other socially complex issues of the neighbourhoods where their students lived (Dinkes et al., 2009). Mr. Franks, for example, was conflicted about using suspensions, what it might mean for a particular student to be out of school, and seemed to regret the role that suspension may have played in the early leaving of one of his gifted students. In addition, Principals also expressed awareness about how schools were represented as unsafe in the media, and that when incidents in schools happened, they were being observed publicly, even if in their perspective, in distorted and negative ways. Awareness of these issues worked in combination with the fact that all

schools had a Code of Conduct, and in all of the Codes of Conduct the ultimate consequence was suspension, Principals, assessed individual situations, used discretionary styles, commitments and values, awareness of how they might be perceived, and their assumptions about their Kids—and based on what they felt was the right choice—decided whether this was the consequence that they would apply in an individual situation.

In interviews, Principals made clear how they invested in relationships with students, and how they encouraged other adults in the school to do the same. These practices were contrary to how school safety appeared in the policy texts. Principals were therefore able to help students who were perhaps “trapped in appearances” (Larrain, 1996, p. 56) representing students in negative ways. These negative representations of students served to justify why in policy, school suspensions were the ultimate consequence.

### **Problematizing Practices of Safety in Schools**

Two issues about how the principals interpreted school safety surfaced. The first, issue was related to the use of their discretion, which in most circumstances allowed students to be represented differently than they had appeared in Ministry and School Board texts. The second issue was in terms of the practice of questioning students, and the potential conflict that may arise from this interaction.

#### **Principal Discretion: Room to Make Mistakes**

Principals needed to make decisions about whether a situation is an “incident” or a “mistake,” and these decisions built upon their values and value assumptions. As Greenfield (1993) suggested, “the central questions of administration deal not so much with what is, but with what ought to be; they deal with values and morality” (p. 194). And decisions principals make are not simply “the mechanical application of existing rules, regulations and various levels

of school and school-related policy” (Frick 2009, 50, as cited in Findlay, 2012, p. 16). Instead, principals use their discretion to make decisions, and when these are shaped by their own values, the application of the rule becomes interpretive (Hawkins, 1992). It is in this interpretation of rules and policies that principals’ discretion in making decisions “often occurs at the periphery,” on the outskirts of bureaucracy where discretion represents “subjective, formal justice” (Hawkins, 1997 p. 414). Decisions that occur “at the periphery” of policy risk that the policy will be fragmented, distorted, or even subverted as it moves across policy genres. This might mean that a policy in practice may end up being quite different from what was originally envisioned (Findlay, 2012). It was, therefore, through a principal’s interpretation of policy that the practice of the policy actually takes place.

It is also in this space between policy and practice that Hawkins (1997) warned issues of discretion collide in ways that can contribute to the reification of inequality in schools and challenge the responsibility principals have in taking care of all the students. Hawkins (1997) suggested that when the use of discretion was accompanied with “arrogance, and carelessness, and an inconsistency” (p. 414), it led to negative experiences of policy for students. Arrogance along with an “invisibility” (p. 414) in the use of discretion often makes harder to hold the person (principal) responsible for the consequences that emerge.

Of course, this was also the space where, Principals, like Ms. Peters, Mr. Franks and Mr. Cahill, who attested to the use of School Board policy, also found ways to work around the policies, in an effort to protect students from rules when they felt the rules are not in the best interest of the student. For example, Ms. Peters spoke about examining the intention of the student in having a knife at school. In addition, Mr. Franks—who did not want a student to get in to trouble over a small piece of burned paper—worried about what a suspension might mean for

his student. Mr. Cahill spoke at length about avoiding suspension when he knew his students would not benefit from it. However, given the assumptions principals appeared to make—both about the kind of students they had in their schools and the “nature” of their parents—there is room to question how many of their decisions were based on assumptions that may not be well-founded and/or may not work to the benefit of all students: the student in question as well as the school.

Building on the work of Greenfield, Manley-Casimir (2003) argued that discretion, is vital to the principal’s creativity and flexibility to make decisions in schools. However, “discretion is not absolute” (Findlay, 2012, p. 19), and as Justice Claire L’Heureux-Dubé (as quoted in Findlay, 2012) stated, it must be used within the “boundaries imposed in the statute, the principles of the rule of law, the principles of administrative laws, the fundamental values of Canadian society, and the principles of the Charter” (p. 20).

