LEARNING TO DISCIPLINE STUDENTS IN MONTREAL SCHOOLS: AN ADMINISTRATOR'S PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Using the lens of educational institutional ethnography, this dissertation explores how the disciplining of students is textually and socially organized in Montreal (Quebec) schools. This qualitative study investigates, first how school administrators learn to discipline students. Secondly, this research project considers how different stakeholders in schools (e.g., teachers, administrators, students and parents) view school discipline differently. Concentrating on the school administrators' description of the work they do on a daily basis in elementary and high schools, I used ethnographic data (interviews, textual analysis and journaling) to discover how discipline is organized and how administrators learn to do it and think about it in the ways that they do. Findings suggest that new vice-principals learn to do their work in action with the people they work with and through coaching from their principal, rather than simply basing their decision-making process on common sense and professional judgement as they initially suggested. The study also found that teachers play an important role in how students are disciplined in a school and have a tendency to favor exclusionary disciplinary measures when other measures have failed. Both of these findings bring about concerns for biases and discrimination against students with special needs and from visible minorities who could be targeted by these exclusionary disciplinary measures. Finally, the research project illuminated a disconnect between teachers and administrators' expectations in relation to disciplining students.

RÉSUMÉ

En s'inspirant de la théorie de l'ethnographie institutionnelle en éducation, cette thèse explore comment la discipline des élèves est organisée textuellement et socialement dans des écoles montréalaises (au Québec). Cette étude qualitative enquête premièrement sur la façon dont les directeurs d'école apprennent à discipliner les élèves. Deuxièmement, ce projet de recherche tient compte de la façon que les nombreux partenaires de l'école (enseignants, directeurs, élèves et parents) considèrent différemment la discipline des élèves. En me concentrant principalement sur la description du travail fait au quotidien par les directeurs d'écoles primaires et secondaires, j'ai utilisé des données ethnographiques (entrevues, analyse textuelle et écriture d'un journal professionnel) pour découvrir comment la discipline était organisée, apprise et perçue par les différents partenaires. Les résultats suggèrent que les nouveaux directeurs-adjoints apprennent leur travail, incluant la discipline des élèves, en travaillant au quotidien avec leurs collègues et à travers le mentorat des directeurs avec lesquels ils travaillent étroitement, plutôt que d'utiliser le bon sens et leur jugement professionnel tel que suggéré au départ. L'étude a aussi démontré que les enseignants jouent un rôle très important dans la discipline des élèves dans une école et vont en arriver à préférer les moyens disciplinaires d'exclusion lorsque d'autres moyens de discipline progressive ont échoué. Ces deux résultats amènent des préoccupations par rapport aux jugements biaisés et à la discrimination envers les élèves à besoins particuliers et ceux de minorités visibles qui pourraient être visés par ces mesures disciplinaires d'exclusion. Finalement, ce projet de recherche démontre une discorde quant aux attentes des enseignants et celles des directeurs au sujet de la discipline des élèves.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

GLOSSARY

Detention: a consequence given to a student who is made to stay in a class or in the school's office during non-class time (e.g., morning, recess, lunch or after school).

Expulsion: a student is made to change school boards in Quebec. Outside of the province, the term may be used to mean a transfer of schools within a same school board.

In-school suspension: a student is removed from the classroom for a specific amount of time but remains in the school, in a separate space, without contact with other students.

Out-of-school suspension: a student is removed from school for a specific amount of time.

School-to-prison pipeline: In the United States, a phenomenon where students who misbehave in school are arrested, put into contact with the juvenile criminal justice system and may end up in prison.

Transfer: a student is made to change schools within the same school board.

Zero tolerance policy: a general policy that originated in the American criminal justice system and was adopted by the education system in the 1990s. The main message is that both minor and major misbehaviors by students in a school will not be tolerated and students will receive an automatic consequence for their misbehavior.

INTRODUCTION

My work is inspired by my own experience as an educator, a teacher and a school administrator. I have been working in education for 23 years, mostly as a high school French teacher in Montreal, Quebec. I have been privileged to work at one of the best public high schools of the province for most of my teaching career. When I became an administrator, I quickly realized I was disciplining students of other teachers whom I did not know personally. The students and I had not had the time to build a rapport and a relationship based on trust like I had experienced in the past with my own students. Misbehaving students were sent to my office because they had not followed school or classroom rules. Having received very little formal or informal training to become a vice-principal of a school, I turned to my principal for direction in disciplining students. I learned that in general, my options were limited when it came time to deal with more serious infractions to the school's code of conduct; I could give the student a detention or I could suspend them if I felt it was necessary.

Detentions were given quite regularly but did not seem to discourage certain students from engaging in the behavior that got them in trouble. When a student had accumulated too many detentions, a warning was given: if the student received another detention within a specific timeframe, he/she would be suspended for one day. When a student was suspended, a letter would be sent home with the student for the parents. The student was not to come to school the next day. He/She would return to school the following day with his/her parents to have a meeting with the vice-principal in order to address the issue at hand and attempt to find solutions, hoping the misbehaviors would cease and that the student would have learned a valuable lesson on his/her own, at home, for one day. Parents were not always supportive of our disciplinary

measures because these would exclude the student from classes and school without any educational support, nor supervision. While a one-time out-of-school suspension (OSS) can work at dissuading some students from misbehaving in the future, many students and parents consider a suspension to be a day off, to rest and to catch up on projects. In these cases, a suspension do not serve as a negative consequence for the student nor the parent. However, Railsback (2004) and Shannon and Bylsma (2003) show that "repeated ongoing exposure to OSS has a strong and significant effect on the growth of truancy occurrences over time. It has been speculated that suspension or expulsion of a student for truancy may reward their desire to escape from or avoid school and does little to encourage them to have consistent attendance" (as cited in Flannery, Frank, & McGrath Kato, 2012, p. 132-133). Consequently, it is essential for school administrators to examine other disciplinary measures that are better suited for helping and educating students who continue to misbehave.

After experiencing a few years of using these exclusionary disciplinary measures in my school, I came across research and articles about the effects of the zero tolerance policies used in schools in the United States (U.S.). Zero tolerance policies started in the American criminal justice system as a radical practice that gave no second chances for criminals to break the law (Skiba, 2013). This movement was then later adopted by the education system in 1990s to counter an increase in student misbehavior and violence in American schools. These radical policies would send the message that any misbehavior, minor or major, would receive a consequence. Zero tolerance policies included having police officers patrolling in schools, installing metal detectors at the doors and having surveillance equipment everywhere to monitor everyone's moves. In schools where zero tolerance policies were employed, it was not uncommon for students to be arrested by police officers in their classrooms or on the playground

and brought before the justice courts for misbehaviors that would have historically been handled by school staff, such as talking back, using foul language or lateness to school.

My own view is that excluding misbehaving students from school prevents them from learning not only the curriculum but how to behave in a manner deemed appropriate by an educational community, and can, over time, reduce their chances of succeeding in life. Though I concede that there are many factors that may contribute to how a student being removed from school may lead to prison, I still maintain that chances for this to occur increase, when students are systematically pushed out of mainstream programs through school suspension and expulsion processes. Although there has not been a wide-spread adoption of zero tolerance policies in Montreal schools, I am curious how the discourses and practices related to zero tolerance have shaped Montreal school disciplinary practices in more subtle ways, contributing to the exclusion of young people who are experiencing academic and social difficulties rather than working to engage them in learning in school. As such, this thesis conveys the results of my research to discover how school discipline is institutionally and socially organized in Montreal schools.

Study Background

In my first readings on the subject of finding alternatives to suspensions and expulsions, I came upon articles by Skiba (2014), Skiba and Rausch (2006a; 2006b) and Skiba, Michael, Nardo, and Peterson (2002) about how zero tolerance policies were a failure in the U.S. The more I read on the subject, the more I was appalled that students in elementary and secondary schools in the U.S. are suspended and expelled more often, for longer periods of time, and for minor infractions that were historically addressed internally by school authorities. Some students are even being arrested by in-school police officers. Other students are sent home for an undetermined period of time that could vary between a few days and sometimes many weeks,

without parental supervision, not necessarily learning from their mistakes and missing out on classroom learning (Chin, Dowdy, Jimerson, & Rime, 2012). When they return, since they have missed a lot of important instruction time, many fall behind (Fenning et al., 2012; Skiba, Mediratta, & Rausch, 2016). When students fall behind in their education, they may repeat a school year, and down the road, they are more likely to drop out of school (Skiba et al., 2011; Fenning et al., 2012). In addition, the chances for future misbehaviors to occur increase with exclusionary discipline measures (Hemphill, Toumbourou, Herrenkohl, McMorris, & Catalano, 2006; American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008).

The most discouraging fact is that more and more children who follow this path end up in prison: this is called the school-to-prison pipeline (Fenning & Rose, 2007; American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Fenning et al., 2012; Skiba, Arredondo, & Williams, 2014). Furthermore, Fenning and Rose (2007) expose how a high number of racial-minority students are targeted and affected by exclusionary discipline measures such as suspensions and expulsions that lead them to the criminal justice system and to prison. As Skiba and Rausch (2006a) state: "National, state-, district-, and school-level data for the past 30 years shows that African-American students have been suspended at rates two to three times that of other students" (p. 90). This complex and worrisome phenomenon is occurring in the U.S. but I started questioning if there were similarities in Canada, for example in Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal? When I explored existing research about discipline issues in Montreal or in the province of Quebec, however, I did not find a lot of information available. This is where my own research comes into play.

Study Objectives

The focus of my research is on the organization of institutional policies that govern school discipline measures and practices. My research was guided by the following central question: "How is school discipline institutionally and socially organized in Montreal?" My intention was to document and analyze institutional processes and policies that shape disciplinary actions on a daily basis in English schools in Montreal, most particularly high schools. I began these documentary practices by paying systematic attention to my own everyday work as a vice-principal and asking my administrator colleagues to tell me about their work. From here, I examined the institutional policies and procedures that give shape to this work. My analysis of the institutional organization of school discipline in English schools in Montreal emerges from administrators' understanding of their daily work to discipline students in their schools.

Ultimately my aim is to share my findings on the social organization of school discipline practices, as well as promising alternatives to suspensions and expulsions with my administrator and educator colleagues. From my experience, I know that many administrators may not be well informed about alternatives to suspensions and expulsions, and with their heavy workload and very busy schedule, they may not have the time to engage in independent research. I hope to create a shift in thinking about school discipline, to encourage discussions in schools, to provoke a difficult conversation that I feel needs to happen about disciplining students. I believe that looking at the root of the problem of student acting out can stimulate innovation and become more restorative in the long run.

Framing my Research

Ostensibly, school discipline is used to create a safe school environment to promote learning. In North American schools, detentions and suspensions are the most common tools of

discipline (Skiba & Rausch, 2006a). An out-of-school suspension (OSS) is defined when a student is removed from the school for a specific amount of time, whereas an in-school suspension (ISS) is when a student is removed from the classroom for a specific amount of time but remains in school, in a separate space, without contact with other students. The main purpose of these punitive forms of discipline is to discourage students from misbehaving. Over the past two decades, in the United States, zero tolerance policies have been adopted in schools "as a method of sending a message that certain behaviors will not be tolerated, by punishing all offences severely, no matter how minor" (Skiba & Rausch, 2006a, p. 88). Hence, there has been a significant increase in the use of suspensions for all types of misbehaviors, from minor ones like lateness to school, to more severe ones like bringing a knife to school. Chin et al. (2012) state that "in the United States, public schools using out-of-school suspensions with no curriculum or additional services provided have increased from 34% in 2000 to 41% in 2008" (p. 157). Although suspensions may be "effective in achieving compliance and obedience" in school for some students (Bear, 2012, p. 177), there are many negative outcomes to suspensions.

One of these negative impacts of suspensions is that once students are removed from school, they tend to be suspended more often. According to Brownstein (2010), "30 to 50% of suspended students are more likely to be suspended again" (p. 25). When these students are removed from the classroom, they miss the opportunity to learn and then they tend to fall behind in their classwork (Morris & Perry, 2016; Skiba et al., 2016). As a result, this may cause stress and anxiety to the student falling behind in class. For those reasons, they may encounter academic difficulties, they may fail subjects and/or they could even be retained a grade level for not achieving academic success. In the end, suspended students are more likely to drop out from high school altogether (Skiba et al., 2011; Fenning et al., 2012).

Another negative outcome of suspensions is that a suspension is a temporary solution that removes a misbehaving student from the classroom but it does not address the reasons or causes for the specific misbehavior. By suspending the student, the classroom may return to an environment more suitable for the learning of others, but the offending student will not necessarily have learned a lesson on how to modify the misbehavior that caused the suspension in the first place. Being sent home for a day could even be considered as a reward for that student as he or she does not have to go to school and work like his or her peers, especially if he or she is having academic difficulties.

Study Findings

Researchers have made significant progress in presenting many alternatives to suspension and expulsion, especially over the past decade. Alternatives to suspensions are of professional interest to me because when I was newly assigned as vice-principal of a Montreal high school in 2013, the most common consequences for misbehaving students referred to the office were detentions and suspensions. These punitive consequences are used to address both minor and major misbehaviors. Although suspensions may be useful in certain circumstances of major misbehavior, minor misbehaviors do not justify the use of such a punitive consequence. Suspended students can learn their lesson in a more productive and positive manner, such as counselling or community service, without missing class and valuable learning time. Furthermore, my research suggests that parents are concerned that their child is excluded from school for minor misbehaviors such as chronic lateness or unjustified absenteeism, reasons that already made them miss class in the first place.

My efforts to learn how administrators learn how to discipline students have lead me to discover that different stakeholders in the school do not see the discipline of students in the same

way. Expectations and desired disciplinary outcomes are not shared among stakeholders (e.g., teachers, administrators, students and parents), and this creates a certain disconnect that prevents the stakeholders from working together to review/reform school disciplinary policies in order to improve behavior and school climate. One way to improve school climate is to encourage open dialogue about school discipline practices and to establish clear expectations for student behavior and school discipline outcomes. School administrators have a further responsibility to clearly communicate expectations to all parties and to ensure that teachers and staff members are regularly trained in positive classroom management techniques.

This research's target audience is school administrators as they are the ones who decide to use suspensions as a punitive consequence in school. Administrators are also responsible for setting a discipline system that will encourage and favor learning for all students, in collaboration with teachers, support staff, parents and students. Moreover, students will indirectly benefit from this project as schools in Montreal may be exposed to more inclusive disciplinary systems.

Description of Chapters

Chapter 1 presents a literature review on the increase of the use of suspensions and expulsions in schools in the United States over the last decades and the effects these have had on students, most particularly on African-American students, boys, and students with special needs. In Chapter 2, I describe my research methods. I explain the institutional ethnography's approach to studying how language and texts regulate both the operational inner workings of a school, and the work of administrators who apply the rules and regulations in disciplining students.

In Chapter 3, I look at how education is textually organized in Quebec. I describe how texts (e.g., legislation, policies, inter-institutional agreements, and codes of conduct) organize to

some extent the work of educators, school administrators and others (e.g., the police) involved in disciplining misbehaving students. Chapter 4 extends the policy and text analysis conveyed in Chapter 3, focusing on informal learning among administrators in Montreal schools.

In Chapter 5, I explore the different perspectives that people involved in education may have about disciplining students in schools in Montreal. In the last chapter, I present a conclusion of what I have learned about disciplining students in schools in Montreal. Finally, I propose a few alternatives to the suspensions, transfers and expulsions of students.

CHAPTER 1

Literature Review

In this chapter, I describe how suspensions and expulsions have increased significantly in the United States over the past decades. I explain where zero tolerance policies come from and how they affect students in American schools, making extensions where applicable to Canadian and Quebecois contexts. A zero tolerance policy is "a disciplinary policy that is intended primarily as a method of sending a message that certain behaviors will not be tolerated, by punishing all offences severely, no matter how minor" (Skiba & Knesting, 2001, p. 20). This literature review explores whether and how zero tolerance policies have influenced discipline policies in Montreal schools.

School administrators are faced with the responsibility of creating a safe and secure environment that promotes learning for all students. Principals are in charge of both academics and discipline. Dealing with misbehaving students is a daily occurrence for school administrators. However, according to Kupchik (2010), schools are teaching students to follow rules like they are teaching them to learn for a test. Hence, the author claims that we miss out on opportunities to teach children how to resolve conflict and manage their own behavior (p. 117-118). The first time I read about zero tolerance policies being regularly applied in elementary and high schools in the United States, I wondered if the same "get tough" philosophy on school discipline was being organized and applied in the same manner in Montreal schools.

Zero Tolerance Policies in the United States

Over the last three decades, there has been an increase in more aggressive discipline measures in American schools inspired by zero tolerance policies in order to project a strong

image of a safer and more secure school environment for children. The term zero tolerance originated in the mid-80s in relation to the fight against crime and drugs in the criminal justice system. In the early 90s, the term was picked up in education in response to increasing drugs and gangs in schools at the time. Zero tolerance came out of a fear in schools and communities, which was fueled in part by politicians, that violence would take over American schools.

In 1994, the United States Congress passed the *Gun Free Schools Act*, "which required public schools to expel for at least one year any student bringing a weapon to school, or else lose their federal funding" (Kupchik, 2010, p.30; Skiba, 2013). This act was intended to enforce social control but actually failed to reduce violence in schools. Critiquing these early policy moves, Cerrone (1999) observed the following: "These laws have the potential of imposing strict and harsh punishment upon school children who are not dangerous and who will only suffer detrimental results from a full year expulsion. In addition, and perhaps more irksome, is that these laws do not prevent school violence" (p. 133).

The objective of the *Gun Free Schools Act* was to send a clear message and setting expectations to all students that certain misbehaviors would not be tolerated and would be harshly be punished. These punishments would mainly include exclusionary disciplinary measures such as suspensions and expulsions. The "get tough" policies in schools were encouraged even for minor incidents in thinking that they could become major incidents if not controlled properly. In this political context, the disciplinary interventions were meant to be reactive instead of preventive — action versus education. Suspendible offences within these policies include minor ones such as defiance, noncompliance, attendance and general disruption, while expellable offences in schools are related to criminal offences (e.g., physical violence, drugs, weapons, theft) (Skiba, 2017).

Excluding Students from School

Out-of-school suspensions (OSS) are a common disciplinary measure used by administrators in schools while expulsions are applied less often. According to Skiba (2014), the use of suspensions and expulsions have increased substantially over time in the United States. In fact, in the U.S., "between 1973 and 2009-2010, exclusionary discipline such as suspensions have doubled and almost tripled for Black students" although "school violence has stayed relatively stable in 30 years" (Skiba 2013; 2017). While there has been a significant increase in these measures, suspensions are not restricted only for major misbehaviors such as theft, violence, or drug use, but most often for minor misbehaviors that should be handled by school authorities (e.g., attendance, defiance, non-compliance). In addition, the presence of police officers in American schools, also known as School Resource Officers, has increased the likelihood of minor misbehaviors being translated into arrests and criminal charges, therefore introducing youth to the criminal justice system and having students spend time in jail for minor misbehaviors that could have been prevented and addressed by school authorities in the first place.

Little evidence supports punitive and exclusionary approaches (Mayer, 1995; Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997, as all cited in Osher et al., 2010). Bear (2012) states that suspensions are effective in achieving compliance and obedience, but not in teaching students to behave appropriately. Rules and suspensions do not teach students; adults who teach and offer support do. "A disciplinary process like expulsion that punish children rather than instructor assist them appear in direct conflict with many of the developmental needs of school-age students, specifically the need to develop strong and trusting relationships with adults and the need to form positive attitudes about fairness and justice" (Morrison et al., 2001, p. 56; Brown,

Losen, & Wald, 2017, p. 77). Repeated suspensions for the same student are also ineffective. School administrators and teachers need to look at the cause behind the misbehavior, (e.g., personal, familial, or emotional) instead of repeating the same consequences over and over again without any result. By removing disruptive students from school, suspensions and expulsions are believed by educators to temporarily improve the learning environment when on the contrary, they create negative classroom and school climate (Bear, 2012; American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008), especially when excluding students from school for minor misbehaviors.

Effects of Suspensions and Expulsions

A perception of unfairness may result from a negative school climate and will cause more damage in the long run mainly because students will feel they are not respected nor heard by their teachers and administrators who are the figures of authority in schools. In addition, rather than reducing misbehaviors, suspensions have a negative effect as they serve more as a predictor or reinforcer for future misbehaviors (Tobin, Sugai, & Colvin, 1996; Skiba et al., 2014). Mendez (2003) found that "the number of out-of-school suspensions a student receives in fourth or fifth grade was the strongest predictor of the number of suspensions later in middle school" (as cited in Skiba et al., 2014).