In this study, all the Principals spoke to the levels of discretion they had in making decisions in their schools. For most, this was done with a sense of pride and, for example, to establish that they had relationships with their Assistant Superintendents who respected their decisions. However, there was one principal, Mr. Franks, who stated “I can have huge autonomy, but that's at my own peril, because then if something goes awry, or if something doesn't go properly, then questions will come fast and furious” (Mr. Franks, 508-510). Mr. Franks was earnest in admitting that he felt that the structure in place was there not only to ensure that he followed due process, but it was also there to support him. This was one area that all Principals tended to agree on; Assistant Superintendents’ had more experience and more exposure to issues that happened in schools.

## **Due Process: In Loco Parentis and Civil Liberties?**

Central for school safety, there has long been a general acceptance that, based on the *School Act* (1996), Principals, teachers and other school officials, act *in loco parentis* or “in place of a parent” during the school day. Principals, parents and communities view the powers of the school at the same level as the power of the parents. This clause was quoted in *The Guide*, and cites, Section 76 (3) of the *School Act* (1996), the right of a principal to act as a judicious parent in matters of discipline. However, this Section of the *School Act* was repealed effective July 1, 2012 along with an extensive list of Powers and Duties of the School. Despite this repeal, Canadian law suggests that in terms of student safety, teachers and principals hold a Supraparental duty of care, not just as a prudent parent. That is to say, “as a general rule, the closer the relationship between the parties, the higher the standard of care” (Tomlinson, McGlashan, Aubin, Edwards, & Berhane, 2013, p. 17).

Findlay (2012) suggested that “it is against the function of maintaining school safety and preserving order in the school that administrators must balance their requirement to protect and to respect student rights in the school setting” (p. 16). Principals therefore, must balance how they keep their school safe as administrators while also ensuring that their practices of school safety are in line with the principles of the Charter. However, this brings to bear the possibility that a situation might arise where to ensure school safety for the community, an individual student’s rights might be restricted. This suggests that principals, depending on the seriousness of a situation, might make decisions for the safety of the entire school that could potentially be interpreted not in the best interest of the individual child, and as an issue of due process. (DeMatthews, 2016). In these situations, the *in loco parentis* clause might not apply to the work

of Principals. Though these occasions might be few, and perhaps even warranted, they might potentially be in contravention with their duties to the school.

However, there is still a risk that, when we consider how students are represented within policy texts, the act of “sending someone to the principal’s office” might position a student negatively, prior to getting all the information about why the student was sent. This might be especially true when dealing with a student with a history of being sent to the office. In these cases, the negative perceptions associated with the student are not about the seriousness of their behaviour, but rather about being repeatedly being sent to the office. Repetition, as was detailed in Chapter 5, resulted in minor behaviours, like absences, eventually becoming offences equivalent to incidents. In these instances, before the student is even asked about the situation, they are already positioned negatively, and may therefore be “questioned,” rather than asked about an event.

The *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1982) provided people, and Students, with rights. When principals, teachers, and other school officials, question a student, they act as agents of the government, and cannot claim to be acting *in loco parentis*. This is one of the reasons—in situations when police are called to question a student about a possible violation of the criminal code—a parent and not an agent of the state should be present (Mackay & Sutherland, 2006).

What this suggests is that, when Principals have “talks” with Students, there is a fine line between acting in the place of parents, and acting as agents of the state. As was noted in the analysis, the presence of the term “talking” was more common than other words when it came to describing communication; however, there appeared to be specific reasons for the “talk.” For example, Ms. Peters responded:

I did as I always do, I talked to the student who had the concern, got his story, and when you *talk* to students you have to, you really have to *probe* them to make sure you have clear information because sometimes they generalize, sometimes they don't tell you the whole story. I then proceeded to *talk* to the other student to make sure, to find out what his side of the story was, of course, kids always downplay. [emphasis added]. (Ms. Peters, 437-442)

As Ms. Peters indicated, first, she always “talked” to both parties to try to get more information. Further, Mr. Cahill referred to talking to as many people as possible as “thorough due process,” because:

people oftentimes when they are in trouble, aren't always...or, their version of what happened, is not particularly accurate, or, they're being, somewhat deceitful because they're definitely gonna get in trouble. Or they are so emotionally attached to what went on they, underestimate their role in something, so I talk to as many people as possible. (Mr. Cahill, 391-395)

There is also a power differential, between a principal and a student, which alongside the discourses of Student as immature and only activated in the conduct of negative behaviours, might lead to assumptions about Students that impact how they are questioned. When Parents are only informed about consequences after the fact, they may not be given the opportunity to protect their children.