Studies show that students disconnected from school and having poor relationships with adults in school may contribute to students misbehaving especially black students, students with special needs, LGBTQ, and other minorities (Anyon, Zhang, & Hazel, 2016). A student who experiences bonding, attachment, and support in school will benefit from the affective component of schooling that includes care, concern, and respect from educators. Anyon et al. (2016) also refer to other studies that demonstrate that "connectedness to school adults has been

shown to be positively associated with students' academic performance, motivation, and college attendance; and negatively associated with delinquency, discipline incidents, social-emotional, maladjustment, dissatisfaction with school, and dropout (Crosnoe, Johnson & Elder, 2004; Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor & Schellinger, 2011; Murray & Greenberg, 2000; Wooley, Kol, & Bowen, 2009, as all cited in Anyon et al., 2016). A negative school environment where students are policed, punished severely for minor misbehaviors repeatedly and treated like criminals will not create a safe and caring learning environment where students will succeed. On the contrary, when disciplinarians deny students an opportunity to talk about what happened or why they misbehaved, make decisions about punishments before even meeting with students, or rigidly follow rules that may seem arbitrary to students, they risk making school punishment seem illegitimate and unjust (Kupchik, 2010, p. 149). Kupchik (2010) believes that these perceptions of unfairness will likely increase misbehaviors rather than solving them. This is particularly the case when the perceptions of unfairness are held by students who already face structural and systemic barriers due to poverty, racism and other forms of discrimination.

Research shows that there is an overrepresentation of low-income students, minority students and those with special needs who get suspended and expelled from school (Skiba & Knesting, 2001; Morrison et al., 2001; Brown et al., 2001; Kupchik, 2010). Black students are 3.5 more times as likely to be suspended than white students. Other groups at risk are Latino, Native American, students with disabilities (behavioral and emotional disorders) as well as LGBTQ students (Brownstein, 2010; Fenning et al., 2012; Skiba, 2017). Black students tend to be referred to the school principal for disrespect, excessive noise, threat and loitering (Skiba, 2017; Anyon et al., 2016). Compared to other categories warranting a disciplinary response (e.g., bringing a weapon to school), demonstrations of disrespect, excessive noise, and loitering require

more subjective decision-making on the parts of educators. In these instances, bias and perception of educators and administrators contribute to minority students being disciplined more severely and more often for less serious and more subjective infractions (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; Skiba, 2013; 2017). The same pattern is observable among students with special needs – any minor misbehavior results in a disciplinary action, making them a target for further disciplinary consequences (Skiba & Knesting, 2001; Kupchik, 2010). This creates a vicious cycle of continued misbehaviors leading to exclusionary disciplinary measures (Skiba & Knesting, 2001; Brownstein, 2010; Brown et al., 2001; Hemphill et al., 2006).

In addition, suspensions do not improve educational outcomes and affect academics negatively often leading students with learning or behavioral difficulties to failure (Morrison et al., 2001; Skiba, 2013; Gregory, Skiba, & Mediratta, 2017). Academic failure is mainly due to loss of instructional time which leads to loss of school engagement. In turn, the loss of student engagement in his/her academic life may eventually lead to school drop-out and even involvement in criminal activity (Morrison et al., 2001, p. 57; Brownstein, 2010). Being targeted for more disciplinary consequences leads to negative outcomes students who misbehave : "It has been documented that suspension or expulsion are used by some administrators as a tool for "pushout," in an attempt to rid the school of perceived troublemakers or those whose long-term chances of success at school are seen as low. Somewhat surprisingly, however, purging the school of such students does not improve school climate" (Skiba, 2013, p. 383).

As I noted in the Introduction, this pushout from school into criminality is known as the *school-to-prison pipeline*. It refers to the pattern of students being removed from school through the overuse of suspensions or expulsions, and who then find themselves at greater risk of ending up in the juvenile justice system because they have a tendency to disengage from learning in

school and have more unsupervised time outside of school (Wald & Losen, 2003, as cited in Monahan, VanDerhei, Bechtold, & Cauffman., 2014; as also cited in Kreuger-Henney, 2013). Moreover, the concept of a school-to-prison pipeline also points to the transformation of American schools into prison-like institutions through the presence of police in schools, the introduction of surveillance equipment and metal detectors, and the severe punishment of all types of misbehaviors. In an era of zero tolerance policies that severely punish students even for minor misbehaviors in schools, students are being arrested by police officers in their classrooms and brought before the justice courts for misbehaviors that use to be handled by school staff, such as talking back, using foul language or lateness to school.

Conclusion

This chapter illuminates the literature on punitive and exclusionary school discipline practices, which served as the point of origin for my work. In my own research, I wanted to know if the same pattern of excluding and pushing out students from school was occurring in Montreal; if school administrators were increasingly policing our schools and treating students as criminals; and if principals were working closely with the police to send students into the juvenile justice system and off to prison. In the next chapter, I present the research methods I used to find out more about how administrators discipline students in Montreal schools.

CHAPTER 2

Research Methods:

Doing Educational Institutional Ethnography

In this chapter, I describe my experiences conducting research on the institutional organization of disciplinary processes in elementary and secondary schools in one Montreal school board using institutional ethnography as an inquiry method. I also describe the research methods I have selected to answer my research questions and the data sources, which ground my analysis. In addition, I describe my specific research activities and recount my efforts to establish a relationship between my encounters with administrator colleagues, my own work as a vice-principal and my research.

Institutional Ethnography in the Schools

My approach to research is guided by institutional ethnography. While traditional ethnography is focused on what people are and how they interact with each other (Woods, 1986), institutional ethnography is primarily concerned with discovering how things work in a particular organizational complex like the education or healthcare system (Smith, 2006). An institutional ethnography focuses on how language and texts regulate both the operational inner workings of an organization, and the work of people who apply the rules and regulations from within – in my case, the language and texts that background the work of school discipline. Distinct from other forms of organizational analysis, however, in an institutional ethnography one always begins his/her investigation with what people know, and how they have experienced the institutional settings under investigation. One's own experiences can represent useful data in this regard. Other institutional ethnographies begin with the experiential insights of others. In either case,

people's experiences anchor the investigation. An institutional ethnography of the institutional relations mediating young people's experiences of homelessness could, for instance, begin with young people's efforts to seek access to safe and affordable places to live (Nichols, 2014).

In this study, I illuminate what educators do in their everyday work in schools as a way of learning about institutional organization of school discipline. Like all institutional ethnographies, my research focuses on the complex of institutional relations that shape educators' work; the focus of the research is not on the people themselves. In proceeding in this way, I paid attention to how administrators, including myself, make decisions when it comes to disciplining students in their school. DeVault and McCoy (2006) suggest that institutional ethnography "research follows a sequence: (a) identify an experience, (b) identify some of the institutional processes that are shaping that experience, and (c) investigate those processes in order to describe analytically how they operate as the grounds of the experience" (p.20). As a result, this institutional ethnographic research begins with administrators' accounts of their own work experience, and the analysis of their work takes me beyond the everyday into the actual policy and discursive organization of school discipline processes that more generally shape school discipline in Montreal. Each conversation I have had with an administrator or teacher gave me a glimpse into what they do, how their work and the conceptualization of their work are socially organized, and it also made *them* think about what they do, how they do it, and where their decision-making processes come from.

Smith (2006) claims that institutional ethnography is used "to extend people's ordinary good knowledge of how things are put together in our everyday lives to dimensions of the social that transcend the local and are all the more powerful and significant in it for that reason. We participate in them without knowing what we are doing" (p. 3). My intention was to understand

not only how administrators' decisions are regulated and organized, but how these processes have become automated in their daily dealings with misbehaving students. I wished to figure out what policies, procedural guidelines, ideas, common practices, histories, etc., school administrators base their disciplinary decisions on. For example, although most participants in my study suggest that their daily decisions are derived from their professional judgement and experience, I have sought to reveal the ways that professional judgement and experience are themselves socially organized phenomena. As mentioned before, institutional ethnography does emphasize the important role of language and text but surprisingly, in my own research, the predominant regulatory text does not seem to be in the written form, as the process of disciplining students is replicated through informal training from principals who guide the decision-making process to vice-principals.

According to Gramsci, "the state reproduces itself by incorporating and rearticulating the resistant impulses of subordinate groups, thus producing seemingly common sense ideas about how the world works" (Dimitriadis and Kamberelis, 2006, p. 132). By reproducing its dominant discourse through social interactions, a school board is able to transmit its policies and values from management directors to school administrators without seeming overly directive, giving the impression that administrators have some discretion on how to discipline their students and that their decisions are based on common sense and professional judgement. In fact, the policies on disciplining students appear to be casual in "how we do things around here", when on the contrary, administrators in different schools are applying the same consequences and going through the same processes because they have been historically transmitted and reproduced by their administrative predecessors over time. In addition, Gramsci claims that "every social group…creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it

homogeneity and an awareness of its own function, not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields" (quoted in Storey, 2000, p. 212)" (Dimitriadis and Kamberelis, p. 133). The intellectuals of a school board are at one level, management level directors who have all previously been teachers and school administrators, and at another level, school principals who are responsible for disciplining students in their school, who have been mandated to train the vice-principals as well as oversee the work of teachers.

With this research, I focused on a particular issue of interest to me in my own everyday experience at work as an educator and a school administrator, although I get the impression that I am the only one to question the process of disciplining students in my school board. In my conversations with colleagues, many are surprised that I have chosen to research what seems to them such an obvious process and application of rules and consequences. As I collected data, I found myself particularly drawn to the ideas of the replication of processes through informal training in a public institution, and the ruling relation a school administrator may participate in and extend when disciplining students within a school board system. An analysis of this kind may establish that the professional discourses that circulate in among school administrators are at the basis of order in schools. I aim to understand how the institutionally-derived power of the principal shapes what knowledge and educational practices are transmitted to the vice-principal as part of "how things are done" in our schools.

Campbell and Gregor (2002) point out that "ruling relations are more than an imposition of rules. They rely on people knowing how to make them up and act in the appropriate manner" (p. 33). As a vice-principal, I still ask my principal how to take care of a situation involving a misbehaving student. What I have received as answers are what Turner (2006) calls the 'particular institution's standard sequences' in making a decision on past experiences and having

similar outcomes over time without much innovation (p. 140). Nichols (2014) proposes that "the capacity to organize is not located in discourse, institutions, or policies, but in relations among people, as they are mediated by objectified forms of knowing and being" (p. 8). It is therefore worth considering if approaches to school discipline reflect an objective form of knowing, which people acquire over time and experience participating in educational settings as a student, a teacher and an administrator. In general, administrators go through the usual motions of the disciplinary process they have learned, without noting or questioning the belief systems, professional values, prior disciplinary encounters, and the ruling discourses, which shape their work. My research aims to illuminate the social processes, which operate in schools and shape how principals come to see their school discipline practices as common sense or the way things are done.

Methods

Research setting. My ethnographic work occurred in many elementary and secondary schools in one school board in Montreal. Before starting my interviews with administrators, I applied at the Research Committee of the chosen English school board in Montreal to obtain its formal approval to interview its administrators, study board policies and statistics on discipline, and eventually conduct workshops for administrators on presenting alternatives to suspensions and expulsions after submitting my thesis. As I presented my proposal to the Research Committee composed of principals and school board management personnel, I quickly felt a lot of resistance to my study. Principals on the committee were very defensive about my inquiry into discipline policies and processes in schools, demanding the specific reasons for my study and telling me in a 'matter-of-fact way' that decisions on discipline were obviously based on the administrators' professional judgement and common sense, nothing more. It was here that the

problematic for my project started to come into view – although I wasn't entirely aware of its significance at this time. The general consensus that school discipline was based on professional judgement and common sense suggested to me that school discipline processes in Montreal were less structured by policy than by the informal learning processes – coaching, mentoring, and the promulgation of professional discourses and frames – that shape the work of becoming a vice-principal.

I left that meeting feeling like my research proposal had touched a very sensitive chord with them and was most probably going to be refused. A few weeks later, I received a letter from the school board Research Committee chairperson offering me a choice in the way I could conduct my research with the school board. To be authorized to conduct the research formally, the first proposed option suggested that I needed to make a few adjustments concerning the employees I could interview. This meant that the administrators that I would interview would all have to be principals, with a minimum of five years of experience, with a balance between principals from both sectors of the school board, 1 and 2. I would have to give the names of the interviewed administrators to the school board and therefore breach my confidentiality option. The second proposed option was to conduct my research informally, interviewing administrators outside of school hours. I chose the second option. Unfortunately, the school board did not show any interest in the workshops on alternatives to suspensions and expulsions that I proposed to offer to other administrators in the future as there was no reference to it during the meeting nor in the letter. The workshops are intended to give back to colleagues and the school board what I have learned from my research and share with them more valuable and non-exclusionary disciplinary measures with misbehaving students and proactive programs that promote positive school-appropriate behavior. The ultimate aim is to create a formative and proactive shift in

thinking about school discipline. Perhaps I will present such a workshop at a future conference on school leadership and administration.

Research participants. My research participants are mainly school administrators. I interviewed ten school administrators. I intended to interview a few teachers who have experience in the Outreach system working with students who have had serious dealings with school discipline and have ended up in schools where they have been given a (sometimes last) chance to make a life change. Unfortunately, I did not get a chance to do so. In addition, I interviewed the provincial director for the Alternative Suspension program offered by the YMCA in collaboration with several Montreal high schools. This is an out-of-school suspension program where suspended students spend between one and three days, with the help of outreach workers, to work and reflect on problematic behavior and how to improve this behavior to encourage them to succeed and persevere in school. Finally, I interviewed three young adults who had recently graduated from high school in English schools in Montreal. They agreed to speak with me about their personal experiences concerning discipline in high school.

At first, I aimed to interview perhaps six to seven participants in all but the list quickly grew as I sent out approximately fifteen invitations to administrators I had worked or studied with, and most of the recipients accepted the offer to have a conversation with me about discipline in their schools. Although the thought of reducing the number of participants and conducting more than one interview with each crossed my mind, I found there is more value in looking into how school discipline work is organized from the standpoints of several educators and administrators. I believe that conducting more interviews has led to a better understanding of how administrators make their decisions. As I engaged in each of my interviews, my understanding of the research problematic evolved and the larger number of interviews gave me

the opportunity to adjust the questions I asked as I gathered more information. Ideally, I would have liked to interview the participants a second time as I was writing my research thesis, in order to ask each of them more specific questions on how they learned to discipline students, and especially dig deeper into what they meant about using their professional judgement and common sense to discipline students. Unfortunately, there was no time to go back for a second interview.

The first person I interviewed in the fall of 2016 was the provincial Director of the YMCA's Alternative Suspension. I knew of some schools in Montreal that were using this program to send some of their suspended students to be supervised and counselled during their suspension. I had heard good things about their program and wanted to know more about it. Between September 2016 and June 2017, I interviewed ten school administrators from one English school board in Montreal. As mentioned before, some were principals, other were vice-principals. Some had more than 15 years of experience in managing a school, others had started only a few years prior to our conversation. Out of these ten administrators, seven were men and three were women. From this group, only one administrator was from a visible minority group. I met each of them in their respective school. The students who graduated from high school were the last to be interviewed in July 2017. All of these students identified as visible minorities. Authorization to interview all of the participants was granted by McGill's Research Ethics Board. Since the identities of participants (interviewed educators, young adults and students mentioned in my journal), schools and school board are to remain confidential, the name of participants, schools and school board where participants are employed or are studying are not revealed in this thesis. Pseudonyms are used for individuals, schools and school board.

Research activities. The research activities I employed for this research are linked to one another. They complemented each other well as part of institutional ethnography. Each research activity used for this research was a relevant way to inquire into the organization of knowledge and the standardization of actions in schools concerning the discipline of students. These activities all occurred over a full calendar year, which coincided with my first year as an elementary school vice-principal (previously, I worked as a secondary school vice-principal). The data collected was generated through a dozen interviews, textual analyses, and journaling about my own work disciplining students. My research started in my own work experience and the work of people who are on the front line of the discipline of students in schools on a daily basis. By engaging in the inter-related research activities mentioned below, my objective was to discover and describe what people do every day in their work and more importantly, how their work is organized to happen in the ways that it does.

Interviews. Interviews have been key to my research because it gave me a chance to sit down with other administrators or educators and have a conversation about what they do on a daily basis concerning the discipline of students and especially how they do it. Although the interviews were semi-structured, I saw them as "talking with people" (DeVault & McCoy, 2006, p.22; Woods, 1986, p.67). I found that many of my participants were surprised by the question, "How do you go about making a decision about disciplining students?" They were often unsure about how to answer the question. Their initial reaction was to say that it is just common sense and professional judgment, like the principals on the school board's Research Committee. But when we dug through the steps of their decision-making process together, it is as if it was the first time they had really thought about what they were doing. Prior to giving their own work explicit attention in the interview setting, it had simply seemed that they were engaging in a

series of natural and logical — almost instinctual — processes. “These workers have been trained to use the very concepts and categories that institutional ethnographers wish to unpack, and they are accustomed to speaking from within a ruling discourse. Thus the interviews must find ways of moving the talk beyond institutional language to ‘what actually happens’ in the setting” (DeVault & McCoy, 2006, p. 28). This is the reason why I had prepared a series of questions and prompts to help interviewees unpack their usual plan of action.

The interviews were a way for me to build knowledge, adding onto the previous interview, slowly fitting the pieces of the puzzle together, trying to better understand how policies and professional knowledge/discourse affect school discipline decision-making processes. I regularly analyzed a school’s code of conduct in preparation for an interview and questioned an administrator about how the code of conduct influences his or her decisions. The aim of the interviews was to understand how principals on the front line apply policies and procedures, how they learn them, where they get access to these policies, what they need to do with them, when they need to use them. “Workers’ tasks are shaped by certain prevailing features of the system, features so common to workers that they begin to see them as natural, as the way things are done and in some odd way as the only way they could be done, rather than as planned procedures and rules developed by individuals ensuring certain ideological ways of interpreting and acting on a case” (Pence, 1996, p. 60, as cited in DeVault & McCoy, 2006, p.31). Although I did build knowledge for my research, I felt that the administrators and I were not able to dig deep enough to truly uncover together how they are able to discipline students on a daily basis. The answers often remained superficial in following the school rules, applying a variety of consequences and using one’s professional judgement.

During the interviews, I had to be alert and have each interviewee explain step by step the process of disciplining a student even if I am aware of these steps as I have used them myself in my work. I had to inquire and confirm what the interviewee knows or believes, even though this was sometimes difficult because I already know and understand what is generally being done. At times, I felt like I did not push the interviewee into enough details because of my prior professional knowledge. Perhaps because of this factor, my interviews changed over the course of this project. The focus went from general discipline processes to more specific situations (e.g., What happens when you suspect a student of using drugs at school?). In addition, over time, my questions evolved. Instead of asking administrators to tell me about what they do during their day in general, I asked them to specifically walk me through a disciplinary situation with a student involving violence. This emergent approach is consistent with institutional ethnography ways of interviewing: "Each interview provides an opportunity for the researcher to learn about a particular piece of the extended relational chain, to check the developing picture of the coordinative process, and to become aware of additional questions" (DeVault & McCoy, 2006, p.23). Once it was established that the basic process for disciplining students is quite similar from one administrator to the next, it was an opportunity to dig into other aspects of process such as policies, beliefs, values, or evolution of process. However, I was often unable to direct the interviewees towards the aspects of their work that I wanted to explore in more details as they were vague in describing their work. Finally, I took few field notes during the interviews as I mostly wanted to listen to the participant and participate in what resembled an authentic conversation about discipline in their school. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by an external transcriber at a later date.

Journaling. On a regular basis (once a week, more or less), I handwrote in a paper journal about my own dealings with disciplining elementary students in the school where I work. Since my school included students from kindergarten to grade 11, my notes also included reflections on discipline cases of high school students, discussions I had with my principal who was in charge of both levels of students and with my colleague who was the vice-principal at the high school level. I chose not to interview them formally for my research because I preferred having their reflections and our daily discussions included in my journaling as part of my own reflections on the job. Therefore, their input was integrated in a more personal way through my journal.

In addition, the journal includes my reflections and frustrations about my own work, learning to become a vice-principal. I would like to note that even though I have been working as a vice-principal for four years, I still feel that I have a lot to learn concerning disciplining students. It seems that every week, a new situation arises. While every disciplinary incident adds to my professional experience of disciplining students, this part of my work is a continuous learning process. In my journal, I documented and reflected on my actions towards students with behavior difficulties and towards misbehaving students, my dealings with difficult parents who at times did not support the school's decisions and, my vision and understanding of discipline. For example, I would write about the types of incidents that would occur regularly in the elementary school yard. A common disciplinary situation would involve boys playing rough and being physical with each other as they would push, shove, pull, hit, etc. I would reflect in my journal on how to deal with and improve these behaviors; describe which consequences I would apply first and how they would progress if this was to reoccur; write excerpts of discussions I would have with students or staff about these incidents; I would question and second guess my

decisions; write notes to remember for the next time; etc. Most of the entries in my journal were reports of incidents between students, describing what had happened and how I, as the vice-principal, dealt with it. In order to code and analyze the data gathered in my journal, I voice-recorded my entries and had them transcribed in an electronic version by a transcriber since all my entries were hand-written.

Textual analysis. When I started as a vice-principal, I assumed that there were written policies and procedures from the school board to guide school administrators on how to discipline students, a common or systemic progressive application of consequences depending on the level and age of students (elementary or high school levels). I even asked my principal at the time of my first administrative assignment where I could find the 'instruction manual' for new administrators. He laughed and said I could refer to the online portal for administrators at our school board. This portal is not well organized nor easy to navigate. After going through all of the documents on policies, I quickly realized there was not much on the discipline of students except for a Safe-School Policy and Anti-Bullying Policy (school board, 2000)[1]. Many documents on the school board portal were outdated by a few years. Despite the fact there is no actual manual of instruction on discipline in schools and the school board, there seems to be some replication of disciplinary processes but not in the form of an actual written text. DeVault and McCoy (2006) claim that "it is texts that coordinate people's activity across time and place within institutional relations" (p.21). In my research, it seems that *relational* texts (e. g., discursive frames of reference, historical patterns of activity) really coordinate administrators'

[1] I have chosen not to identify the school board from which these documents come from. It is for that reason that only "school board" appears in the citation and in the reference section.

decisions regarding discipline. In fact, I realized that the most important piece of *written* text used on a daily basis in reference to disciplining students is a school's code of conduct.

In my textual analysis at the provincial level, mapping out the Quebec education system turned out to be more difficult than expected in the sense that there was not much to work with as far of provincial or systemic discipline related policies, compared to Ontario which has a provincial code of conduct against which schools must model their own. In Quebec, the *Education Act 2018* of Quebec (I-13.3) is *the* piece of legislation that governs schools, school boards, teachers, administrators, students and parents but again, there is not much on student discipline. For the school administrator, according to s. 96.12 of the *Education Act 2018* of Quebec (I-13.3), the principal is in charge of creating a code of conduct, an anti-bullying plan and an anti-violence team, and presenting them to the school's Governing Board, which is each school's decisional body composed of parents, teachers, staff members, students and representatives of the community.

In addition, the principal may suspend a student when the student does not comply with school rules, especially when it concerns bullying or violence. If the students commits any further violent act following a suspension, the principal may request the student be expelled or transferred according to s. 96.27 of the *Education Act 2018* of Quebec (I-13.3). Hence, the school's code of conduct remains until now the most used written text in relation to the discipline of students in schools. Administrators seem to appreciate the flexibility they have in applying consequences depending on the situation, the student, the past misbehaviors, etc. as they see fit. But the question remains, "How do they know what to do?"

Conclusion

This chapter explored the ethnographic activities I have chosen to conduct to gather information for my research. I described my take on interviews, textual analysis and journaling within an institutional ethnographic approach. My initial assumptions are still part of this analysis of the global data and its derived reflections. DeVault and McCoy (2006) suggest that "the process of inquiry is rather like grabbing a ball of string, finding a thread and pulling it out; that is why it is difficult to specify in advance exactly what the research will consist of" (p. 20). What follows from this chapter reflects the outcomes of the process of inquiry I undertook.

CHAPTER 3

Mapping Education in Quebec:

A Textual Organization

In this chapter, I look at how education is textually organized in Quebec. I describe how legislation, policies, inter-institutional agreements, and codes of conduct background the work of educators, school administrators and others (e.g., the police) involved in disciplining misbehaving students mainly in the high schools of Quebec. I begin by presenting the main pieces of legislation that organize education in this province. As I progress, I show how provincial legislation fits with school board policies to impact local school decisions and actions affecting students in their everyday schooling through my own work as a school administrator and my experience as a teacher.

Education in Quebec

In the Quebec educational landscape, the Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur (MEES), or the Ministry of Education, is the government department in charge of elaborating and supervising educational programs and services for students at the preschool, elementary and secondary levels, as well as at collegial and university levels. The *Education Act* of Quebec (I-13.3) is *the* legislative building block on which rests the provincial education system. It is the piece of legislation that governs the rights and obligations of each institutional stakeholder such as the students, teachers, principals, governing boards, schools, school boards, commissioners, and the Minister of Education, describing the relations of power and responsibility in relation to the education of the youth of Quebec. In each of its sections, the *Education Act* not only describes the rights and obligations of each stakeholder, but the functions

and powers of the decision makers. There are two other equally important official documents that organize the provincial education system: the Basic School Regulations (BSR) and the Quebec Education Program (QEP). The Ministry of Education established the BSR to propose a general organizational framework for educational services offered to students in preschool, elementary and secondary schools across the province. Also included in the BSR are the nature and objectives of the educational services offered to students, the certification of studies, the importance of quality of language, and the provisions for handicapped students and those living in low-income areas. The QEP is the learning and teaching guide with subject area content, competency objectives, as well as evaluation criteria, for every subject and grade level in preschool, elementary and secondary schools across the province to ensure a common progression of learning for students.

Key Pieces of Legislation and Policy in Education in Quebec

The Education Act. The discipline of misbehaving students in schools in Quebec is primarily organized at a local level, by the principal of each individual school. According to s. 76 of the Education Act 2018 of Quebec (I-13.3), the principal has the responsibility to establish a code of conduct for the students of his/her school. It is recommended that the code of conduct be elaborated with staff and student representatives to improve its adherence and efficiency. This proposed code of conduct must be ultimately approved by the school's governing board which is a school decisional committee composed of teachers, staff members, parents and community representatives. The principal has the responsibility to ensure that the code of conduct is read and understood by all students and their parents at the beginning of each school year. He/She will include the code of conduct in the student agenda for the students to read. He/She will ask Homeroom teachers to review the code of conduct with their students at the beginning of each

year. He/She may also ask the students and their parents to read and sign the code of conduct to acknowledge they are aware of the school rules. On a regular basis, the school's administrative team will emphasize certain points of the code of conduct in discussions or assemblies with students, in staff meetings with teachers asking them to reinforce certain rules, or in communications sent home as a reminder to parents. The principal is also responsible for ensuring that the staff is not only aware of the code of conduct, but will also help the principal to enforce it. In staff meetings, especially at the beginning of the year, the principal will ask for the teachers' cooperation in helping to uphold the school's code of conduct. According to s. 76 of the Education Act 2018 (I-13.3), the code of conduct should include "attitudes and conduct required of students, and behaviours and verbal or other exchanges that are prohibited at all times" in school, on school grounds, during school activities and bus transportation, and in social media. The school code of conduct is a central organizing document in Montreal public schools.

The *Education Act 2018* (I-13.3) also recommends that the range of possible disciplinary sanctions for misbehavior be communicated to all of the school's stakeholders, especially to the students and their parents. Although, this will be further explored in this chapter and is the essence of my thesis, possible disciplinary actions can vary in the same school and from school to school in a same school board, principals and vice-principals tend to use detentions and suspension as the most common disciplinary measures. In general, from my own interviews and experience as a vice-principal, school administrators do not want to have a strict action-consequence set in writing and published for all stakeholders to see. They would rather have some flexibility in applying a consequence as they deem necessary and appropriate. Numerous mitigating factors come into play when a principal must make a disciplinary decision; it all depends on the student, the intent, the history, the situation at hand, the student's family or

personal situation, the interaction with staff members, etc. There does not seem to be a clear and set way to discipline students. In fact, through my interviews with principals and my own professional experience, I have come to understand that disciplinary decisions seem to be mainly based on the principal's discretion and the school's culture. Thinking back to my review of the literature on school discipline in Chapter 1, I am curious about the heavy reliance on administrator discretion in school discipline processes in Montreal. Given that research in the United States finds that discretionary disciplinary decisions produce the most racially disproportionate outcomes, the decision-making processes employed by school administrators here is worth investigating. In the end, the final disciplinary decisions in Montreal schools rest with the principal, as will be further discussed in a later section below.

Bill 56. According to the *Education Act 2018* (I-13.3), the principal has the power to suspend students who do not comply with the school's rules, especially regarding bullying and violence. In 2012, *Bill 56: An Act to prevent and stop bullying and violence in schools* was adopted as Law 19 in Quebec's National Assembly as an amendment to the *Education Act 2018* (I-13.3). This piece of legislation's "main purpose is to prevent and stop all forms of bullying and violence targeting a student, a teacher or any other school staff member" (Bill 56, 2012, p. 4). *Bill 56* requires that every school in the province have a plan to prevent and stop bullying and violence. This plan must include prevention, confidential reporting, collaboration, support and follow-up measures, among other objectives. As mentioned before, a principal may suspend a student who is a perpetrator of bullying or violence. In cases of bullying, suspensions are not automatic. The principal decides of the length of the suspension and considers mitigating factors in his or her decision, such as "taking into account the student's best interest, the severity of the incidents, and any previously taken measures" (Bill 56, 2012, p. 7). The principal must inform

parents of the suspension of their child and the reasons for the disciplinary sanction. The school board must also be informed of the suspension of a student. “In case of further acts of bullying or violence, a student may be asked to change schools or be expelled from the school board” (Bill 56, 2012, p.7).

In Quebec, the decision to expel a student is usually made at the school board level, upon the request of the principal to the council of commissioners (Bill 56, 2012, p. 7). For school expulsions, or *transfers* as school boards refer to them, regional directors, who are the principals’ immediate superiors, are involved with administrators from other schools in arranging a student transfer. When a student commits a major infraction of the school’s code of conduct and the law such as stealing, selling of drugs, or violent aggression, this can be a cause for a school transfer. In some schools, this policy is clearly stated in the school’s code of conduct, while in other schools, it is clearly communicated through assemblies to students. Once one of these infractions is committed, the student is suspended while the principal finds another school for him/her. The student and parents are advised that the student will not be returning to the school and will be changing schools. In my experience, the parents often protest and try to convince the principal to keep their child but once this decision is taken, it is very unlikely the student will remain at his/her school. The school administration is responsible for sending the message to all other students that they must follow school rules, in order to discourage them from misbehaving and for the safety of all other students. The misbehavior is deemed too serious and it will not be tolerated. Therefore, the principal contacts the regional director to advise him/her of the infraction and consequence. They both contact other principals to see where the student could be quickly transferred. In these cases, there seems to be an exchange of service between administrators when it comes to transfers of misbehaving students; “If you take this student, I

will take one of yours later." Once a school has been chosen, the parents and the student are advised. After the suspension, the student is to report to this new school. The new principal will then meet with the student and his/her parents to clearly establish the rules of the transfer and perhaps have the student sign a behavior contract indicating he/she must follow the rules, if not, a final transfer to the Outreach system could occur. Expulsions from the school board may happen but seem to be very rare and must be reported to the Director of Youth Protection (DYP).

In my experience as a vice-principal, *Bill 56* is taken very seriously in schools by principals because it is the law. The principal and/or the vice-principal must take action to investigate within 48 hours when a claim of bullying is filed by a student, a parent and/or a staff member. I have heard principals mention this very often over the years. The investigation automatically becomes a top priority and is expected to be done as quickly as possible. Once the student who has been bullied, the student who has bullied, eyewitnesses and staff have been interviewed, a school action plan is undertaken to remedy to the bullying situation. The bullying student may be suspended and in extreme cases transferred to another school, depending again on mitigating factors (e.g., severity of bullying, intent, length, history of student behavior, etc.). My interview and observational data suggests that an expulsion from a school board is extremely rare – a very serious and/or repeated offence would have to be committed for a student to be expelled. There are no formal records made available by a school board in Quebec to confirm the frequency of formal expulsions or school transfers.

My research suggests that after an incident of bullying has been established, the school's guidance counsellor and/or the behavior technician will be involved in educating the bullying student about his or her negative behaviors and working with the student to change this behavior to avoid any repeat misbehavior. Parents of the bullied child often expect an automatic out-of-

school suspension to exclude and punish the child who mistreated their own. Especially at the elementary level, the focus of the disciplinary measure is on educating the student who misbehaved. Removing the bullying student from school only removes the source of trouble but this does not educate him/her on the misbehavior when he/she is alone at home. Furthermore, this exclusionary measure is only temporary since he/she also has a right to be educated and will eventually return to school. At the high school level, a suspension for bullying does occur more often. Again, each situation is unique and depends on numerous mitigating factors that a principal must take into consideration.

When transferring a student from a school, a principal may not make that decision alone. He/She must consult the school board's regional director, who is the principal's immediate superior, to discuss the matter. Then, other administrators from neighboring schools must be contacted to negotiate a transfer to their school. Once a deal has been concluded, the school board will approve the transfer. Parents are consulted through this process, but the final decision lies with the School Board in this matter.

School board policies. In 2000, an English school board in Montreal adopted the Safe Schools and Centres Policy to ensure that every school and adult education centre would offer protection from violence and crime in a safe and secure environment for all students and staff members. With this policy, some of the school board's objectives and responsibilities are to provide training to employees to help implement programs to prevent violence, to coordinate the schools' codes of conduct, and to help schools find alternatives to suspensions. If a student is to be suspended, the school board recommends that the student and his/her parents be supported by a guidance counsellor or a community organization such as the YMCA Alternative Suspension program, to help the student learn from his/her actions and the reasons behind them, that all led

to a suspension in the first place. In this policy, there is also a list of reasons for mandatory disciplinary action such as suspension or transfer, to be taken by the principal for very serious violations of this policy or the school's code of conduct, including possession of weapons or drugs in school. In cases of extremely violent crimes, the school board advises that the police be contacted immediately. Examples of such offences may include physical assault, sexual abuse, selling of drugs, or violent threats.

In 2012, building from the Safe Schools and Centres Policy and in accordance to *Bill 56,* every school board has continued to develop and broaden their safe school policy for its schools for youth, centres for adults, vocational centres, students and employees. For instance, the school board's Safe Physical and Cyber Environment Policy states that there should be a strong safety and prevention focus in schools to ensure that "every member of its community has a right to learn and work in a safe physical and cyber environment" (2012, p. 1). According to this policy, all school board stakeholders are responsible for the creation of a safe school environment. Furthermore, any report of violations of the Policy will be investigated by school administrators and consequences such as disciplinary measures and/or even legal proceedings may be applicable. Although prevention is mentioned in the rationale of this policy, it mainly focuses on procedures during investigations for principals and other school board staff. Procedures are divided into four types of violations: violations involving youth to youth, youth to adult, adult to youth, and adult to adult. The procedures indicate generally how a school administrator goes about investigating an incident between two parties. This policy is communicated to students through the school agenda, to the employees via a circular indicating where to find the policy on school board website, and to parents during meetings with school administrators in a big group

setting at the beginning of the year during parent-teacher evenings. It is applicable during school activities, on and off-site, and in cyberspace.

Unfortunately, there have been instances where young people act out because they have been discriminated against, unfairly treated, misunderstood/misrepresented, etc. in schools. Some students come to school with huge family and personal baggage. Some of them consider school as a safe place where they can build a future that is different from what they are living in the present. Others act out as a means of frustration, not knowing how to deal with everything bad going on in their life. Therefore, as a school administrator, it is very important to have as much information as possible about a student before making a major decision about a disciplinary measure, such as pushing out a student from school by suspension or expulsion, which could have a tremendous impact on a student's entire life. From my own professional experience, a disciplinary measure should not simply be a punitive consequence in matters like these, but have an educational and compassionate component to help the student steer out of difficult situations and personal circumstances. Regular high schools do not always offer services and guidance to help youth who are in grave personal difficulties.

Outreach schools. These cases are often referred to the Outreach system composed of very small alternative high schools that can help students with a smaller teacher-student ratio. In these classes, teachers get to know their students on a more personal level, are able to better guide them towards succeeding in their learning and offer the appropriate guidance in getting out of difficult situations. Outreach schools may also be contacted in cases of a school transfer. An Outreach school offers an alternative setting to learning for students who have important learning difficulties and/or behavioral issues. The teacher-student ratio is very low, learning is often done on independent work with teacher assistance, teachers generally act as guides or

advisors for the students, the course load may be diminished or modified to focus only on the subjects needed to graduate. The Outreach system is considered as the last step before dropping-out from high school and going into adult education. When a principal wishes to transfer a student to the Outreach system, he/she will contact the Principal of all of the Outreach schools to make an appointment to attend a multi-disciplinary conference table discussion to present the student's case and find the best fit for student's needs. At this table, there will be different experts of the Outreach system such as a social worker, guidance counsellor, special education teacher and technician, psychologist, Outreach or Resource teacher, etc. They evaluate the case and make recommendations of placement for the student depending on many factors affecting the student such as academics, behavior issues, family situation and support, and student's personality.

Inter Sectorial Agreements

According to s. 214.1 and 214.2 of the *Education Act 2018* of Quebec (I-13.3), school boards and schools must come into agreements of partnership with the police force and the health and social services with the aim to help youth in their social and educational development. The main objective of this collaboration is to protect youth from violence and abuse. One of the ways to protect youth is through prevention programs, especially against violence and bullying as stipulated in *Bill 56.*

Police force. School boards have an agreement with the police force on three fronts: prevention, investigation and emergency interventions. In conjunction with *Bill 56* and as stated in s. 214.1 of the *Education Act 2018* of Quebec (I-13.3), "a school board and each competent authority in respect of a police force in its territory shall enter into an agreement to determine how the officers of that police force will intervene in an emergency and when an act of bullying

or violence is reported to them, and to establish a mode of collaboration for prevention and investigation purposes." Each school is assigned a community officer, also called a "Socio-comm", from their local police station or 'Poste de quartier'. The stated aim is to build collaboration and trust between a school community and the local police force. Prevention activities are organized based on the needs of the school and the school board's experiences and policies. Such activities also depend on the socio-community police officer's involvement with the school, the principal or vice-principal in charge of this dossier, and the culture of the school and the community. Prevention programs may address issues important to the school or the community such as violence, alcohol and drugs, or intimidation and cyber-bullying for example. According to the document Police Presence in Educational Institutions,

> regardless of the problem to which the community chooses to dedicate its energy, dialogue amongst the various parties must be made essentially around a common definition of the message transmitted to the students. This implies a consensus among the various intervenors on the values promoted with the students (Provincial Consultation Panel on Violence, Youth and the School Environment, 2005, p. 12).

In addition, protocols and responsibilities are established for investigative and emergency purposes. During police investigations, school staff and management are expected to collaborate with police officers while they question students, enquire about incidents or arrest suspected 'perpetrators'. In case of an emergency situation that threatens the safety of students and staff, school boards and schools must have a pre-established plan with the local police force.

A school board plan includes contingencies in case of an emergency such as an armed intruder coming in a school. A security protocol has been established and disseminated in schools so staff and students know what to do in such a case such as taking cover, hiding,

keeping quiet, not confronting the intruder, waiting for police reinforcement, keeping safe, etc. Another example of police officers collaborating with schools can be when there is a report of physical or sexual abuse or assault, or if a student is selling drugs on school grounds. Police will be invited to school to investigate and question students involved in the matter. Usually, once the police takes over a case, the principal will act as a witness in this situation. The principal will do an initial investigation but once the police intervenes in the case, the principal hands over the investigation to the police and will not get involved in the matter any longer.

Health and social services. In 2003, the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux (MSSS) and the Ministère de l'Éducation et des Loisirs et des Sports (MELS) renewed the Agreement for the Complementarity of Services Between the Health and Social Services Network and the Education Network (Quebec Government, 2014). Through this agreement, the provincial government harmonizes the services of the education and the health and social services networks to help youth and their families, especially students with learning and behavioral difficulties or impairments, and those at-risk of not succeeding in school. The aim is to offer personalized services to students in need of intervention in their own school with the help of the community. The main objectives are to support students with difficulties and to prevent those who are at-risk from developing problems. By at-risk, it is meant that a student is at-risk of developing a learning or a behavioral difficulty; this student is on the path to experience difficulties in class, under-perform academically, or get in trouble.