Another possible issue arises in terms of the commitment to students that they will receive a high quality education. For example, there could be a student—who through repeated tardiness or repeated absences—is suspended or is referred to other programs offered by the school board. This student has been removed from their school through suspension, which

research suggests is a student's way out of school and, therefore, the referral is not in line with a good quality education, and not likely to be consistent with helping them achieve the highest level of education (e.g., Kelly, 1993; Velloso & Vadeboncoeur, 2014).

In the example with Mr. Cahill, the "talk" might be akin to making a case for why a student needed to experience the consequence associated with an incident. Mr. Franks, continued, "it becomes an interview with that student and getting down to it and sort of having him on the camera, we're pretty sure its him, and then the boy ends up admitting it" (Mr. Franks, 397-399). Like parents from the higher income neighbourhoods have noted, talking appears to be code for "interrogation." It is, therefore, not totally unjustified that, when they are able to, parents will try to be present or have a lawyer present. As noted previously, only one school Code of Conduct, Royal Roads, had a section on Student Rights. This school was in a higher income neighbourhood.

It is in this grey area of needing discretion and institutional support where the struggle between *in loco parentis* and student civil rights may become an issue. This study identified how "talking" was used in reference to incidents in school. It was observed that the "talk" could serve both as much for "information gathering" and for potentially "building a case" against a student. While Principals used the justification that these talks were necessary to assess the intention of the student, as well as their ability and willingness to take responsibility for their role in the incident, there is room to question when this is an infringement upon the rights of the student, and if and when this infringement is justified.

There was only one instance when a principal, Mr. Murphy, mentioned being on the phone with a parent who was reluctant to let his child be questioned without his parents or his lawyer's present. This was the only example described where a principal appeared to have called

the parent before the student was questioned and where the principal accepted the request. All other references made to calling parents was to inform parents of the next steps related to consequences for their student.

Hyman and Perone (1998) suggested that in the United States, violence in schools was overstated, that victimization in schools was more likely to be victimization of students by teachers, administrators and other staff using inappropriate policies. They also reported that law enforcement procedures like strip searches, the use of undercover agents, and the use of corporal punishment was at that time, still allowed in 23 states. This suggests that when speaking about school violence, we should not be limited to what students do, but also how other social actors and procedures contribute to unsafe schools. In this study, given the policy texts examined, the focus was narrowed to Students by Students and excluded other possibilities. However, this does not mean that other human social actors may not also play a role in school violence or victimization.

In BC, Stryker et al. (2013), working with the BC Civil Liberties Association, produced a pamphlet, entitled *Rights Talk: Student Civil Liberties at School*, which was developed to educate students and parents in BC about their rights. This pamphlet outlined differences between the *Charter* (1982) and the *School Act* (1996) and included examples of case law in support of things like dress codes, religious freedom, searches, use of technology, and a section specific to school discipline and the criminal justice system. Key to this discussion concerns the use of the term “due process” as used by principals in interviews, and the level and kind of relationship School Boards and schools have with police.

In the first instance, the pamphlet in question specified that “due process” refers to instances when the person has been accused of a crime. Though the examples provided by school

principals mostly dealt with issues that happened in school, it is odd that they used the legal term “due process” which was not present in Ministry or School Board texts, but that was present in the Hilltop School Code of Conduct. In the second instance, the pamphlet stressed that in dealings with the police, especially if students were under the age of 18, a parent should be present. This suggests that in cases like, when Mr. Murphy followed procedures to scare the student who refused to acknowledge wrongdoing in bringing a water gun to school, there might have been some grey areas if the process involved calling in the police to question the student. Especially, if the parent was not present.

### **Implications**

This study demonstrated the recontextualization of safety and students, as social actors, in policy texts and the disjuncture between policy texts and the social practices that principals’ described to address students’ behaviours. It also highlighted two discretionary styles that principals described using. These styles were characterized by: 1) how a behavior was assessed; 2) whether or not a behavior was deemed an incident, and; 3) responses to either behavior or incident. While policy texts incorporated the language of “making schools safe,” principals argued that their role was to maintain school safety. The perspective advanced by the participants emphasized that, in their experience, schools are already safe. Principals used policy and, perhaps more importantly, their policy interpretations and discretion to maintain school safety. Four implications for this study follow.