My own experiences as an educator and administrator suggests that at-risk students are flagged to the administration by their own teachers. If a student is experiencing learning or behavioral difficulties in class for an extended time (even with the help of the teachers and the support of the parents), and there is still no improvement, this student will be brought to a multi-

disciplinary team (MDT) meeting. This team may include the following school professionals: school psychologist, guidance counsellor, speech and language pathologist, resource teacher, special education technician or behavior technician, teacher(s), and school administrator(s). They will discuss the student's behavior and learning, as well as strategies being used and that could be used, and decide if they recommend a psycho-educational evaluation to be done in-school by the school psychologist at the elementary level or the guidance counsellor at the high school level. The principal may suggest parents request a psycho-educational assessment for the child through the public system, but this comes only after a few MDT meetings have been conducted and the same student has shown no improvement after new strategies have been implemented in the classroom. If an assessment is not possible due to the long waiting list for students at the elementary level or the type of evaluation students may require at the high school level, the principal may suggest having a child tested for a behavioral or learning difficulty in the private sector at the parents' expense. Once an evaluation is returned to school, the school psychologist or guidance counsellor will review it and make their own recommendations to teachers. These recommendations will then be used by the resource teacher to create an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for the student to help him/her improve behavior and/learning with specific accommodations to be implemented in class by all of the student's teachers. Teachers will then be obligated by law to follow this IEP and implement the accommodations indicated to help the student learn and succeed. An IEP can be created without a psycho-educational evaluation for students who are temporarily going through difficult times personally, for health reasons for example, or in their family (e.g., if parents are going through a divorce).

Unfortunately, in an evaluation of the implementation and effects of this inter-sectorial agreement with the health and social services, two studies (Tétreault, et al., 2014; Tétreault,

Beaupré, Carrière, Freeman, & Gascon, 2010) report that the effectiveness of this agreement varies considerably. The efficacy depends on accessibility to and uniformity of services offered in different regions, the availability of information on available services for parents and school administrators, and the degree to which the principles of this agreement are integrated into school practices. In sum, issues of accessibility of services and information and a failure to actualize the principles of the agreement (e.g., because of lack of resources) undermines the potential utility of the agreement in most school contexts.

In my own experience as an educator, it is already difficult to gain access to services in one's own school board trying to identify who does what or who offers specialized services, and it can be quite difficult to navigate through the MSSS bureaucratic structure to find and access services for students with difficulties who need immediate assistance to succeed in school. Resources are limited and reserved for the students with the most urgent and serious needs. Once a student has been suspected and later, identified and coded as having behavioral and/or learning difficulties, years in school may have already passed and the student's difficulties have increased, the student has fallen behind in class, affecting his/her self-esteem, perhaps increasing his/her behavioral difficulties.

Based on my own and my colleagues' difficulties navigating these high-level bureaucracies, I wonder whether collaboration between these two networks would be accomplished more easily at the school level or within a school board. In a school, a nurse, a social worker and a dental hygienist are usually assigned from the local Integrated University Health and Social Services Centre (IUHSSC). As far as I know, there are no other services offered from the health and social services directly in schools and the social work and healthcare services that are offered are only part-time. If a school is fortunate, a nurse and a social worker

will be present in school two days a week. Often, they are in school once every two weeks. The dental hygienist is rarely in school. Apart from this policy linking the school board and IUHSSC, the principal is the main liaison between the two networks in a school. The principal will work in close collaboration with the nurse and social worker on different student cases in the school. Teachers will come to the principal for help concerning a student who has health concerns or serious family issues, the principal will then refer the student and their family to one or the other depending on the issue of concern. If the nurse and social worker are very proactive in their work, they may work more closely with teachers and staff in better servicing their students with educational prevention programs.

School boards and their local IUHSSC will also work on special projects collaboratively to address certain issues pertaining to school-aged children and their families. For example, I participated, as a vice-principal of an elementary school, in a consultative initiative between both organizations entitled the 'Transition scolaire de qualité' or Quality Transition to School Committee. The main goals of this initiative are 1) to improve language development in children who do not speak English or French at home or very well before starting school, 2) to empower parents to develop confidence in their own parenting skills, and 3) to improve the partnership between schools, families and communities (field notes, 2017). In the end, the most important objective is to ensure success of the children in school. The Quality Transition to School Committee reaches out to families through daycare services and other service points to help them have access to more information about schools and community organizations in the neighborhood to give children a more successful start in their schooling.

Another context in which these two governmental sectors may work together is in conjunction with *Bill 56* and s. 214.2 of the *Education Act 2018* of Quebec (I-13.3), where,

a school board shall enter into an agreement with an institution or another body in the health and social services network for the provision of services to students after an act of bullying or violence is reported. It may also enter into an agreement with a community organization operating in its territory. Any agreement under this section must stipulate, among other things, the actions to be taken jointly in such cases (*Bill 56*, 2012, p. 12).

In my experience, schools tend to take care of these matters on their own or in collaboration with their school board. If there is outside collaboration, it is more likely to be with local community organizations who offer services tailored to the community's needs and issues, such as the YMCA Alternative Suspension Program where the suspended student will work with an educational worker on the causes behind the misbehavior and how to move forward when returning to school in collaboration with the school and the student's family.

Director of Youth Protection. The Director of Youth Protection (DYP) is another significant collaborator in relation to the Quebec education system as it "provides psychosocial, rehabilitation, and social integration services primarily related to the Youth Protection Act, the Youth Criminal Justice Act and an Act Respecting Health services and Social services […] and it ensures provision of services related to child placement, family mediation, adoption and adoption disclosure, and expertise to the Superior Court on child custody" (Batshaw Youth and Family Centres, 2015, p. 6). A school principal will contact DYP if there is evidence that a student is mistreated or neglected at home, or for chronic unjustified absences from school. A principal may call DYP to lodge a formal complaint against parents or family members in what is called a 'signalement', or he/she may call for an informal consultation to see if what has been observed merits to be signaled to the DYP. In the case of a consultation, DYP will make notes of the

conversation and keep it on file in order to document if there should be a future formal 'signalement'.

Another important role for the DYP is the rehabilitation and reintegration of young offenders from the age of 12 to 17 years, through alternative and empowering programs that help youth make smarter choices. The collaboration between the education sector and the DYP translates into having young offenders continue their education while in detention to obtain their general high school leaving diploma or to benefit from vocational training to help them acquire skills they will use once they are released from detention. For this purpose, school boards establish schools in detention centres for young offenders such as in Rivière-des-Prairies Youth Detention Centre. Education in these centres is usually with a reduced student-teacher ratio, in small class setting, where students work independently on core subjects with the help of the teacher in order to graduate from high school. It is important to note that according to s. 242 of the Education Act 2018 of Quebec (I-13.3), the school board must advise DYP when a student is expelled from its schools.

How Do these Policies Shape School Discipline in Montreal Schools?

In this final section, I summarize how all of the aforementioned policies, programs and institutional texts institutionally organize school discipline practices in Montreal schools. As previously mentioned, the principal will establish a code of conduct that will be approved by the governing board of the school. The code of conduct, which includes attitudes to be adopted, behaviors to be prohibited, and possible disciplinary sanctions in case of misbehavior, is communicated to all of the stakeholders of the school at the beginning of every school year. If a student misbehaves in class, according to s. 19 of the *Education Act 2018* of Quebec (I-13.3), the teacher has the right to govern the students' conduct as he or she sees fit; one student could

receive a detention while another could be given a warning or sent to the office to see the vice-principal. It is also common practice for a teacher to establish, perhaps with the students, a class code of conduct. There usually is a range of consequences applicable for misbehavior in the classroom: for example, non-verbal intervention, verbal warning, speaking to the student after class, class detention, speaking with the student's parents, meeting with the student and his/her parents, before involving the school's administration in the matter. These consequences are common and usually follow an escalation flow, hence becoming more serious and implicating other stakeholders such as parents and administrators while teachers add-on interventions.

A principal or vice-principal will discipline students who do not follow the school's code of conduct, students who have repeatedly disrupted in class even after many teacher interventions, or if a student is disrespectful of the teacher or staff member. Again, there usually is a range of consequences a school administrator can apply to a misbehavior: for example, verbal warning, speaking with the student, school detention, speaking with the student's parents, meeting with the student, parents, and/or staff, school or community service, in-school suspension, or out-of-school suspension. These are not legislated possibilities; rather, these represent disciplinary norms and standards. These consequences are very similar to what a teacher may apply in his/her classroom and administrators have experienced these as teachers themselves. In disciplining students, teachers and school administrators are both expected to use their professional judgment in considering mitigating factors such as the student's disciplinary history, the severity and the implications of the infraction, and the student's best interest in learning from their mistake. In fact, as stated in the school board's Safe Physical and Cyber Environment Policy:

> [A] violation must be reported immediately to the school administrator who shall use his professional judgement to investigate and determine the course of action to be followed. Once a violation has been reported to a school administrator, he must carry out an investigation. If the individual who has reported the incident indicates that the situation has been resolved, then the school administrator must assure himself that all implicated parties are satisfied with the resolution. If the individual who has reported the incident indicates that the situation has not been resolved, or if the school administrator is of the opinion that it is not resolved, then the school administrator shall carry out an investigation. In carrying out the investigation, the school administrator shall meet separately and/or jointly with the parties involved in the alleged violation (2012, p.6).

It is important to note that there are very few procedures on disciplining students that can be found in writing for Montreal school administrators to follow. The most explicit policy directives are associated with the investigation of student actions.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have looked at official institutional texts that organize education and discipline in Quebec schools in a legislative manner. I have also considered how different stakeholders in education play a role in disciplining students, at times in partnerships with other government organizations. Legislation and school board policies rely on the principal when it comes to school discipline. In these texts, there is very little in writing that guides a principal to make disciplinary decisions on a daily basis. In the end, when it comes to disciplining a student in school, the principal makes the final decision based mainly on the school's code of conduct and his/her professional judgement. How does a principal know what to do with each disciplinary case brought to his/her attention if the process is not clearly stated in legislation and

policy? The training of a vice-principal and principal is informal through coaching and it takes time to learn about how to discipline students in schools. It is very similar to a teacher starting his/her career. It takes time to learn how to master classroom management, there are many hits and misses for the first few years before a teacher becomes more confident, experienced, and field knowledgeable. It seems as if discipline in Montreal schools is more socially than textually organized and is transmitted from one school administrator to another. In the following chapter, I explore how vice-principals actually learn to discipline students. This is presented through my own professional experience and interviews with other administrators in a Montreal school board.

CHAPTER 4

Knowledge on Disciplining Students:

A Social Organization

In this chapter on how school administrators learn to discipline students in their everyday work, I draw on data from interviews with school administrators about the information, experience and skills they need to do their jobs, as well as my own experiences working as a vice-principal for the past four years. Grounding my work in people's experiences including my own, I seek to unpack the core issues in disciplining students and explain how administrators learn to do school discipline in the ways that they do in English schools in Montreal. I attempt to show that – in addition to (and perhaps more than) the institutional and policy texts described in Chapter 3 – a new administrator's experience in disciplining students is mainly shaped by the people he/she works with.

"Where is the manual of instructions?" I asked my principal as I became vice-principal. He laughed and answered: "There isn't one." "What do you mean? How will I know what to do when it comes to disciplining students?" "You'll figure it out", he said with a smile. At that time, two disciplinary measures were offered to me: detention or suspension. I was told that I could use these disciplinary measures as I saw fit. It was up to *me* to decide how to discipline students who were misbehaving in school. My principal expressed his confidence that my decision would be the right one; however, he warned me that the Deputy Director General of the school board at the time did not like suspensions, and he himself did not like in-school suspensions. So, of the two disciplinary processes offered, one remained: detentions.

Presently in my fourth year as a vice-principal, I still wonder how other school administrators go about effectively disciplining students as new situations arise every week. I begin the chapter by presenting what administrators know and from here, provide an analysis of how (in the absence of the manual I was seeking) they know what they know. During interviews, I tried to highlight how administrators learn to discipline students. Their descriptions of learning to discipline tended to revolve around professional experience, learning on the job, and being coached by a principal. Towards the end of the chapter, I show why their knowledge is constructed this way. My aim is to analyze where the discourse on disciplining students is coming from.

The Objective of Discipline

The main goal of disciplining students is to guide and teach them to behave appropriately (i.e., according to school rules and norms) in school. Before the students start elementary or high school, the parents are responsible for showing their children how to behave appropriately in their own family and community. In school, teachers are responsible for establishing structure by developing and reinforcing classroom rules, which align with school rules based on the school's mission, vision and values. This is meant to be a continuation of the educative process established by parents at home where children continue to learn to behave appropriately in a group setting. Teachers become central "caregivers" in the school, tasked with ensuring that students continue to learn how to behave appropriately in school. The principal, as head of a school, in collaboration with the vice-principal and school staff, is responsible for establishing the school rules. The process for establishing these rules will be explained further. Ideally, the system is built on an idealistic image of parents, teachers and administrators working together to help children behave appropriately in school, all in the best interest for the child, with the

ultimate and shared goal of helping each child learn and become a responsible and respectful citizen. When the word child is used, this includes high school students as well. Even in high school, students still continue to learn how to behave appropriately in school. Some teachers and administrators may believe that high school students should know better and own their actions as they are almost adults, but that is not always the case. In fact, studies show that the adolescent brain continues to develop and grow until the mid to late twenties, indicating that teenagers do not always make the correct choices and still have a lot to learn when they are in high school between the ages of 12 and 17 (Johnson, Blum, & Giedd, 2009; Arain et al., 2013).

In the end, disciplining children should all be about "mentoring, not monitoring". In other words, the purpose of disciplining students should not be about catching them misbehaving as this does not show them how to behave appropriately (Heitner, as cited in Vigneault, 2017). Rules and consequences alone do not teach students to behave appropriately; significant adults do. But of course, one seldom finds all parents, teachers and administrators in a school on the same page regarding the education of the student body. This will be discussed later in Chapter 5.

Establishing School Rules

As noted in Chapter 3, each school has a code of conduct which is a set of rules meant to create a healthy and safe school environment conducive to learning and teaching. The code of conduct is considered as the main written text used in disciplining students; it states the rules and regulations that students need to follow in school and teachers need to apply in their work with students. In Quebec, according to s. 76 of the *Education Act 2018* (I-13.3), the code of conduct is created and updated yearly by the principal of a school. This is preferably done in consultation with the vice-principal, teachers, staff, and students, but year over year, a school code of conduct changes very little. In this way, school rules are historically passed on from year to year. A

consultation with student representatives is encouraged to get a sense of their perceptions and open a discussion about rules of conduct, but not always done in schools because this remains at the discretion of the principal. In the eyes of students, rules need to make sense and seem fair for them to be efficient and be followed.

Kupchik (2010) suggests how important it is to listen to the students' needs, explanations, and justifications because they contain important information that can guide the creation of rules and evaluate their effectiveness in a school. Students know what goes on in school and it helps to create a more positive school climate (p. 195). Students feel the need to understand the reasons behind the rules. Rules need to be justified and explanations need to make sense in order for them to be accepted. I have had many discussions with students in my office about the reasoning behind certain school rules. Some of these rules have been easy to defend, others not so much. I have learned that when rules are not based on solid reasoning, they are less convincing for students and tend to create frustration and a sense of injustice. Kupchik (2010) shares a similar observation:

> In her book about social power in schools, *De-facing Power*, political scientist Clarissa Hayward notes a similar orientation to rules in urban elementary school. She finds that when rules are enforced, teachers give no reference to a purpose for the rule or a reason why one should obey the rule, other than the need to avoid punishment. Like a parent who tells her child to obey her because "I'm the parent, that's why," school officials tend to justify rules and punishments only by citing their own power and the consequences of violating the school rules (p. 125).

The same would apply for school administrators. A vice-principal cannot ask a student to comply to a school rule just because he/she said so. This type of reasoning is not convincing nor efficient, and will create more resentment with the students.

According to principals and vice-principals I have interviewed, students are expected to follow the rules established by the school and staff members are expected to help the principal enforce those rules. Kupchik (2010), refers to this way of disciplining students as teaching to the rules, similar to teaching to the tests. In his research, he suggests that "school discipline follows a similar pattern, since rules are enforced in a way that teaches students only how to abide by rules but not how to resolve conflict, solve their own problems, or correct their behaviors" (p. 118). I find this to be true in schools in Montreal, especially at the high school level. The students receive consequences when they misbehave in school. Often, there are serious reasons behind a students' misbehavior and this should be addressed by staff members at school, sometimes even by health professionals in the private sector, before we can hope to help a student change his/her behavior. Many students come to school with heavy emotional, psychological, and family challenges. Accurately identifying and attending to these circumstances takes time and professional expertise; unfortunately, teachers and administrators lack the necessary time to do this work well.

During my interviews, a few administrators admitted that unfortunately, they did not have time to discuss with the student who was sent to his/her office about what had triggered the misbehavior, talk about the student's personal issues and struggles, and give them sound advice. This is not to mean that administrators do not wish to have meaningful interventions with students but rather that they have no choice but to be efficient and give consequences such as detentions and suspensions in hope that this was enough to convince the students not to break the

rule again and change their misbehavior on their own will. It is as if the detention or suspension should in itself teach the child the lesson that should have been taught previously by a significant adult on how to behave appropriately in school.

How Do Teachers Learn to Discipline Students?

Based on my experience as a teacher and a vice-principal, when a student misbehaves in class, the principal expects that the teacher addresses the issue on the spot. A teacher's immediate intervention tends to prevent a situation from escalating. Students will know the limits of a misbehavior and learn to behave appropriately more quickly. Early interventions will also reduce and prevent negative consequences for students (e.g., getting in trouble, receiving a detention, having a negative interaction with a staff member). Just like teaching a subject matter, classroom management is part of the teacher's responsibilities to ensure an adequate learning environment for all students. It is an important part of his/her duties and everyday work with students. He/She will establish the class rules based on his/her professional values and personal preferences, preferably with the input of the students. The teacher will then share, explain and reinforce the class rules with the students. The teacher will regularly remind the students of the classroom rules and review them with the students as needed.

Unfortunately, there is very little formal training in classroom management in university teacher education programs. Based on my own experiences as a teacher and a cooperating teacher having mentored student teachers in the past, as well as based on discussions with other teachers, to this day, university students in education are lucky if they receive a few classes on the subject in their entire undergraduate program. It is often a topic among many others in a course, rather than a single course specifically on classroom management being offered to pre-service teachers. This early and abstract learning sinks in as pre-service teachers learn how to

manage a classroom during their stages under the mentorship of a practicing teacher. Here, they are trained informally by their cooperating teachers on how to deal with disruptive and misbehaving students. During this training, students learn through trial and error with ongoing mentor support. It may actually take a few years at the beginning of a career before a new teacher finds the best practices to manage his/her class and perfects his/her teaching style. Refining one's classroom management style can also be intuitive. A teacher may borrow and adapt different methods from different sources over time, dependent on the teacher's own style, the culture of the school, the needs and strengths of students, size of the classroom and so on.

Once teachers start working full time and over their career, they may share best practices with colleagues, research different classroom management techniques, attend workshops, sign up for webinar sessions, ask for advice, etc. In certain school boards, pedagogical consultants specialized in classroom management can come into classes to observe and give teachers some new techniques and pointers to improve their classroom management style. New teachers are also evaluated by their school administrators when they start at a new school following very similar criteria as when they were evaluated as student teachers in university. During their follow-up discussions on the teacher's work, which includes classroom management, administrators may discuss ways to discipline students more effectively if there are issues in the class. In these ways teachers learn to discipline students in their classrooms. While the particulars of the disciplinary style vary, most teachers choose from and communicate a range of disciplinary actions, which range from light to more serious. These consequences are not necessarily written anywhere. They are informally shared among teachers and administrators as best practices in the school. Some may be found in codes of conduct or in class rules.

All of these consequences may be repeated if the misbehavior continues until the teacher feels that the next step must be taken because the student is not changing his/her misbehavior: the student is then sent to the vice-principal's office. In the past, sending a student to the office was used as the ultimate threat of punishment and it is used this way still today at times by some teachers. But, as the administrators in my study point out, transferring the disciplinary power to school administrators shifts the dynamics of a classroom and may undermine teacher authority. As George, a high school principal, notes:

> Sometimes, again, you know, things pile up and pile up and the teacher has dealt and dealt and detained the student after school and kept them in and talked to them and worked with them and called their parents and done whatever. Ultimately there is a time when administration needs to be involved but that involvement needs to be in support of the teacher's measures to improve the student's behavior. It's not me solving the problem (interview, 2017).

Morrison, Redding, Fisher, and Peterson (2006) suggest that patterns of teacher-referral differ within and across schools; some teachers may over-refer while others may under-refer to the school office. "There is a variability in office referral rates *within schools* as a function of teachers' ability to manage the class, effectively engage students in academic lessons, interpret the school discipline system, and tolerate misbehavior" (p. 213). To some extent, referral practices are learned. They reflect the values and norms of the teacher, the school, and the administrator in charge – some administrators encourage office referrals, while others discourage them, leaving it up to teachers to discipline misbehaviors in their classrooms. From George's point of view, for example, it is best if teachers take care of their own discipline with students in

class to efficiently exercise their authority. This view shapes his approach to classroom and school discipline. He explains:

> So if you [speaking to a teacher] call me in to solve your problem [with a student in the classroom], I really think that that makes you less of a functioning authority figure than [me, the principal]… All you're admitting to the student is that I can't handle this discipline issue, I'm going to have to turn it over to administration (interview, 2017).