First, policy texts and policy implementation tools at all levels should be based on current research and data from schools, including research that examines the experiences of principals, teachers, and students in schools in relation to school safety. Policy borrowing, as in the case of borrowing zero tolerance policies from the United States’ Customs Department, is an ineffective

and inappropriate method for creating school policies. Specific to principals, though principals are legally bound to enact BC Ministry policies, these policies do not appear to be directly informed by their practices. The top-down form of governance—a form of governance that also ensures that principals are positioned as agents of the state—necessitates that policies, to be useful, must be informed by the experiences of those implementing them. Otherwise, if there is little or no input from principals, the policies risk being a hindrance to the very professionals they were created to empower.

Second, this application of CDA to policy is an important contribution in that it shows how policies enable governance. Linguistic tools demonstrate how the movement of meaning, through intertextuality and recontextualization is carried out across policy texts. Most notable this study showed how the narrowed and negative role afforded to students in policy texts surfaces in ways that potentially impact how principals make decisions with different effects for different students. Notable, as well, was the erasure of the role of teachers in maintaining school safety. CDA, used in this way by focusing on both internal and external relations of texts, presents a powerful opportunity for detailed policy analysis in many other areas of research.

Third, the work of identifying social actors, looking at relationships between social actors in texts, and tracing recontextualization becomes more valuable still when coupled with interpretations of policy by the people for whom the policy was developed. Specifically, policies about school safety need to be inclusive of all social actors in schools. Further, research needs to undertake the difficult task of studying policy and practice to better inform policy makers about the work of principals and to ensure policy and policy implementation tools have the intended effects.

Fourth, this study highlighted how a policy about school safety became one focused on discipline. Despite the words “safe and caring” in effect the consequences eventually led to suspension. In terms of alternatives to suspension, one that is described in Chapter 2 and was mentioned by at least one principal, was restorative justice. McClain (2015) showed that a Restorative Justice Program was effective even when a change in policy did not reflect a change in outcomes for students. The Restorative Justice Program is an educative program designed for adults who work in schools: from principals, to teachers, staff, and anyone else who is in contact with students. This allows adults to reflect on the reasons they are sending students to the principals’ office, and requires them to examine their assumptions about students. A program of this nature recognizes that, in the practice of policy, all adults play a role, not just the Ministry, School Boards, and Principals. While in this study Principals pointed to options other than suspension, school board guides used a progressive discipline approach that limited their options. This meant that options like Restorative Justice programs with a school wide focus, rather than a focus on the behaviors of individual students was not a viable alternative for principals to use.

Though complex, there is value in moving between policy and practice using the notion of critical bifocality, moving between macrolevel policy and local practices. This link is necessary in order to assess policies and ensure that they are addressing what they were intended to address. In addition, it offers the opportunity for showing when a shift in policy name, does not follow through in implementation, and identifies where increased supports are necessary that would allow the intentions of policy to be translated in to practice.

### **Limitations of Research**

There are two identifiable limitations to this study. First was an issue of data; what was included and what was excluded. Second, an issue of a limited participant pool.

### **On Data: Inclusion/Exclusion**

One challenge of this study was the scope of the data that was available. From over 30 different Ministry and School Board texts, only eight were eventually analyzed. The questions that surface in relation to the documents that were chosen, highlighted the fact that some voices were included, especially in terms of the Ministry and School Board, while others were excluded. For example, the Principals and Vice-Principals Association had their own set of documents pertaining to school safety, so did the BCTF and the BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils (BCCPAC).

### **Participating Principals**

While this study highlighted the experiences of principals, only six participants were interviewed from two school districts. BC has 60 school districts of varying sizes. This suggests that claims in this study are limited to the participant pool; and that generalizing statements might not be accurate for schools in other parts of the British Columbia.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study has implications for methodology and for the practice of policy. For example, applying CDA to other areas of educational social practice to problematize other practices that happen in schools that may have their roots in policies borrowed elsewhere could be potential future research. It is also important that the influence of policy and policy changes be examined. For example, as previously mentioned, the *School Act* was revised in 2012. What is remarkable about this revised *School Act* is that it includes over 14 sections that were repealed from *Part 6, Boards of Education, Division 2, Power and Duties*. What are the implications of limiting the power of schools, and how do these changes influence the roles of other social actors in schools, specifically, Principals, Teachers, Parents and Students? To what extent do these changes reflect

an ideology that promotes choice and individual responsibility, by limiting power of schools? Does the power for school choice now rest with the Parents? What does choice mean in this instance? These are questions that need to be examined systematically for their impacts on schooling and society, as well as, various social actors.

In addition, the link between policy and practice needs to be further examined. This study raised questions about why there is a continued reliance on discipline through school exclusion. Principals, in their own ways, resisted suspensions, but also recognized that suspension was ultimately the final consequence available to them. Yet, if “we are going to be asking at a policy level for a shift in disciplinary practices and disciplinary outcomes, there has to be support all down the line” (Skiba, as cited in McClain, 2015, fourth paragraph). This suggests that more research about different kinds of alternatives needs to be carried out and supported across school boards, principals, teachers, and anyone else who plays a role in the safety of schools.

Finally, the objective of this study in tracing policy to practice would benefit from several additional links to solidify the practice aspects of policy. Specifically, examining the role that teachers play in the implementation of policies about school safety, and how they respond to training provided by the school boards, either using threat assessment protocols, or any other options made available to support them. In addition, an examination of how students experience policy, for example, by tracing the experience of students from the initial “situation” for which they are sent to the office, to what happens while they are in the principal or vice principal’s office. This would provide further evidence for the kinds of practices identified in this study, as well as how the different discretionary styles are experienced by different students. The ethical considerations involved in this kind of work suggest that it is urgently needed.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Interview Protocol

#### ***A. Demographic Information:***

- a. Age Group:
- b. Gender:
- c. Years of experience as administrator:
- d. Years of experience in any other educational position (teacher, social worker, coach):
- e. Years at this specific high school:

#### ***B. Introduction: School Context***

- a. Socioeconomic status of catchment area (neighbourhood)
- b. School composition/complexity (ethnic groups, languages spoken, learning needs, level of parental involvement, First nations)
- c. Special programs for students (IRPs, # or percentage who are designated...)
- d. Years as principal of this school

I would now like to talk about school safety and what this looks like in schools.

**A. School Safety**

- a. In your experience what is school safety and what does it a “safe school” look like? Safe for whom? From whom?
- b. What level of importance does school safety play in your daily responsibilities as administrator? What are the most prevalent kinds of issues that arise when dealing with student safety in school?
- c. Are there specific policies or regulations you use when making decisions about school safety?
  1. Are there supports or key people in place to guide you as you make your decision and follow protocol? Can you give some examples?
    - i. Ministry
    - ii. School Board
    - iii. Community
  2. Are there resources or key people in your School Board where you can get advice or share your experiences about the kinds of incidents that might threaten school safety?
  3. What is your School Board’s relationship with the RCMP when it comes to school safety?
  4. Are there issues that arise (or could arise) concerning school safety that may make you uncomfortable when dealing with them? What makes these issues uncomfortable? (Racism, homosexuality)

In my research I have noted that safe schools literature concerning student safety, for example, the Ministry document, *Safe, caring, and orderly schools* document (2006), often mention 3 terms: Safe, caring and orderly.

**B. In your experience *what do each of these words mean in school? Safe, Caring, and orderly?***

- a. Safe?
- b. Caring: What does a caring school look like? How does a school demonstrate care? For whom? Are caring schools safe schools?
- c. Orderly (not in School Board docs): What does an orderly school look like? How is order maintained in school?

Discipline: In my research I have found that alongside the concepts of Safe, caring and orderly, the concept of student discipline often shows up.

***C. School Safety and Discipline:***

- a. How do you define discipline?
  - a. In your experience does discipline play in a role in maintaining a safe school?
  - b. From whom and for whom and on whose terms?
- b. In your experience, are the concepts of discipline and caring related? In what ways?
- c. What is the relationship between maintaining order and discipline in schools?
- d. Can you think of instances where a behaviour would be punishable in one instance but not in another? What helps you make that distinction? (tolerance level for “misbehaviour”)
- e. Can you give 1 example of a behaviour about which you feel very strongly about? Why?
- f. From ministry documents as well as documents from your School Board it would seem that the major threat to student safety comes from: bullying, intimidation and harassment. Can you speak about whether these are issues that you have been encountering in terms of student safety?