In George's view, once teachers delegate their classroom authority to an administrator, they lose their authority and tend to be less efficient in disciplining their students. In these cases, students usually continue to misbehave while expecting an administrator to deal with the situation, overriding the teacher's power in class. This view was common among administrators in my study, and it shaped their approach to school discipline more broadly.

This social learning of interacting with students and disciplining them can be extended to the entirety of a school, where different stakeholder groups also learn through experience and social interaction as they engage the formal curriculum together. In turn, administrators are shaping the ongoing learning of teachers and other school staff regarding normative standards for school discipline. Administrators are there to guide and lead school staff in the discipline of students.

How Do Administrators Learn to Discipline Students?

The social learning of disciplining students is based in action when dealing with misbehaviors. As is the case with most new vice-principals, I am far from being an expert in the matter of discipline. At the same time, disciplinary expertise is somehow expected of me from the teachers, parents and administrator I work with. Although I was a teacher for close to 20 years, I continue to work and learn with students, parents and teachers in finding ways to help

students improve their behavior. I have learned that one size does not fit all; what works with one student may not necessarily work with others. In addition, even though discipline takes up most of my time at work as a vice-principal, I do not feel like an expert at anything I do since I take on many roles (e.g., coaching and evaluating teachers, supervising and coordinating pedagogical activities, preparing schedules and planning events, etc.) and I have numerous duties (e.g., purchasing, budgeting, reporting, monitoring, etc.) that I touch upon very superficially in my everyday work. I never get to be an expert at anything.

Foucault argues that people become *disciplined subjects* within a social discourse. Administrators and teachers often refer to using common sense and professional judgement to do their work, not realizing that the knowledge they have has been passed on by their superiors over years of experience. [Foucault] often wrote on how various institutions (psychiatric clinics, prisons, schools, and so forth) produce discourses that then constitute what can be known or practiced relative to that body of knowledge. People become disciplined subjects within these different discourses. In the process he showed how knowledge and power are intimately connected (Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2006, p. 112).

In much the same way that Foucault described, teachers and school administrators are institutionally disciplined to follow rules and directives set by their superiors who exercise their power in transmitting policies and procedures to be executed in schools. I have heard principals say that if the school board asks them to turn right, they turn right. They tend to follow and apply what the school board tells them to do, stating that this is how things are usually done and often without questioning.

To bring disciplinary processes into view, Foucault proposes a method of intellectual inquiry called the “archeology of knowledge”. His work aims to understand “how discursive

formations—for example, medical discourse or discourse on sexuality—come to be seen as natural and self-evident, accurately representing a world of knowledge" (Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2006, p. 113). This is very interesting when it comes to looking into how the discourse on disciplining students in schools is considered as simple common sense when in fact it is knowledge that is transmitted from a principal to a vice-principal in training. This knowledge is also passed down from the school board where former principals have been promoted to higher management positions and continue to repeat the same ways of doing things. Foucault wanted to figure out how the discourse was regulated to construct knowledge in an organization. For Foucault, "discursive knowledge regulates, among other things, what can be said and done, what constitutes right and wrong, and what counts for knowledge in the first place. In short, discourse establishes and controls knowledge" (Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2006, p. 113). This is similar to a school board that controls the knowledge that is transmitted and used in different schools set in different neighborhoods and contexts. Administrators are led to believe that the work they do when they discipline students derives from common sense when it is a dominant discourse coming from above them that guides every decision they make without them realizing it.

Similarly, Gramsci points out that institutional knowledge is reproduced in ways that make people believe that an organization's knowledge/approach is common sense, while it is in fact knowledge produced and used to serve the interests of those holding institutional forms of power (Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2006, p. 132). In schools, common knowledge is built over time and transmitted socially through school board employees as "this is how we all do things here". As I work on a daily basis, I refer to my principal and ask how she thinks I should address an issue or ask her what she would do in a situation. Gramsci refers to a group of intellectuals

that sets a common way of thinking, saying and doing things in a group or organization (Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2006, p. 133). In a school board, principals and upper management are part on the "intellectuals" who create that homogeneous way of thinking that is applied in every school by administrators in a very similar fashion. The tendency here is to reproduce the knowledge and procedures to be delivered as common sense knowledge instead of encouraging employees to transform the processes that have been the same for so long.

Although a particular body of knowledge may be considered as natural and self-evident, there is not really one's own common sense, as in one's own way of individuated sense making practice. It is not really about carving one's own way but more about figuring out what is expected in our work, what is within our scope of autonomy, what is considered effective by our profession, etc. There are spoken and unspoken rules that one learns to follow as a vice-principal. Instead of common sense, this should be called common knowledge as it is knowledge passed on from one senior administrator to a junior administrator. As new vice-principals, we are told what to do without questioning because the information shared comes with: "This is how we do things here". Our superiors want us to problem-solve, to be creative and efficient, but tell us we generally have two options to discipline students: detention and suspension. In a regular school day, there is unfortunately no time to think, discuss, research, and/or question on school discipline.

Like teachers teach to the test, vice-principals discipline to the rule; we discipline as efficiently as possible, without changing or innovating our ways very much. Therefore, the same disciplinary measures are used over and over in the same circle of social learning and things do not change very much over time. Vice-principals are there to reproduce the procedures, not to transform them. This is a comparable apprenticeship model to the 'stage' or internship in teacher

education programs, where students learn to teach under the guidance of a cooperative teacher in a classroom for many weeks. In both of these professional situations, common sense and experiential knowledge – the two most popular resources at an educator's disposal – are shaped by the people one works with. The learning environment created among teachers and school administrators reflects the social organization of the schooling and the norms of the school and the board more broadly. Norms, rules, processes and values are transmitted from one administrator to another through coaching and informal training.

The vice-principal as the main disciplinarian of the office or the executor, is caught between the policy makers like the school board and the ministry on one side, and the masses of students, teachers and parents on the other. A vice-principal will apply the rules without question as a disciplined or conformist subject and will deal with the resistance from students, parents and teachers to school rules and procedures. He/She gains the knowledge needed to exercise his/her duties from the authority and power of his/her superiors; he/she tries to apply some authority but has no true power because the principal always has the final word in a school. A vice-principal learns to make decisions by following an informal protocol taught top down. How can we teach children to be critical thinkers when we have a hard time with that ourselves? We follow curriculum programs, teach to the test, apply the code of conduct, follow school board rules, are scheduled by bells and periods, teach to the rules, and work with children who want to avoid consequences instead of learning to behave appropriately. That is how we as educators and parents have taught them. Generally, teachers and administrators are not interested in knowing why they behave this way nor do they take the opportunity to do so. With everything else they are asked to do in a school day, it is an emotional investment that educators are not equipped to make.

The work of school discipline. Dewey believes that previous experiences serve as a guide to future experiences (Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2006, p. 12). An administrator's own successful classroom management techniques influence how he/she addresses general school misbehaviors with students. Everything a vice-principal has learned as a teacher in his/her classroom is used as a foundation for the interactions with the students. However, the major difference is that a vice-principal does not get the chance to build a trusting relationship with the students over time by working closely with them and getting to know them on a personal level, like he/she would if he/she engaged with students in a classroom (unless involved in extra-curricular activities). As a vice-principal, I see students occasionally in the halls, in classes, in assemblies, but rarely do I really get to know them on a personal level. Often, when I do interact with them, it is because they've been referred to my office for breaking school rules or because a teacher has identified an academic issue that needs some attention or guidance. I have noticed that students can be intimidated by the title and position of the vice-principal, perhaps even by me, which may reflect the fact that I am often the person that students are sent to see when they misbehave. When I call students to my office, their body language often suggests they are nervous or upset about seeing me. Even if I say that I want to help them, there is an apparent disconnect and distrust evidenced by non-verbal communication cues such as crossing their arms, having a serious look in their eyes, avoiding eye contact, refusing to discuss their misbehavior or taking any responsibility for it. Other school administrators I interviewed suggest similar difficulties seeking to build trusting relationships with students when they are in an administrative role:

> Even the position we hold (e.g. teacher, vice-principal, principal) – the students' perception of what we do is very different [given each role]. They receive teachers one

> way, vice-principals are usually very negatively received. If they don't have a prior relationship [with us], it's hard to build that relationship. *Principal as an authority figure,* I think, gets more respect than a vice-principal. It shouldn't be that way, but I see it all the time (Richard, a high school principal, interview, 2016).

Hence, a distance is created between the administrator and the students because they do not interact closely on a daily basis. It will take much more time for an administrator to establish a trusting and personal relationship with a student compared with a teacher who works with the same student on a daily basis. Also contributing to that distance between a student and an administrator is the element of authority and power that an administrator, especially a principal, may have over a student. New vice-principals are not always comfortable with this authority and power because they often feel wedged in between students, teachers, and their principal wishing to work together collaboratively but clumsily experiencing this new sense of authority.

Administrators I have interviewed each draw on varied professional experiences, having worked in different neighborhoods and coming from different backgrounds. As teachers, they each had their ways of managing a classroom, establishing order and structure for learning to occur that they learned over time and from different sources. From the perspectives of the administrators I spoke with, they were able to translate their classroom management style to disciplining hundreds of students in an entire school. Administrators described becoming a vice-principal as a continuation of their work as a teacher, as the next step up in a school and working with a larger group of students. Many of them mentioned that getting to know some students on a more personal level may impact their disciplinary decisions. When they discover more about a student's family or personal situation that is more difficult or challenging, they may choose a consequence that takes into consideration these mitigating factors. Administrators may show

more compassion, choose a consequence in light of mitigating factors, ensure there is follow-up to a consequence to support a student in improving his/her behavior, etc.

Susan, a high school vice-principal, suggests that although the rules are the same for all students, an administrator must be fair when applying consequences for a misbehavior and make an informed decision:

> Disciplining has to be for everybody the same way. […] first of all you use your professional judgement and second […] you know the severity of the situation and that you can't apply the same formula for each kid. I think that's [..] key, you know like, what may work for one kid, will not work for the other. And again you have to know your students, you have to know the background, you have to get all your facts for it before also making a decision. […] Again I'm a firm believer in […] You have to be fair obviously, but every student is different and there's no formula for discipline that we have to use for each student. For me I think that was very important (interview, 2017).

A tension is evident in Susan's description of her work. On the one hand, she suggests that "disciplining has to be the same for everyone," but she quickly goes on to note the importance of her professional judgement and the idea that "every student is different and there's no formula for discipline." Herein lies the heart of the tension in school disciplinary processes in Montreal schools – administrators value professional discretion but struggle to simultaneously attend to others' demands for fairness and transparency. As a response to this tension, some administrators claim that these mitigating factors have no impact on their decisions of consequences. For them, there seems to be no gray zones in disciplining students. All students should receive the same consequences no matter what the student's personal situation is. For example, Sandra, a high school vice-principal, says that she gives the same consequences no

matter what the student is going through at home or outside of school. “What is different is the support you can try and provide these kids, who have these bigger issues at home” (interview, 2016).

For my own part, I have found the principle of equality (at the expense of equity) to be very difficult to follow. For example, a high school student who arrives late to school five times during a term should get suspended for one day according to the school’s code of conduct. But when I find out the student has arrived late five times, I have him/her come to my office so we can talk about his/her lateness. We talk about the reasons for the lateness, how he/she received warnings and detentions, how that has not helped the situation, and now we are obligated to follow through with a more serious consequence. Although the code of conduct indicates the student should now be suspended, I may decide to give the student a long detention on a Pedagogical Day. Having made this decision, I call home to speak to a parent about the situation and the consequence. This is when I often learn important details about why a student may be struggling to arrive on time. In one instance, a mother explained that her child suffers from Crohn’s disease and is sick every morning before coming to school. The student never mentioned it to me in any of our conversations. This is a perfect example of how a personal health concern can change a disciplinary decision. By the end of the conversation, I had cancelled the student’s detention, thinking we are lucky to have student come to school in the first place. In this situation, I used what is called my professional judgement and discretionary decision-making power.

Professional judgement is acquired over time, shaped by the informal and formal learning opportunities I have been documenting in this thesis. Much like the first five years of a teaching career is not a set rule but is rather based on the acquisition of a common knowledge, which

allows a teacher a chance to settle in, feel comfortable with the job and in control of the work they do (Brown & Schainker, 2008). A similar process of knowledge acquisition is undertaken by someone learning to be an administrator. In much the same manner it takes time to *make a teacher*, school administrators I interviewed also suggest that it does take some time for an administrator to develop his/her school management style, to get a handle on the paperwork, figure out the way he/she leads the school, and to understand how the greater educational and school board system works. On the other hand, new school administrators are expected to hit the ground running when it comes to disciplining students, to be an expert at it. When they start in a new school, they are expected by their superiors to learn the job very quickly and by staff, parents and students to know what they are doing. In reality, new school administrators have no clue what to do when they start. Sandra shares a similar sense being pulled between expectations and adaptation when starting as a vice-principal: "[You] question yourself a lot at the beginning. You have never dealt with these situations before. It's all about experience. With it you gain confidence and clarity on how to deal with situations" (interview, 2016).

The expression, "It's all about experience," points to the ways that new administrators build their knowledge about disciplining students as they work case by case over time. Each experience teaches them what to look for, the steps in disciplining students, the variety of consequences available, making a decision and evaluating its efficiency afterwards. With each experience lived, there is a baggage of knowledge that is transmitted from the principal. This knowledge initially came from the school board, and over time, was transmitted from a principal to a vice-principal, in different schools, in different neighborhoods. A key learning relation – shaping the acquisition of professional knowledge – is that between the vice-principal and the principals he or she works with during the first few years after the move into administration.

Coaching from the principal. Most of the training as a vice-principal is informal, provided by the principal with whom a vice-principal works. Vice-principal positions are only granted to schools with a high student enrolment. This criterion means that while all English high schools in Montreal have at least one vice-principal, only a few elementary schools have one. Beyond one's professional experience as a teacher and informal training by the principal, I identified no further ways to specifically learn about disciplining students in school administration. Until you have experienced a situation yourself, there is no other way to predict and consider every variable included in a disciplinary case. There is no metaphoric flight simulation for being a school principal: these are human relations, and people learn to participate in them by observing them or being in them.

A new vice-principal will learn to play his/her new role by modelling what the principal does and says. If the principal has a severe disciplinary philosophy with students, the new administrator will most likely be influenced in adopting that tough line perspective as well. Also, it depends on the school culture, context and student clientele. In some schools, disciplinary measures used may be stronger, more severe and exclusionary to dissuade students from misbehaving. In other schools, there may be a preventive positive behaviour program that teaches students to behave appropriately and disciplinary measures may be progressive and more inclusive. When administrators change schools, these different contexts may serve as teaching moments in disciplining students and administrators need to adapt to school cultures and vice-versa. In these situations, administrators and staff members learn together and from each other.

To learn how to make and deal with different disciplinary decisions, a principal will invite a vice-principal to attend meetings with students, parents and teachers to learn by observation and modelling how to deal with different issues, how to have different types of

conversations and to witness how things are done in the school and the school board. After each conversation, there is often a short debrief between the vice-principal and principal to discuss matters at hand and answer questions. After an undetermined period of observation, the principal will invite the vice-principal to deal with disciplinary matters on his/her own. The principal usually requests to be kept informed of the result and is available to consult if needed. Each experience adds on to the previous and knowledge is built as the vice-principal deals with more situations. Each new administrator will make mistakes and learn from them. Many administrators have suggested that they have made mistakes in disciplining students but have attempted to correct them with time.

The turnover of vice-principals in many schools is very fast-paced and each stay is short. The school board management team (including the Regional Directors and Human Resource employees) is the one who assigns administrators to schools with the approval of the Council of Commissioners. The movement of administrators creates a domino effect where a change in administration at one school requires a shift in administration at another. Some administrators ask for a change, apply for an open position, others are switched without any particular reason, or if there is a reason, it is not necessarily known to administrators, and at times, even to those affected by a change. A vice-principal can change schools many times before becoming a principal in an elementary school, which is where most administrators are assigned a first principalship. According to a retired principal and an educational leadership consultant I spoke to, there is no singular explanation for why particular administrators get paired up in a learning relationship nor why administrators are moved between schools. Some boards give more consideration to pairing principals and vice-principals. She shares that some boards realize that "not all principals are as interested in or capable of training new vice-principals as others and

value those who are eager to put in the time and effort to prepare their vice-principals for principalships in the future" (journal notes, 2017).

Training and coaching new administrators is a central part of a principal's job. Some administrators are asked to train new administrators more often than others as vice-principals keep changing in their school or are promoted to principalship. There are some schools where vice-principals change very often, perhaps too often. For example, in one school, there have been close to ten new administrators in three years while in other schools, the administrative team has been stable for a few years. In these latter cases, these principals get to enjoy a certain stability and get a break from continually training new vice-principals which takes a lot of time and energy.

I have heard that vice-principals change schools often to gain experience in different settings and neighborhoods. Chris, a high school principal, shares that he gained a sense of confidence because he had been in many different schools before becoming a principal. He had worked in different neighborhoods, at different levels, with a variety of students, parents and teachers. He felt ready to take on a principalship (interview, 2017). However, Marie mentions that no one is ever prepared for a change of school. It is the same for all administrators; they are parachuted in a school and they learn on the spot as they work with teachers, staff and parents. That is how it is done; an administrator learns once he/she is in the position (interview, 2016).

The student body, disciplinary culture and practices in a particular school are passed on and adopted by new administrators, learning how to administrate while working as vice-principals, because people learn on the job. George shares the following insight, illuminating how the particularities of a school shape the disciplinary approach he adopts:

> You know, I don't really like detentions. I think, that if we had the time to actually — if a student did something that was not correct, if you have the time to sit and talk to a student, you'd be much more effective. But that's not the reality of our schools. You know, you have a school with X population [hundreds of students] and it's a quick, arbitrary, non-judgmental response to a behavior (interview, 2017).

We can see in this statement that an administrator gives a consequence without really believing it will be effective but gives it because it is convenient. In busy schools with a lot of disciplinary issues, administrators use consequences that do not require large investments of time because they are submerged in the seemingly never-ending task of disciplining students plus all of their other duties and paper work. They cannot take the time to sit with every student misbehaving to talk about what happened and truly have a teachable moment. Discipline is cold, detached, and impersonal if there is not that shared moment with a student to look at what went wrong, the reasons behind the misbehavior, what could have been done differently. Taking the time to build a relationship with the student can actually go a long way in preventing future misbehaviors for this student. But this time is a luxury some administrators feel they don't have.

Amongst the administrators I interviewed, three out of ten reported spending close to 80% of their time disciplining students (George, Alan and Mark, interviews, 2016-2017). Being submerged in discipline without any formal training presents a huge challenge for new administrators:

> There's no training whatsoever. You just figure it out. That's what I feel you're told to do. I also think a new administrator should not start in a high school. Like the one I'm at, I think you should start in an elementary school and you learn like school routines. You

> can't even learn the paperwork part of being a principal if all you deal with is discipline (Mark, interview, 2017).

In Mark's account, we see how vice-principals are left on their own to figure out the work that needs to be done. There is no specific pre-training for the job. One learns as he/she goes along. A new administrator always feels one step behind everything that needs to be done in his/her work until he/she gets to do it once or twice.

It is a process of in-service training with apprenticeship that is considered normal in educational environments – both for administrators and teachers. The idea that the only way to learn is by doing is so ingrained in the teaching profession that I wonder if administrators would really appreciate being pre-trained. In another school board in Montreal, they have decided to start pre-training their new administrators before they are given their first administrative assignment. This pre-training will include informative seminars, workshops, as well as mentoring from in-service administrators. New administrators will accompany current administrators in different schools over a six month period to better understand and learn what the job entails. This is again very similar to a pre-service teacher learning to teach in a classroom with a cooperating teacher. Reading back through my journal notes, I see echoes of my experiences practice-teaching in my descriptions of my work to become a vice-principal:

> Arriving in my new school as vice-principal, I find it difficult at times to know what to do when situations arise, for example, disciplinary issues with students. I am very fortunate to work with another vice principal who was in charge of the elementary school the last few years. Since we work closely together, he has become my go-to person and my main source of information when I am faced with new situations I am not prepared to handle, or unsure of. Since I have worked in a high school my whole career, dealing with

elementary students is very different, and I am unsure of the steps to be taken when it comes to disciplinary issues (journal notes, 2017).

Social learning is the primary way people learn to be a school administrator in Montreal. We learn from experience, learn from coaching, learn from networking – there is a focus on social learning that means the status quo remains intact – the same sets of assumptions, beliefs, practices, etc. are just passed down from principal to vice-principal over time and across the board. There is no official curriculum (no manual of instructions) and no group of people sitting back, thinking, discussing and figuring out together what a positive school climate would look and feel like and the role that school discipline should play. Everyone just continues, business as usual, passing on existing practices. In this context, there are few investments in formal learning opportunities and little room for growth and change. We see each other at meetings, in classes, in workshops, and on committees. Our superiors frequently mention the word *network* as part of the school board's management culture. The directors at the school board are the ones who lead the discourse behind the policies and the regulations that manage the schools; they are the "intellectuals", as Gramsci refers to them, who feed the administrators the information required to manage a school, including the discipline of students. They are the ones who meet and network the most. They have the time to discuss policies and regulations while the school administrators are told what to do and execute. The administrators are invited to 'network' meetings at the school board to receive information that has already been decided upon. There is not enough room for discussions or think groups about pedagogy and discipline at the school administrator level. There is not enough time at school and no opportunity at the school board level for administrators to contribute to the discussions and evolution of policies on discipline.

Although it is required for a new administrator to obtain a post-graduate certificate in Educational Leadership, a new administrator needs to proactively advance his/her own learning as a vice-principal, mainly through conversations and networking with others in the same field. One must be autonomous in asking questions in looking and searching for answers, in asking for advice to find out what the school board practices are because nobody will feed a new administrator the information. There are some policies and documents available; however, they are not easily accessible, often outdated. A new administrator is responsible to find them, print them, consult them on his/her own. No one tells a vice-principal to consult policies or documents. I have seen my principals consult documents, and I have learned from watching them that I am expected to do the same. For example, no one ever told me to read the Basic School Regulations (BSR), but it quickly became apparent that I needed to know it. The same goes for the *Education Act* – no one advised me to read it, but it was obvious I needed to know it. As a new administrator, one learns by observing but also by listening. I heard one of my principals often refer to both of these documents as the pillars of the education system in Quebec and that is how I learned that they mattered. In administration, learning happens largely through experience and active apprenticeship.

Conclusion

My goal for this chapter was to show how school discipline is socially organized by the people administrators work with on a daily basis, but especially by their mentoring principals and administrative colleagues at other schools. Administrators learn through apprenticeship in much the same manner they learned to teach. The principal coaches the vice-principal to reproduce actions through modelling and observation. The school board reproduces its discourse on discipline through its principals using language to transmit knowledge that is left to be

interpreted by its administrators and is transformed into experience. Administrators come to believe that they use common sense and professional judgement to do their work when in fact, they are using the school board's common knowledge to discipline students. In the following chapter, I explore how various stakeholders view the disciplining of students differently, illuminating the feeling of distrust towards school discipline developed in this context.

CHAPTER 5

People View Discipline Differently

In this chapter on how people view discipline differently, I draw once more on data from interviews with school administrators and former high school students, as well as my own experiences as an administrator, to discuss the divergent perspectives that varying stakeholders in a school (e.g., teachers, students, administrators, parents) may have about how students should be disciplined. Continuing to ground my work in people's experiences (including my own), my aim is to unpack how different stakeholders see the discipline of children differently and how this impacts on the idealistic image of parents, teachers and administrators working together to help children behave appropriately in school. I also attempt to show how all of these different perspectives affect the work of new administrators learning to discipline students.

Teachers on the Frontline of Discipline

In my own experience and in the experiences of those I interviewed for this research, teachers are considered to be on the frontline of the school discipline system. Due to the amount of time spent with students, teachers tend to have a more personal relationship with them. When a teacher is faced with disciplining a student, having previously built a relationship with him/her helps in establishing trust and opening a conversation on improving school behavior in order to better understand where the student is coming from, and in choosing the best consequence to allow the student to learn from his/her mistake. Teachers tend to know their students personally, what they are capable of and they can put in place strategies to help the students who have trouble following classroom or school rules. When a teacher creates a positive personal connection with a student, the student tends to misbehave less and succeed more academically.

Skiba and Losen (2015) actually propose relationship building as an alternative strategy to suspensions. "Interventions that focus on strengthening teacher-student relationships can reduce the use of exclusionary discipline, particularly for black students" (p. 6). When building a positive relationship with a teacher, a student will want to please and not disappoint him/her. Benard and Slade (2009) suggest that teachers can be "turnaround people" for students when they offer them caring relationships and have high expectations in school. Relationships can also be strengthened through staff coaching, mentoring, and/or assisting students in different school activities.

While many of the disciplinary conventions of a school are shared informally amongst administrators and teachers, there is a legislative basis underpinning the idea that teachers represent the frontlines of the disciplinary system as previously mentioned. According to s. 19 and 22 of the *Education Act 2018* of Quebec (I-13.3), teachers have "the right to govern the conduct of each group of students entrusted to his care." Teachers also have the obligation to "(1) contribute to the intellectual and overall personal development of each student entrusted to his care; […] and (3) take the appropriate means to foster respect for human rights in his students." As a result, teachers decide how to organize and run their classroom in line with the school's educational project (mission, vision and values). In light of these rights and responsibilities of teachers, school administrators entrust them and rely on their professional judgement to create classroom rules and enforce them with consequences of their choosing.

However, teachers do not always take disciplinary matters into their own hands. In schools, teachers should be considered the experts when it comes to disciplining students. When I started as a vice-principal in an elementary school, I relied on my administrator colleagues and my teachers to help guide my decisions on disciplining young students. Since my entire teaching

career had been in high schools, I considered the elementary teachers as experts on the subject yet, I was surprised when they did not know what to do or came to me for advice, as reflected in my journal notes (2017):

> One of [the grade 3 students] is extremely disruptive in class and very disrespectful of his teachers and classmates. In the past few months, his behavior has only gotten worse. I do not know what to do. It seems that his teachers, the resource teacher and the special education technician, are also clueless. How can that be? They are the experts in elementary education. We had a meeting about planning our interventions with him this week, and I felt there was a lot of uncertainty about what needed to be done. Teachers seemed to be at their wits end, not knowing what to do anymore, almost giving up; this worries me.

It is as if they were accustomed to using the same disciplinary methods for a long time with the same type of students; now that they had students who were more challenging, their methods did not work as well and they did not know what to do next. In the past, a warning and a phone call home were enough to get a student to stop misbehaving, but it is no longer the case. Teachers were waiting for a supervisor like me to advise them of the next steps to take in disciplining their students instead of coming up with solutions themselves. Having lost the habit and perhaps the interest in reading and researching academic literature, they were waiting for someone else to handle the situation and give them information on how to go about disciplining students, as if saying: “Tell me what to do and I will try my best”.

As my own journal notes suggest, some teachers further disengage from disciplining their own students and elect to send them to the office without seeking to fully address the disciplinary issue in class first:

> Some teachers bring a student to me without warning, without discussing with me the issue at hand or the background interventions that have been applied. Therefore, I must deal with the situation on the spot, because I am faced with it, without choice, but later I am forced to address the intervention with the teacher or staff member […], and explain how it should have been dealt with. So, it seems that discipline processes can be influenced from the top, such as school board, ministry or principal, only to a limited extent, and more so by the bottom coming from teachers, staff, parents and students. All towards the vice-principal, the main central player in disciplining issues in a school (journal notes, 2016).

Are teachers tired of dealing with the same issues over and over? Do they wish to have a quick fix by bringing the students to the office instead of contributing in helping create a more positive school climate? Do they realize how this can affect their class climate? Or have they come to the end of their usual disciplinary measures and do not know what to do anymore? I learned very quickly as a new vice-principal not to automatically accept all students sent to me for discipline by their teachers. If I feel that the reason for sending the student for the office is not a serious or dangerous one, the student will be sent back to the classroom. I will later speak with the teacher stating that the matter should have been dealt with in the classroom and there was no need for an administrator's intervention.

For instance, a teacher sent a student to the office to be disciplined by me because he was laughing in class. When I spoke to the teacher, I made it clear that this was not a valid reason to send a student to an administrator and exclude the student from learning. It did not reoccur. As Richard, a high school principal, mentions, when disciplinary issues occur with one teacher, it is preferable to have a conversation with him/her individually instead of addressing classroom

management with the entire staff in a meeting. Richard feels that when discussing an issue that concerns a few teachers with all staff members, this has a tendency to undermine those who generally do a good job teaching and dealing with discipline issues (interview, 2016).

In addition, when a teacher refers a misbehaving student to an administrator to be disciplined for a minor issue that could have been dealt with in the classroom, this has the reverse effect of diminishing the teacher's authority with the misbehaving student as well as the other students under his care. Kupchik (2010) shares his perspective on having someone else take care of student misbehavior for the teacher and how minor situations can lead to more misbehavior:

> One of the primary findings of John Devine's ethnography in NYC public schools: the staff developed the assumption that teachers deal with students' mind and security staff deal with their bodies… If teachers see student misbehavior as somebody else's job, then they will write referrals for even minor misbehavior as somebody else's job, then they will write referrals for even minor misbehaviors that they might have otherwise dealt with themselves. As a result, there are more referrals; more students visiting a dean, interventionist, or assistant principal; more students going to in-school suspension for at least a class period; and more out-of-class punishments overall. If teachers stop handling discipline, then they escalate minor situations by creating a recorded incident instead of having a talk with a student or some other informal response (p. 143-144).

According to all of the administrators I have interviewed, if an administrator comes to a class to discipline the students for a teacher, this is seen as undermining the teacher's authority in front of the students. As Susan, a high school vice-principal, explains:

> But we always try to kind of send it back to the teacher, you know and let them [take care of discipline]. Again because of credibility before the students, it's important that the students respect them, because at the end of the day, they're going to be in the teacher's class for the rest of the year, you know so they have to work on that kind of relationship with that student. And it's not always easy, there's going to be roadblocks and obstacles, but we find ways to deal with it (interview, 2017).

Given these negative impacts when a teacher refers a student to an administrator to be disciplined, it is striking that some teachers continue to rely heavily on disciplinary interventions from administrators. It seems that a certain disconnect between teachers and administrators arises concerning the general discipline of students and more particularly in establishing the acceptable reasons for sending a student to the office to meet an administrator. This difference in understanding school discipline seems to be present in many schools according to the administrators I interviewed. Peter, Richard and Susan all share situations in schools where they have worked where teachers regularly refer disciplinary issues, minor and major, to administrators. They have each attempted to change this tendency and have faced a lot of resistance from many teachers they have worked with. How do teachers and principals come to such different conclusions about one another's roles?

A Difference in Perceptions of Roles

From what principals and vice-principals I have interviewed have shared about their experiences disciplining students, I have come to understand that teachers and principals have different perceptions in regards to disciplining students for various possible reasons. The first possibility for this different perspective is that some teachers who regularly refer students to the office do not see the value for them in learning to discipline misbehaving students differently

from what they usually do. Peter, a high school vice-principal, shares that at a school where he worked, teachers were not interested in improving classroom management methods or in investing time and energy in learning to build stronger relationships with their misbehaving students. He relates how, over the years, different administrators at this high school were not able to convince the staff of changing their vision of how to discipline students or even how to relate to them in the first place:

> I think the problem where it [restorative justice program at school] fell apart is we were not able to get the support of our staff of really implementing it the way we wanted to. The teachers did not want to sit down and talk with the student who had […] sworn at them and told them to f-off or something. They felt that […] they need to be suspended and that's it … They weren't interested in that kind of restorative situation […] the idea was that down the line, we wouldn't have suspensions anymore, because when something would happen, we would have a circle, we would mediate and then we would move on, and that hopefully we wouldn't have a recurrence (interview, 2016).

In this example, we can clearly see that the staff at this school wants to keep the exclusionary disciplinary measures rather than moving towards a positive disciplinary program in which staff would build trusting relationships with their students over time. This resistance to change not only prevents administrators from improving the disciplinary process in schools, but also shows how the staff exercises control over the school culture, the school climate and how things are done in this school. In addition, this also demonstrates how it can be a challenge for an administrator to arrive in a new school with a different perspective on discipline in the hopes of improving processes, relationships, engagement, in order to have a positive effect on the overall academic success of students in the end. This further shows how essential it is for administrators

to have the staff's support in making changes in a school. Without that support, change is impossible. Transforming a school culture can be a huge challenge for school administrators.

A second possible explanation for how teachers and principals come to such different conclusions about one another's roles is in the past, some vice-principals or principals took care of all of the disciplinary situations for teachers and consequently created a precedent where teachers could avoid taking responsibility for disciplining misbehaving children in their classes. For these teachers, this method of referring students to the office worked out for them in the past so they will continue to do so and will tend to sabotage any new initiative proposed to them. Peter shares how the teachers had clear expectations of his duties when he arrived in a new school:

> Before me there was one or two other [vice-principals] who had a difficult time, but they all looked back to the good old days… The early 2000's when the vice-principal dealt with every single disciplinary issue in the school… [He] would yell at the kids, would scream at them, would basically intimidate the kids, […] would line them up in hallways and make them sit there all day. For the teachers it was great, they didn't have to do anything. The minute someone misbehaved, they would just tell the [vice-principal] and [he] would pull those kids out and they wouldn't see them the rest of the day and they got used to that… And so that was their philosophy. You know I can recall teachers saying to me you need to be a sheriff, that's what your role is as vice-principal, you're the sheriff, right. You know I can remember a teacher in a staff meeting saying to me we don't need a paper pusher, we need a sheriff (interview, 2016).

Getting staff members to change their ways and changing a school's culture, with respect to school discipline, is quite the undertaking and takes a lot of lobbying over a long period of

time. Naively, I thought it would be easy to get teachers to work collaboratively with each other and other educational professionals in the school to address issues of misbehavior together. Once, I spoke to my teachers during a staff meeting about working together to speak to their classes, to review the code conduct, to take care of disciplining and addressing misbehaviors in the yard, to be active while supervising, and to intervene when students were playing aggressively. They were not happy; I saw upset faces, arms crossed, and I heard objections. I considered them as the experts, the ones who should come together with a vision of social skills for all students to learn and uphold, but as my journal notes suggest, they did not share this vision:

> I will leave the school very soon and a system needs to be in place and continue to thrive once I have moved on. It is as if they only want to take care of what is going on in their own class and are trying to delegate to others anything that goes on outside their classes. Teachers told me they gave warnings and communicated with parents, after that, they did not know what to do. I don't understand. They are the experts; they told me they wanted consequences, which means they wanted me to give them. I can't take care of all of that, and I won't (journal notes, 2017).

From what I have learned, there are limits to what an administrator can do when it comes to disciplining students in a school. He/She cannot do it alone; it must be a school team effort.

A third possibility for the different perspective on discipline between teachers and administrators is that general expectations concerning disciplining students are not clearly communicated from administrators to teachers. As previously discussed, teachers and administrators are left to figure things out in how schools function as there is very little in writing where policies and legislation are concerned, aside from a school's code of conduct.

Richard, a high school principal, finds that staff and administrators should be on the same wavelength and have the same standards when it comes to disciplining students (interview, 2016). How is that possible when rules and regulations are transmitted informally through social learning and expectations are not clearly communicated? Only one administrator I interviewed, Chris, a high school principal, shares how he set clear expectations to his staff right from the beginning, as he arrived in a new school: “But I think I did it in points sending the message out to one of the supervisors that was a direct message. Teachers have to get involved and be more proactive. When you see a student in the hallway that you think is not doing the right thing, intervene” (interview, 2017).

Another administrator I worked with did not shy away from telling staff members individually what her expectations were of them when she noticed a difference in the vision they all had for the school. She would quickly have a conversation with the staff member and clearly state what she expected of them before it got out of hand. Consequently, the administration's message must be clear from the beginning that teachers are responsible to prevent and deal with misbehavior while following a progressive scale of disciplinary measures to help the child improve their behavior in the classroom. As Bear (2012) suggests:

> Principals can simply instruct teachers not to send offending students to the office. When the teachers are not provided with any support or assistance (e.g., training, consultation, direct services to students), it is unlikely that much will actually change in the classroom. Thus, any reductions in office disciplinary referrals and suspensions often simply reflect a change in school policies and referral procedures, not student behavior (p. 179).

Finally, teachers are trained to be autonomous and self-sufficient in their work. As administrators, we are expected to respect this autonomy, empower teachers to deal with their

students on their own and support them when they need our assistance. That is until something goes wrong. Teachers do not always take under consideration the big picture of a school with hundreds of students or the personal background of a student. When they have an issue with one student in one class, they want immediate assistance and results, often requesting the student be removed from the class. I must admit that teachers are not always made aware of the personal background information on a student that could affect his/her behavior in school due to confidentiality issues that protect some of that information. However, when a teacher is made aware of a student's personal difficulties, in my experience, it has had positive impact on the understanding and empathy of a teacher towards that student. In these cases, a more open communication between the administration and staff members contributes to reduce a difference in perspectives on disciplining students who are struggling with personal issues.

There Are Always Multiple Sides to a Story

Since there are always two sides to a story as the saying goes, it is essential to consider both (or multiple) versions of a disciplinary incident, involving students and teachers. The student, the classmates, and the teacher are all interpreting the same event with their own perspective. The act of misbehaving is actually a multifaceted event with each witness telling a different story and disciplining a student does not follow a linear path. Therefore disciplining requires acknowledging all the different 'versions' of the event to make a fair decision. Unfortunately, there often seems to be a disconnect between teachers and students, and administrators have the difficult task of attempting to mediate and fix this problem.

I have learned that the role of a vice-principal is to work with all parties involved in a situation and to listen attentively to every person implicated before making a disciplinary decision. Yet, teachers and students are not always aware of this role. When a teacher is

involved, this should not automatically mean that he/she is right when a student misbehaves. For example, my own journal notes record instances where a student was provoked by a teacher to misbehave and then sent to the office for a consequence. After looking into the matter, my administrator colleagues and I realized that the teacher's behavior towards the student was the cause of the misbehavior. When this occurs, the teacher is brought in for a conversation with the administration about what happened and how to avoid this from reoccurring in the future. Depending on the gravity and recurrence of the incident, there may be a formal disciplinary note added to the teacher's file. In either case, teachers are reminded that they are professionals and as indicated according to s. 22 of the *Education Act 2018* of Quebec (I-13.3), "a teacher shall […] (4) act in a just and impartial manner in his dealings with his students; and […] (6) take the appropriate measures to attain and maintain a high level of professionalism."

To be fair for the student, an administrator must establish what happened any time a disciplinary incident is brought forward. If the teacher or another student was at fault, there should be a "consequence" for him/her as well. A consequence can be a simple conversation with the person. In any case, the misconduct of a teacher should not be ignored, if not it will continue and perhaps worsen in regards to students. Peter, a high school vice-principal I interviewed, recalled a time when a teacher asked him if he/she was going to receive a suspension for misbehaving, just like the students (interview, 2016). Similarly, my own experience suggests that teachers do not take very well to being called to the office for these types of conversations. No one likes to be reprimanded or called out on what they did wrong. Especially if they feel they were in their right to do something (e.g., managing their classroom as they see fit). The professional autonomy that administrators promote and value in teaching is good until something needs to be addressed. At times, it happens when teachers need support and

administrators need to step in to mediate between teachers and students. These are human relations and they can be quite complicated at times. As long as everything is done in a respectful manner, these interventions need to considered as offering support and working together to improve human relationships in general.

Students (and parents) today tend to be more aware of their rights, to advocate more for these rights and may question a teacher's behavior or actions. They may go directly to an administrator to talk about their concerns or their parents may contact the principal to do so. When confronted about their behavior with students, my journal notes capture a tendency among teachers to become very defensive and offended because they feel that the administration does not blindly support all of their disciplinary decisions. I have had a few teachers ask me why I always take the side of the students or the parent in these situations. I try to explain that my job actually puts me in between all parties and I try to make sense of what happened so that we can remedy to these situations together and ensure they do not occur again. It can sometimes be very difficult to mediate between teachers, students and parents as everyone can be very emotional concerning an incident. Each party believes that the administrator should take their word for what happened and if this does not occur, then they assume that the administration is not on their side. In these cases, all sides need to be heard and they each have a version of what happened, shaped by personal perception and emotion.

It would be beneficial for administrators to explain how they work as mediators between students, teachers, and parents when there are divergent views on a disciplinary situation. A major challenge is to reassure every stakeholder that their side of the story has been heard, that everyone feels supported in the situation, that no one has been undermined in the face of the other, while on the other hand, it is also important that mistakes are addressed in a respectful and

productive manner as to be able to move forward in working together in the future. Reflecting on the difficulty of serving as an intermediary between different stakeholders in this way, one begins to see why George and Sandra have opted to discipline quickly and without nuance (e.g., giving out detentions), rather than investigating each disciplinary infraction. Investigating and mediating takes time and energy, both of which administrators do not always have enough of.