***D. Preventative measures and Codes of Conduct***

- a. Can you tell me about your school student code of conduct? Why does it exist? What is its purpose? Is it a Ministry requirement?
- b. Do you know when it was last reviewed and who participated in that review? Parents, teachers, students, community? Ministry School Board, lawyers?
- c. How are teachers and staff made aware of the student code?
- d. How are students, parents and the community made aware of the student code?
- e. In your own judgment, how much support is there for the student code: from teachers, staff, students, parents, and community?

***E. Incident Reports and Consequences for Individual Students:***

- a. When there is a disciplinary incident, what are some of the factors you take into consideration when making the decision about how to proceed?

- i. Academic history of student?
- ii. Disciplinary history of student?
- iii. Information about family life?
- iv. Information about special needs?
- v. Context surrounding incident?
- vi. Are there other factors you take into account, but that may not be recorded in a report?
- vii. From the list of possible consequences available to students that I have compiled, can you verbally identify which is available to students? Do you explore other unique options that you do not see on the list?

*(Check list on table List of Possible Consequences)*

- b. How do you go about deciding what option best matches the specific situation? Have you ever invited a student to take part in the decision-making aspect of assigning consequences for their behaviours?

Decision-making Incident:

- F. **Can you think of one example where the behaviour of one student or a group of students impacted the safety of the school? Can you walk me through your thinking and actions in dealing with this incident from what happened to how you dealt with this incident?**
  - a. Have you ever experienced a situation when you made a decision given what you believed to be the right choice for a specific student, but that possibly conflicted with community or “professional” expectations?
    - i. Can you give an example?
    - ii. How did you go about coming to terms with this discrepancy?
  - b. Have you ever had a “confrontational” experience with anyone about a disciplinary decision you had made? Were you supported and how were you supported by your organization (School Board?)

- c. In your experience have you ever encountered a situation about student safety that made you question the rules or protocols for dealing with the situation? Based on your experience, how much discretion do you feel you have when it comes to issues of student safety? (You can use a scale: between 1(no discretion)-10(total discretion))
- d. Have you ever made a decision you had to retract after consulting with your School Board coordinator?

Accountability for What and to Whom: Administrators are held accountable for decisions they make about school safety.

- a. Should there be additional protocols or guides for principals in their decision-making? Can you give an example?
- b. Many of the issues that principal's deal with are related to the amount of experience a principal has? What are some recommendations you would make to new principals about how to keep schools safe? Is there some recommendation you can make that can help a less experienced make good decisions about school safety?
- c. What recommendations would you make to policy makers for changes in policy concerning how to keep students safe in schools?

Additional suggestions?

Is there any question I haven't asked that might help me understand more about how you as a principal make decisions about school safety?

Are there any closing comments you would like to share with me as we wrap up?

## List of Possible Disciplinary Consequences Available to Students

- ◆ Detention
- ◆ Additional assignments
- ◆ Reporting incident to parents or guardians
- ◆ In-school suspension
- ◆ Restitution to victims
- ◆ Restorative justice measures:?
- ◆ Community service?
- ◆ Transfer to other class
- ◆ Transfer to another program
- ◆ Transfer to other school
- ◆ Boot-camp/challenge program
- ◆ Referral to counsellor
- ◆ Suspension
- ◆ Referral to substance use liaison
- ◆ RCMP notification
- ◆ Expulsion
- ◆ Other?

## Appendix B: Transcription Codes

Symbol	Meaning
<b>R</b>	Interviewer/Researcher
<b>Name</b>	Participating Principal
<b>#numbers#</b>	Time stamp
<b>new line</b>	Indication of turn taking
<b>[text]....</b> <b>....[text]...</b>	Simultaneous speech
<b>.</b>	confirmation of end of thought or response (as different from '...' to identify a pause in the conversation)
<b>?</b>	Rising intonation that suggest question or uncertainty
<b>,</b>	Grammatical separations to allow for fluidity of thought readability
<b>==</b>	Onset of Overlap
<b>==</b>	Second speaker takes turn
<b>Text...text</b>	Short pauses within speech that indicate either thinking or taking a breath
<b>[pause]</b>	Indicates pauses in speech
<b>FULL CAPS</b>	Emphasis in speech
<b>[inaudible]</b>	Could not make out in recording
<b>Bolded text</b>	Reference to other documents
<b>[chuckle] [shared chuckle]</b> <b>Text [aha]text</b>	Additional information noted by the researcher that interrupted the flow of the conversation, can include external factors