Bridging a divisive school culture. According to several administrators, there are still teachers who feel that students should be punished for misbehaviors and that the punishment must hurt for them to learn a valuable lesson. According to Mark, a high school vice-principal, some teachers "want to over punish" when students misbehave. In his experience, "a lot of teachers want a harsh consequence right away" (interview, 2017). When this desire for "harsh consequences" is not met by administrators, teachers feel that administrators do not support them and they are too soft on students and an "us versus them" divide can occur between teachers and principals.

Peter, a high school vice-principal, shares challenges he's faced seeking to discipline students in a Montreal high school, situated in an inner-city, low-income neighborhood, and serving racialized young people. He related that his biggest challenge was not disciplining students as much as it was "having to do disciplinary interventions for things that I knew could have been avoided if our staff members would have had a different management style in the classroom" (interview, 2016). In this school, according to the current principal, David, most teachers did not want to adapt their teaching or classroom management style to the students they had in their classrooms. In fact, they were very rigid in their disciplinary methods; they would not make any concessions to their class rules, would not make efforts to get to know the students on a more personal level to build a trusting relationship, and would send students to the office for

any misbehavior, minor or major. They believed this was the only way to deal with their students.

According to Peter, on the one hand, teachers were afraid that if they became too soft, the school would witness an increase in violence; on the other hand, he also witnessed teachers set students up to misbehave and then punish them for their negative and emotional reactions. Unfortunately for Peter, this pattern occurred in more than one school, where he worked as an administrator. For example, he recalls a time when a student was being obnoxious and loud with everyone in class, and a teacher called the student a "f-ing retard". The student lashed back, swearing at the teacher. The teacher got upset and sent the student to the office. Once, Peter established what had happened, he realized that both the teacher and the student were deeply implicated in the conflict. The student was suspended, and the teacher received a disciplinary note in his/her file. According to this administrator, in this particular school, the majority of teachers were apt to lose their cool with students and lash out with violent and abusive comments. Peter perceived this to be part of the school culture. He also reported that the teachers did not really care if they received reprimands, as they were tenured and their jobs were protected.

Although Peter stayed at that school for a few years and attempted to change the school's culture regarding discipline with the help of different administrators over the years, there was a lot of resistance from the staff, and he felt nothing had changed in the end. His sense was that teachers considered disciplining students with dignity to be pampering them. In contrast, they longed for the good old days when vice-principals were tough with students, playing the role of a sheriff. The fact that in this school is it deemed acceptable to position the vice-principal as law-enforcement and the students as potential criminals is concerning. Here, we can see another

example where the expectations and visions of teachers and administrators on how to discipline students are very different. Instead of working together on creating a positive school climate, the staff chooses to promote a tough disciplinary stance in their classes and the school that tends to suspend and expel misbehaving students from school.

Mark, a high school vice-principal, similarly observes that some of his staff members "have antagonized the students so it makes it a lot more difficult to deal with" discipline at his school (interview, 2017). Mark worked in a large Montreal high school, situated on the outskirts of downtown Montreal, in a low to medium-income neighborhood that is considered tough, and which serves racially diverse young people. As in the previous school mentioned above, it is as if the teachers in these situations want to push out misbehaving students from their classes, thinking it will create a better learning environment. But other students witness these unjust interactions and begin to view the teacher as acting unfairly more generally. As such, in the end, targeting a misbehaving student and seeking to have them removed, will not help the teacher nor the class environment. This is why it is important to offer more professional development to train teachers and staff in more positive classroom management techniques and to avoid these types of set-ups to fail (Skiba and Losen, 2015).

Student views: Detentions and suspensions are useless. In high schools in Montreal, the usual consequences given to students are detentions and suspensions. Teachers can give detentions to their students before school starts in the morning, at recess, at lunch or after school. These are usually given because the student did not follow class rules, was late to class, or did not complete an assignment for example. In certain schools, secretaries may issue school detentions, mainly for lateness to school. Many schools have detention halls or rooms. In most of these cases, there is no formal discussion with the vice-principal unless the misbehavior is

chronic or problematic. Detentions may also be given by the administrators for breaking other school rules such as misbehaving during a fire drill and being defiant with a staff member. These incidents are usually accompanied by a meeting with the student to discuss the matter. In some schools, the detention room is filled up every day, and many students are recurrent visitors. When a student receives detentions regularly and becomes a recurrent visitor, it is perhaps a sign that detentions do not have the desired effect of reducing or eliminating the unwanted misbehavior. When this occurs, an administrator should seriously consider other disciplinary actions to help convince the student to change his/her behavior. An administrator will usually suspend students if detentions are deemed ineffective.

During my research interviews, I had the opportunity to meet and interview a few young adults who had recently graduated from high school in various Montreal schools. We discussed disciplinary actions at each of their former high schools. All three young adults declared that detentions and suspensions were useless to help them learn from their misbehaviors. They reported frequently receiving detentions, almost on a daily basis, for coming late to school, not having a test signed by a parent, walking in the halls in between classes, or being out of their school uniform, which are all minor misbehaviors.

In addition, they shared how they felt targeted by teachers and administrators who would constantly give them detentions without ever addressing the root of their misbehavior. At times, they received detentions that they felt were unjust, when they thought they had done nothing wrong. For example, one of the students was walking in a hallway in between classes heading to the gym for his Physical Education class, when a few other students ran by him. A teacher came out of his classroom to see what was going on in the halls and because this student was standing alone in the hall, the teacher accused him of running in the hallway and gave him a school

detention. The student tried to defend himself by explaining that other students had run passed him but the teacher did not believe him and gave him a school detention anyways. Another student talked about how teachers and administrators would "flip a situation on him", trying to have the student take the blame and consequence for something he did, and sometimes did not do (interview, 2017). Students felt very frustrated by this as they considered this to be unfair.

The young adults I interviewed were given repeated detentions in high school, sometimes without warning, without ever sitting down with a teacher or administrator to have a talk about their misbehaviors. If they missed a detention, they would receive a double detention. If they missed those, they would be suspended for one day. According to these young adults, detentions and suspensions were "killing their motivation" to be in school (interview, 2017). For them, they even questioned the purpose of attending school if they were going to receive detentions every day. It did not work in changing their misbehaviors because according to them, the root of their misbehaviors was not being addressed. When asked what they would suggest instead of giving detentions alone, the young adults proposed that teachers and administrators would need to have a conversation and ask questions on what is behind the misbehavior, try to connect with students, show compassion and understanding, and not assume that students misbehave on purpose and do not care about school.

Students reported feeling that if the school does not care about them, why should they care about misbehaving and receiving inefficient repeated consequences (interview, 2017). Peter confirms this same impression when he states that "[…] detention was something that just never worked well at our school […] They [the students] didn't care about that" (interview, 2016). Yet, administrators in schools continue to give detentions even if they know they are not effective for many students or even if they do not personally like detentions as George previously shared. In

general, administrators consider giving detentions to misbehaving students as a quick and convenient way of addressing a misbehavior on the spot. They are very well aware it is not an optimal way of dealing with students but the number of students referred to the office and the lack of time all contribute to choosing a detention as a disciplinary action versus having a lengthy discussion with the student to find out what is at the root of the misbehavior. With everything that goes on in a school during a day, there is unfortunately very little time to sit with each misbehaving student for 20 minutes each time to address every issue that troubles the youth in our schools. However, this should be the main strategy in building relationships and connecting with the students of our schools.

The Vice-Principal as the Middle Person

In the following student vignette, I present an elementary student who repeatedly misbehaved in school and who was living an extremely difficult family situation. This vignette shows how it is important to take the time to get to know the student, find ways to work with him/her to improve their behavior in the long run and working together with staff members, teachers and parents to help the student feel comfortable in school and learn.

> ***Student vignette.*** During my first year as vice-principal in an elementary school, there was a boy in grade 3 who just started at our school. We very quickly realized that he was quite disruptive in class and in the school yard, refusing to work and follow rules. He would get into fights and arguments with other boys on a daily basis. Every day, he came to school extremely angry. He would say that he did not want to be at our school and that he hated our school. We found out that his family situation was extremely difficult, suggesting that circumstances at home were shaping the child's behavior at school. He was sent to my office on a regular basis mostly for pushing, hitting and hurting other

boys. Our special education technician (SET) worked closely with him. Although his behavior did improve over time, there were still some very difficult days for him. We did suspend him a few times but tried to keep him in school as much as possible. His teachers became quite discouraged and even talked about the possibility of him attending another school the following year. Although we needed to ensure the safety of all students around him, school also needed to be a safe and stable place for him.

Here we can see that teachers were not at the forefront helping him improve his behavior in school. They relied a lot on our SET who worked with him one-on-one almost every day and on me as the vice-principal when he would act out more aggressively. Even as the year progressed, this boy's teachers did not innovate in their interventions with him. They continued to respond in a reactive way and to refer him the SET or the vice-principal, wishing for him to leave our school, feeling like he did not belong with us. We tried to get him to see the school's social worker but one of his parents refused. The school psychologist was overwhelmed by learning difficulty cases so could not add him on to her workload for an assessment, let alone a consultation, and I am quite certain one parent would have refused this service. It would have been left up to the administration to organize a training or a workshop with a school board consultant to help teachers deal with this student's behavioral difficulties in class while teachers are expected to be self-sufficient. The teachers, not knowing what to do, had given up on him without successfully helping him in changing his behaviors. In the end, we, as a school team, did not learn new ways to intervene with him as the year ended and he was transferred to other teachers in the next grade the following year.

One of the important things to consider in these cases is that everyone must continue to work together until the end of the school year. All students and staff members are expected to

respect each other, co-exist and learn to work together. The administration may offer different strategies to students and staff to attempt to repair a relationship, to compromise, to understand one another, to listen to the other person's needs. A teacher cannot expect a student to be kicked out of the class for the rest of the school year, nor can a student expect to change teachers simply because he/she does not get along with him/her. The school, under the principal's authority, has an obligation to teach all students and to offer any support in order to do so. This standard reflects educational law and contemporary educational discourses of inclusion set by the Ministry of Education of Quebec. In 2009, the Ministry released the "I care about school! All together for student success" document, which conveys the following:

> The main challenge of the school boards and schools is to implement practices that have proven effective, are based on the fundamental conviction that all students are capable of persevering in school and succeeding, and draw on the expertise, creativity and dynamism of the education community. Providing support for students and teachers is also of crucial importance (p. 4).

This policy is important because it institutionalizes the value of an inclusive school culture. Unfortunately, the policy in and of itself does little to actually provide "support for students and teachers" who must actually engage in the difficult work of ensuring that everyone who enters the school system has what they need to persevere and succeed.

Without the programmatic and other supports needed to ensure that students are experiencing success, learning difficulties and student disengagement continue to show up as disciplinary issues for administrators to address. Mark shares that "they [the teachers] come and say 'He's [student] not doing his homework, I don't want him in my class ever again.' It doesn't work that way. You can't deny the child an education" (interview 2017). According to

administrators I have interviewed and worked with, a school must do everything it can within its capacities to support and provide services to students with behavioral and learning difficulties. Even so, other research suggests schools continue to use exclusionary disciplinary measures such as suspensions which have an impact on students' learning and sense of belonging (Browne et al., 2001; Chin et al., 2012; Fenning et al., 2012; Skiba et al., 2014). The following student vignette demonstrates how a student who has a diagnosed behavioral disorder repeatedly misbehaves in school and how the school is not equipped to deal with this student's special needs.

Student vignette. There was a senior high school student who started being defiant with his teachers. Over time, he became more impulsive and angry. He was sent to the office a few times. I asked the special education technician (SET) to work with him on managing his anger and reducing his misbehaviors. When he was in elementary school, he had been diagnosed as having Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD). The school therefore needed to provide him with support services such as those of the SET. One day, he was sent to the office by one of his teachers who could not tolerate his rudeness any longer. I spoke with the student who felt targeted by this teacher. I spoke with his mother who also felt the same way. I spoke with the teacher to explain how the student felt and suggested that she speak with him directly to repair their relationship.

On another day, there were a few issues between this student and a few teachers. We decided to send him home. He was not officially suspended but he needed a break (perhaps the teachers did as well); he was not having a good day and his misbehavior was only getting worse. When I advised him that he was going home, he exploded with anger towards me in the hallway. I saw a teacher out of the corner of my eye and signaled him

to remain close. The student started yelling how unfair this was, he had done nothing wrong, he was being singled out again, this was stupid, etc. He called his mother on his cell phone to explain what was happening, screaming and swearing into the phone. The principal finally came and escorted him out of the building.

Following this public and angry meltdown, teachers expected him to be expelled from school the next day. Although I was upset by what had just happened, I could not believe they thought he would automatically be sent to another school. This would only displace the problems the student was having without attempting to address any issues behind the misbehavior. I told some teachers that we were going to work with the student; they were very surprised and somewhat disappointed that he was staying with us. They asked if we were going to find him another school for next year at least. I realized then that expelling this student from our school would make teachers happy. Teachers told me that other administrators had done it in the past, informing me that behavior like this had never been tolerated before. They were sending me the message that they thought I was not doing my job properly. Their desire was for the student to go because he was a bad example and influence on others. I felt like I was being judged for wanting to give the student another chance and help him improve his behavior in our school.

On the next school day, the principal and I met with the student and his mother to talk about what happened. We identified triggers for the student and worked out a plan with the SET to help this student when he felt he was going to burst in class. After that, there were many more incidents and disrespectful outbursts. Each time, the SET worked with him to address the issues and talk about alternative ways of managing his anger and frustrations. He developed a positive and respectful relationship with our SET. With time

and the collaboration of his teachers, his outbursts diminished somewhat. We continued to monitor his behavior and work with him on controlling his temper and disrespectful interactions with others. There were a few in- and out-of-school suspensions throughout the year. It was not perfect but we did the best we could to help him. At the end of the year, he was asked to change schools.

This vignette illustrates the difficulties administrators face when trying to make decisions in the best interest of a child *and* all of the other stakeholders of a school – particularly with insufficient resources and only a partial understanding of the root causes of a student's misbehaviors. Unfortunately, there are limits to the services a school can offer a student. Ideally, this young man would have met with a psychologist at school to address the real issues behind the constant misbehaviors but that is not a service that we offer. As a school administrator, I delegate tasks to whichever school staff is available and seems most suitable to the task – e.g., the guidance counsellor, the special education technician or the social worker. In many cases, an administrator does not have all of the time, qualifications, or skills required to help each and every student on an individual basis.

Another point of concern is the fact that teachers expected him to be expelled the next day. From what they told me, this comes from past administrators who seem to have had a zero tolerance stance when it came to disrespectful behaviors from students and would transfer students on the spot. As a school administrator, I do not accept disrespectful behavior from students towards staff members but I do not believe that suspending or expelling a student will help him/her in the long run nor will it teach him/her how to be respectful. This will only transfer the "problem" somewhere else.

The above vignettes both suggest that schools need a functional multi-disciplinary team, which focuses on helping students work on improving their behavior and supports the school to work from a prevention standpoint, where students *and* teachers are supported to manage stress and mindfully engage in dialogue with one another. Fenning and Rose (2007) propose that schools should develop a "diverse discipline team" in committing to teaching children how to behave appropriately in schools. Although multi-disciplinary teams are currently part of the educational landscape in Montreal, they are not necessarily functional and are not oriented to preventing student misbehavior.

Mediating Between Families and Schools

Disciplining students and dealing with their parents is by far the hardest part of a vice-principal's job. Over the years, parents have generally become more involved when the school disciplines their children. A few decades ago, when a teacher or vice-principal called home, the parents were upset with their children. Today, it seems to be the other way around; when a student is on the receiving end of misbehavior, parents are upset that the school does not do enough to protect their child. When a student misbehaves, parents complain that we target their child and that our consequences are unreasonable. As Sandra, a high school vice-principal, shares:

> We're always accountable for everything it seems and we seem to always, not defend ourselves, but people want answers […] We are always questioned I find and questioned and interrogated about what we've done, how we've done it and how we've come to our decision in dealing with something (interview, 2016).

Once a vice-principal has chosen a consequence for a misbehaving student, he/she communicates it to the student, his/her parents, and his/her teacher. A vice-principal usually

contacts the parents once everything has been investigated and a disciplinary decision has been made. Although administrators have the right to speak with students about their behavior in school and gather information without a parent being present, more parents have started to demand that they be present when we speak to their child or that we call them before speaking with the child. In school, a parent leaves their child under our supervision and trusts that we will care for their child. Still, not all parents trust the school entirely. When informed of the misbehaving situation involving their child and the disciplinary decision taken, parents are understandably concerned for the well-being of their child. While many parents are supportive and collaborative, others may dispute the disciplinary decision and/or decide not to collaborate with the school. Parents may be unsatisfied about what has occurred and the disciplinary consequence that was given, even though the reasons behind the consequence are explained by the vice-principal.

Administrators all use the word consequence when talking about the outcomes of school disciplinary practices. Parents often refer to school consequences as punishments which has a negative connotation. At school, the aim of discipline is not to punish but to educate. Often, parents will want to know which consequence is given to the other children involved in the incident if any. Administrators are not at liberty to discuss how they discipline a child with parents of another child. It happens that parents dictate to a vice-principal what consequences the school should give to other students involved, especially if their child was considered a victim in the incident. I have had parents ask for students to be physically separated in school to avoid any contact, or parents have even demanded for other students to be suspended or expelled from school. As Skiba and Losen (2015) recommend, administrators need to help "parents understand and support less punitive approaches" to disciplining students (p. 11). Administrators should

indeed communicate and inform parents of the different disciplinary measures that may be taken without always having to exclude students from school.

In some school codes of conduct I reviewed for this research, I encountered terms such as infraction, offence, perpetrator, instigator, victim, altercation, and first-time offender. The use of criminal vocabulary strikes me as inappropriate when talking about children in school. But there are also instances in schools where parents and students use this language, and in this case, I have used the word victim in this way. I explain to demanding parents that decisions about disciplinary actions are done at the school and taken by the principal, the vice-principal or the teachers. In general, when parents demand that the school's administration discipline a student for misbehavior toward their child, they tend to ask for severe exclusionary consequences such as suspensions, transfers and even expulsions, wanting to protect their own child by keeping the misbehaving child away, which is unreasonable given that all students have a right to be in school and to learn from their mistakes. We see an example of this in my journal notes (2017):

> We [administration] try to make them [parents] understand that we are there to investigate, help, intervene, keep an eye, but it never seems to be enough; it is as if they want administrators to guarantee their child's safety, to accompany them everywhere, to act as a shield as they have at home. These types of parents drain a lot of my energy, as they are never happy about our interventions. It is as if they expect us to suspend students right away, because a student looks at another in a mean way while frowning and saying: "You're rude." Parents ask for other misbehaving students to be suspended, to be punished, but when it comes to their own children they will oppose that same decision.

I continue by saying to parents that we will work with the other student and his/her parents to avoid this situation from reoccurring. I understand that parents are the advocates of their own

children, but they do not seem to realize that the school's administration must care for hundreds of students, making sure that everyone gets a chance to learn from their mistakes and improve their behavior.

I have felt a certain distrust of parents towards school perhaps due to their own personal experience when they were a child and a student. I have heard many parents tell me and other administrators that they did not trust the school to care for their child and ensure their safety. Britzman (2003) suggests that there is an "overfamiliarity with the teaching profession" since we have all observed what teachers do and how they work as students ourselves. Britzman (2003) also points out that the relationship between students and teachers is "charged by the relations of power operating in compulsory contexts" (p. 27). I feel that this may have to do with their own perception of relationships and past experiences with government institutions, such as schools, or authority figures, such as principals. It is as if parents and schools did not agree on the same ways of raising and educating children based on their own feelings and memories, when they should be collaborating.

Chris, a high school principal, talks about "[…] the bad experiences that they [the parents] had with the schools themselves when they were young […] The parents did not believe that the school was a safe zone for them" and in turn, they feel the same way for their own children (interview, 2016). Richard, a high school principal, also shares that:

> […] families in those areas [lower income areas] have a skepticism or a dislike of formal government organizations. So sometimes dealing with them, there's a hostility that has nothing to do with discipline you're doing that day, it has to do with experiences in the education system and in government systems" (interview, 2016).

Trust, in any relationship, professional or personal, can disappear very quickly and it is very difficult to rebuild. Parents need to trust that a school will care for their child when they leave them on that first day of school. When the parents declare that they do not trust the school anymore, the partnership between both parties has been broken. The collaboration therefore becomes very difficult. Parents often take the discipline of their child very personally, like an attack on them, their values, the way they have educated their child. I have encountered a few cases of parents not trusting the school's administration anymore. In my experience, in extreme cases, parents tend to transfer their own child to another school.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I set out to demonstrate how different stakeholders in a school view the discipline of students in different ways based on their perceptions and past experiences (professional or personal). I have shown how the vice-principal deals with all of these varied perspectives each and every time he/she handles a disciplinary situation. In looking at how people view discipline differently, I am able to unpack the different perspectives in order to better understand where each stakeholder in a school stands and acts in a disciplinary situation. Teachers and administrators are clearly the executors of discipline but do not always view discipline in the same way. Even though disciplining methods and programs have evolved in more positive manners over time, administrators need to lead teachers in learning different ways to discipline children that can promote positive behaviors and interactions in the school in a more proactive and preventive way. In order to accomplish such an objective, more communication about expectations and discipline methods are needed between administration, teachers, students and parents. Everyone needs to be aware of the expectations and possible alternative consequences to detentions, transfers and expulsions. It is also essential to work as a team always

in the best interest of the students, not against each other, and especially not in order of pushing students out from school. In the next chapter, I will conclude my thesis by presenting my final findings and by exploring alternatives to suspensions, transfers and expulsions.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion:

Proposing Alternatives to Suspensions, Transfers and Expulsions

My research project began with an interest in zero tolerance policies in education in the United States and a desire to investigate if the criminally inclined methods of disciplining students in the United States had greatly influenced the disciplinary methods in schools in Montreal, Quebec. Fortunately, I have discovered through my research that schools in Montreal have not adopted zero tolerance policies to the same extent as in the United States; elementary students are not being arrested for bringing a knife in their lunch bag, police officers are not patrolling the school hallways, and metal detectors have not been installed at school entrances. When the term zero tolerance is used in Montreal, it often refers to a threatening misbehavior being undoubtedly unacceptable in school and criminal in our society (e.g., the use or sale of drugs, or a weapon being brought to school). When this occurs, a serious consequence such as a suspension, transfer or expulsion will ensue and the police will be contacted.

The focus of my research has been on the social organization of institutional policies that govern school discipline measures and practices used by school administrators and teachers in their everyday work with students. In addition to bringing greater visibility to the disciplinary landscape of public schooling in Montreal, this thesis finds that the biggest challenges to disciplining students are actually the teachers' resistance to changes in the disciplinary measures used, the differences of expectations between stakeholders concerned by the discipline of students, and the ways that informal learning processes and teacher/administrator discretionary

decision-making can result in biased and discriminatory discipline patterns, especially for students with behavior and learning difficulties, as well as for students of visible minorities.

Finally, in order to address the issues brought forth in my findings, I propose alternatives to suspensions, transfers and expulsions in school in Montreal. My aim is to present different ways for teachers, staff and administrators to teach students to behave appropriately and to connect with students in schools in a preventive manner, while moving away from exclusionary methods of disciplining children which are often used as reactive consequences.

What I Have Learned Through my Research

Teachers as agents of resistance. One of the findings of this research project is that the teachers are generally agents of resistance rather than being agents of change when it comes to disciplining students. The teachers of a school play a major role in setting and maintaining discipline practices and policies in a school. These practices and policies are historically passed down from one staff member, which may include an administrator, to the next and tend to remain the same over time. Teachers keep doing what they want and do the same thing year after year, especially is they feel it works well for them. In a school, administrators change more often than its core of teachers does. Therefore, teachers often have more influence on the school's culture and climate than an administrator does. However, there is a tendency for teachers to rely on administrators to take care of discipline for them. Although many teachers use a variety of disciplinary methods in their classes on a daily basis, when everything else fails, they tend to rely on administrators, mainly the vice-principal, to use exclusionary disciplinary measures such as suspensions and transfers to discipline students. When other more inclusive disciplinary measures are proposed, these are usually not well received by teachers and administrators are seen as being weak in their authority with misbehaving students.

Lobbying teachers for change takes time, energy, patience, and a particular skill to make them believe that not only change will be beneficial but that it comes from them, not from administrators. Teachers need to believe that change will benefit them and not add to their already heavy workload. Since teachers tend to be resistant to change, it must be done in a non-threatening way that will not judge their professional abilities negatively.

To help teachers open up to changes in disciplining students, I suggest that administrators generally discuss with staff members and teachers about how students should be disciplined progressively and inclusively, using a variety of disciplinary measures focusing on learning and prevention. It is recommended to rally a few teachers on staff who are open to change, who have some influence on other staff members and who try using different ways to discipline students. This can have a positive effect influencing teachers to attempt something new if they see that it has a positive effect for another colleague.

Different stakeholder views on discipline. My study suggests that in some schools, administrators and teachers seem to be on separate planets when it comes to disciplining students. My research shows that there is a disconnect between administrator expectations and teacher expectations when it comes to student discipline. On the one hand, teachers are expected be autonomous in dealing with misbehavior of their students in class as much as possible and on the other hand, teachers expect absolute support from administration when everything they have tried has failed. According to administrators, teachers must show that they have done everything possible to help their students improve their behavior before asking for help. Once teachers ask for help, teachers expect administrators to, in turn, use exclusionary disciplinary measures to remove the students from class. When this does not occur, this can contribute to a conflict between teachers and administrators.

As mentioned previously, the path to discipline is far from being a clear and simple one. Many mitigating factors come into play that cause a student to misbehave and an educator to discipline. The first divide is between teachers and administrators but there is also one between students and parents, and the school. Students are advocating more for their rights and wish their voice to be heard in the discipline process. They need to feel that they have been treated fairly and understand the reasoning behind a rule and/or a consequence. Parents are now defending their children unconditionally, hence not always supporting teachers and administrators in their disciplinary decisions, which makes collaboration more difficult in improving a child's behavior. Parents have also become more demanding when it comes to imposing consequences to other students who may have wronged their own child.

In all of these cases of disconnect between stakeholders, expectations of appropriate behavior and possible consequences must be clear from the beginning and discussions open on all sides, which is not always the case in schools in Montreal. A school's disciplinary process is often vague and left for teachers and students to figure out. I would also suggest that administrators explain more clearly to all stakeholders their central and mediating role in disciplinary issues involving various stakeholders. Finally, I would recommend that everyone learn to develop more empathy towards each other, a sense of community and an awareness of responsibility for all children in a school.

Biases through informal learning. Finally, the last finding of my research concerns how the informal learning processes can affect the teacher or administrator's discretionary decision-making, at times subjective, and can result in biased and discriminatory discipline patterns, especially for students with behavior and learning difficulties, and students from visible minorities as mentioned in Chapter 1. Since teachers and administrators are trained to do their

work informally through a social setting, language is used to transmit knowledge from one person to the next. This creates organizational knowledge that transforms into practices. It is then believed that this knowledge belongs to an employee and turns into common sense knowledge when it is in fact, common organizational knowledge that does not belong to an individual but remains the property of the school board. In fact, the school board controls this knowledge that is disseminated and learned by its employees and it becomes the ruling discourse in the workplace. The policies, procedures and knowledge learned are reproduced by compliant employees without question in an effort to be efficient. Time constraints prevent teachers and administrators to take the time needed with each child to support and help him/her fully. At times, this may encourage administrators to choose exclusionary disciplinary measures such as suspensions, transfers and expulsions, that are seen as efficient in sending a message to students and parents in a timely manner, but as I have explained in previous chapters, that affect students negatively by pushing them out of school, missing class time, falling behind on learning, and perhaps even dropping out of school altogether. Also, if educators do not take the time to address the root of the misbehavior, the student will likely continue to misbehave and be excluded further from school. It is important to note that these decisions to exclude students from school for misbehaviors that could have been prevented can be influenced by biases and discrimination learned and reproduced through other administrators or past administrators with a tough stance on discipline and assimilated by new administrators as they learn "how we do things here."

All of this social learning in education seems informal and disorganized when in fact, procedures, policies and knowledge are being reproduced in a similar manner in different schools and in different districts. This demonstrates a strong ruling discourse acquired as people learn to do their work trained by others who coach, mentor, and model the expected behaviors

from the organization. I suggest that administrators be critical of the use of exclusionary disciplinary measures and the biases associated with them. It is strongly recommended for administrators to take the time to question, reflect and evaluate the disciplinary measures, procedures and policies used in their schools and consider the effects that these may have on their students in the long run. This leads me to presenting one school wide disciplinary option that could be implemented across the board.

An Alternative to Suspensions, Transfers and Expulsions

School Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS). One promising model to address the issue of misbehavior in schools is by implementing a School Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (SWPBIS) model[2]. This approach "seeks to teach students appropriate behaviors that promote academic and social engagement by intentionally altering environmental contexts, including the behaviors of teachers and administrators, that may contribute to student misbehavior" (Skiba & Rausch, 2006a, p. 95). Chin et al. (2012) suggest that SWPBIS "emphasizes a proactive, learning, prevention approach to respond to behavior problems" as well as "teaching appropriate behaviors and setting forth clear behavior guidelines and expectations" (p. 160). According to the Technical Assistance Center on PBIS (2018) in the United States, "the broad purpose of PBIS is to improve the effectiveness, efficiency and equity of schools and other agencies". I believe that the word equity is very important in education, especially when schools commonly use exclusionary disciplinary measures as it fosters the value that students will be treated fairly in attempting to move away from biases and discrimination.

[2] In the literature, it is also referred to PBS or PBIS.

There is a clear need to show students to behave appropriately in a proactive manner instead of having staff surprised when students misbehave, think they should know better, and react negatively to the misbehavior. Some students do not actually know better. In fact, many students have not been taught at a younger age how to behave appropriately in previous classes or at home. This is why it so important for educators to share the responsibility with the families to proactively teach children to behave appropriately in school. The success of this solution depends on involving all staff members, students of all levels in a school, as well as parents and community members to teach and model school-appropriate behaviors in a common manner. All students can benefit from this holistic approach inside and outside the school setting. This approach provides the school the opportunity to prevent future misbehaviors as well as intervene early with a child who misbehaves and to neutralize the misbehavior before it gets out of hand and leads to exclusionary disciplinary measures.

Sugai and Horner (2009) suggest four elements of integration for a successful SWPBIS. First, data is collected and analyzed to detail the features of a problem, such as a high rate of suspensions given in a school year for minor misbehaviors, and to establish the most adequate measures that can be used to regularly monitor progress, such as administrators keeping track of the number of office referrals or suspensions. Second, school staff, students, parents and community members establish school objectives and priorities are established to address the identified problem. Third, specific interventions are selected by staff to achieve desired local outcomes. Lastly, organizational supports to the staff and students are put in place to implement a variety of interventions to address problems specific to the school (p. 228). Iselin (2010) reports that a collaborative relationship between parents and school is essential to the success of a SWPBIS program in a school. In my professional experience in disciplining students, if

parents do not collaborate with the school in disciplining students, success in improving a child's behavior can be compromised. The authors also propose that intervening early when a child misbehaves and knowing what to do or having multiple concrete interventions on hand will minimize the impact of a misbehavior. Finally, Iselin (2010) also suggests that it is important to address the causes of the misbehavior to be able to address it better. Flannery et al. (2012) also show that a misbehavior occurs for a reason and that it continues because the student gets something out of behaving this way. In my professional experience, I have often seen students act out in school reacting to dramatic events happening in their family, personal, or social life. For example, I worked with an elementary student who was being physically abused by his father and in return, he was physical with his classmates. Although his behavior was unacceptable in school, we knew he needed our support and time to improve his behavior.

According to Sugai and Horner (2009), when implementing a SWPBIS, the staff selects specific interventions that have proven to be effective and are applied "within five general school-based areas:

- school-wide (all students, families and staff)
- classroom (classroom routines, active supervision, academic engagement)
- non-classroom (active supervision, reminders, positive reinforcement)
- family (community and parental involvement)
- individual student (cognitive-behavioral counselling, person-centered planning, targeted social skills)" (p. 229).

***Concerns about SWPBIS*.** Despite the many positive attributes of the SWPBIS, Sugai and Horner (2009) express some concerns about implementing interventions within the SWPBIS framework that can affect the positive implementation of such a program. The first concern is

that interventions need to be integrated within a comprehensive school wide program versus a sporadic lesson here and there. All staff members in a school, led by the school's administration, must agree to implement the program as part of their teaching curriculum, and not treat it as simple content taught quickly in passing. It must be part of the school's vocabulary and message on a daily basis in all parts of the school (e.g., in daycare, classrooms, office, gymnasiums, hallways, cafeteria, etc.). The second concern suggests that professional development for staff must be "localized, continuous, embedded, and team driven" (p. 230) to be effective in implementing a SWPBIS. Staff need to build skills that matter to the school on a regular basis together with a school leadership team to coach them. They also have to be trained and supported on a regular basis. Another concern may be that this program takes many years to implement; this does not happen over one school year, nor in a few workshops, but over four to six years. Once a staff has agreed to take this project on, it is a long-term commitment that has to be accepted and lead by staff members who will carry on the program through administrative and staff changes. It becomes the new way of doing things at a school. Staff need to start small and build on what is already done in a school. This cannot be carried by one administrator, and certainly not a vice-principal in passing.

Additionally, some administrators and staff may believe that they are already addressing these issues, such as teaching students to behave appropriately one-on-one, but the impact is on a small scale, with a variety of inconsistent methods and can drain energy. In this manner, all individual efforts are disconnected and uncoordinated. If the entire school works in the same manner to take on the responsibility to teach all children, the load of discipline will be shared and the objective of improving students' behavior better accomplished. A final and very important concern is that the implementation of a SWPBIS program must be supported by all stakeholders

including the administration, school board and parents, but most importantly, a majority of the staff members (Handler et al., 2007). Some may believe that this approach may be another popular program being imposed on them and that it will pass with time like others before them. It is important to clearly communicate the intention behind implementing such a program based on school data, involvement of staff members, good training and coaching, administrator understanding of the approach, and good communication skills between all parties.

Finally, one important part of SWPBIS is that each student must be considered as the responsibility of each staff member in a school. For a school administrator, this is naturally the case, but for a teacher who usually focuses on one class group of 25-30 students, his/her perspective needs to widen. Every student at every level needs to be a concern for each staff member as each student matters and contributes to building a positive school atmosphere. This can be quite a challenge for an administrator to make staff understand and see the entire school as an entity, and convince each staff member of their role in contributing to improve behavior for all students, not just their own during one school year. This may seem like a huge endeavor for one school to take on.

I suggest that school boards need to take on an approach like SWPBIS to train, support, and coach all staff in each of their schools to apply this approach. This would relieve some pressure of school administration to lead, plan, train, and implement such an approach. The school board is a constant stakeholder while there are more changes in staff and administration in schools. We must stop presenting excuses for lack of time, energy and effort to invest. Kids are suffering personally, socially and academically. They need help to improve their behaviors and succeed academically and as educators, we have the obligation to find ways to offer a solution. Every year, there are more students with special needs and Individual Education Plans (IEP) in

our classes and our schools. There are some English and French schools in Montreal who have taken on a school wide approach to helping students improve behavior and in turn, improve academic success and personal well-being. School boards need to convince and engage administrators and staff in seeing the benefits of such approaches to improving behaviors and learning as a whole.

Other Suggested Alternatives

Building relationships. Although I professionally recommend a school-wide approach to address misbehaviors in a preventive manner, there are other disciplinary measures that can also be used to avoid the use of suspensions and expulsions in schools in Montreal. One suggestion is having staff members, especially teachers, connect with students. Iselin (2010) recommends that teachers and staff should have "regular contact with students" to help them reconnect with school (p. 4). Having regular contact means going beyond teaching to students but greeting them at the door, knowing their name quickly, inquiring about their interest, having conversations with them. Testerman (1996) found that "students leave school because they feel teachers are not interested in them or their success" (cited in Flannery et al., 2012, p. 132-133). I have a colleague who said one day that she felt that some teachers did not like their students. I found the comment harsh at the time but the more I thought about it, the more I came to realize that for some educators, this was unfortunately true. A student may not remember exactly what a teacher taught them but will definitely remember how they made them feel at the time. Being ignored when all students look for is validation is detrimental to their sense of worth, belonging and success. Being ignored pushes a student to disconnect from school when educators should be there to do everything possible to motivate students. To connect with students, staff can mentor, coach, advise, get to know students on a personal level, and ask students how they are doing, really.

Connecting with students does not necessitate training but rather some caring. Susan, a high school vice-principal, told me a story of a student who was very disruptive and defiant in class. After many interventions, detentions and discussions, she realized that this student was going through a difficult time in his personal life. Susan started showing genuine interest in how he was doing and she saw the student slowly change his ways and improve his behavior in class (interview, 2017). There are thousands of stories like this one and it just takes a few minutes to stop and ask how a student is really doing to make a difference, for an educator to show he/she cares. When I interviewed students who had graduated from high school, one of them mentioned that he felt like he did not matter for his teachers. He saw in their eyes that they had given up on him. It was as if he did not exist in their class (interview, 2017). In those circumstances, it was very difficult for him to hang on and remain in school. He moved to an Outreach school and thrived in a smaller setting where he felt he belonged and mattered. Every child should feel like he/she belongs in his/her school. Educators, teachers, administrators should not be pushing students out of schools.

I understand the reality of the education system that is overloaded and underfunded but, when it comes to a child, we have a collective responsibility to do everything we can to bring him/her to the finish line of high school graduation. Suspensions and expulsions disservice too many youth in our schools. I know that many school administrators and staff know about alternatives to suspensions but choose not to implement them. As Bear (2012) suggests that educators tend to reject these alternatives because they are considered as less effective and efficient, schools continue to impose the same exclusionary disciplinary measures without question. With this research project, I hope to bring administrators and staff to think about alternative ways to discipline students while keeping them in school learning and succeeding.

While at the same time, I realize how much time and energy an approach like SWPBIS requires to be successful but I believe with the appropriate support and training, administrators and their staff can shift a school's climate and children's overall educational success.

Focus group on discipline. Another way of improving the discipline process in a school is to organize a staff working group on disciplinary measures in school, or having conversations about the discipline process used in school. Teachers need to understand that these conversations are to be considered as formative, as a way of working together in order to improve the way things are done. In my experience, having discussions about the discipline of students does not happen often enough in schools. I suggest that a small group of teachers and staff members meet with administration on a regular basis to discuss the disciplinary issues and options in a school. Staff representatives would speak with their colleagues to get their insights and bring those back to the forum to share with administration and work together towards improving the discipline of students as a school team versus each teacher working on discipline independently from the others. Administrators are encouraged to do the same with their own colleagues. Difficult conversations without judgement need to happen.

Improving classroom management techniques. In addition, I suggest that teachers continue to be trained on a regular basis in "culturally sensitive and responsive classroom behaviour management and instruction (cultural competency should include understanding race, poverty and learning difficulties)" (Iselin, 2010). This can be driven by a staff member to be more convincing and it can be based on the specific needs of the school. Additionally, administrators need to create and lead a discussion group or a multi-disciplinary team on discipline policies in their schools, and communicate with teachers and parents about their expectations concerning disciplining students and explain their role as a mediator between all

stakeholders involved in disciplinary situations. Administrators have been exposed to more training in new ways of disciplining students in workshops and conferences. Administrators know about these alternatives but some choose not to implement or use them. It is therefore essential that administrators take the time to share with their staff positive ways to prevent and address misbehaviors in their schools. Moreover, school boards should take some of that responsibility and have a board-wide positive intervention program for all schools.

Other inclusive disciplinary measures. Finally, other suggestions of disciplinary measures may include disciplining with dignity, restorative justice, peer mediation, improving parental involvement, or implementing early screening procedures for risk factors. Bear (2012) suggests that a combination of disciplinary measures works best, especially for students who misbehave repeatedly. There is no one-size-fits-all when disciplining students. In parallel to supporting academic success, keeping students safe and promoting a healthy learning environment are key educational objectives. To achieve these objectives, a disciplinary system should be put in place that encourages and teaches students how to behave appropriately in school. A positive disciplinary system strives to keep students learning, both academically and behaviourally, in school instead of excluding them by sending them home where the chances of them learning a valuable lesson on their own are minimal.

Conclusion

This final chapter began with a presentation of my findings through this research project. As the chapter progressed, I presented a school-wide way to improve student's behavior by teaching them how to behave in an appropriate manner in school. I also presented other alternatives that teachers and administrators could integrate in their work with children on a daily

basis. This final chapter revolves primarily around positive alternatives to suspensions, transfers and expulsions.

As I conclude my thesis, I am reminded that children come first in my *business*. Educators must do everything possible with the resources made available to them to help children succeed personally and academically. Giving up on children and pushing them out of school are not an option. A more inclusive approach to disciplining students is required in order to teach students to behave appropriately in school, remain in class learning and succeeding. The word discipline comes from the Latin word *disciple*, which means to learn. Let's teach our students to behave appropriately in school and work together in doing so.

Some of my most difficult cases in disciplining misbehaving students have been my best "work in progress" in helping them behave more appropriately and make better choices in the future. When I sum up the work that I have done with this research project, I think of them. I dedicate this thesis to the students who misbehave in school and who are automatically excluded through suspensions, transfers and expulsions. They deserve more from teachers, school administrators and our education system; they deserve a place in school.

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