Schools, Cultural Mobility and Social Reproduction: The Case of Progressive Discipline

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Abstract: Drawing on a case study of Progressive Discipline (PD), this paper asks: How does greater discretion, flexibility and parent involvement affect the application of school policy? What are the consequences of these conditions? PD is part of a suite of changes that caters to students' individualized academic and social needs while formalizing increased parent involvement. Drawing on forty-four interviews with school staff members, we find that PD has the potential to enhance students' social and behaviour literacy. And yet, educators are unable to fully tame higher-SES (Socio-Economic Status) parents. According to our interviewees, higher-SES parents are more likely to participate in disciplinary proceedings, confront and threaten school staff and negotiate more favourable disciplinary outcomes for their children. Our paper contributes to cultural capital theory by examining how higher-SES families exploit "discretionary spaces" (i.e., opportunities that allow parents to improve their child's social, academic or disciplinary outcomes) in schooling organizations.

Keywords: cultural capital, cultural mobility, class reproduction, progressive discipline, school discipline

Résumé **:** En s'appuyant sur une étude de cas de mesures disciplinaires progressives (MDP), cet article pose la question : Comment une plus grande discrétion, souplesse et participation des parents influent sur la mise en pratique de la politique scolaire ? Quelles sont les conséquences de ces mesures ? Les MDP font partie d'une série de changements qui répondent aux besoins scolaires et sociaux individualisés des élèves, tout en formalisant la participation accrue des parents. À partir de quarante-quatre entretiens avec des membres du personnel œuvrant dans des écoles, nous constatons que les MDP ont le potentiel d'améliorer les habiletés sociales et comportementales des élèves. Pourtant, les éducateurs sont incapables de composer de façon satisfaisante avec les parents jouissant d'un statut socio-économique plus élevé. Selon les membres du personnel interviewés, il est plus probable que les parents de statut socio-économique plus élevé participent plus activement au suivi disciplinaire, confrontent et menacent le per-

sonnel de l'école et négocient des solutions disciplinaires plus favorables pour leurs enfants. Notre article contribue à la théorie du capital culturel en observant comment les familles de statut socio-économique plus élevé exploitent des « espaces discrétionnaires » (c'est à dire, les possibilités qui permettent aux parents d'améliorer les résultats sociaux, académiques ou disciplinaires de leur enfant) dans les organisations scolaires.

Mots clés : le capital culturel, la mobilité culturelle, la reproduction des classes sociales, la discipline progressive, la discipline scolaire

Introduction

Cultural capital theory has enhanced our understanding of complex relationships between schooling, families and social class. The literature has evolved from examining the intersection between high-status culture and schools (Bourdieu and Passerson 1977) to how parental resources and practices generate inequality (Lareau 2011; Lamont and Lareau 1988). These recent developments have largely focused on how families transmit advantages to their children through class-based institutional and intergenerational processes (Demerath 2009; Kraaykamp and Van Eijck 2010; Lareau 2011; Roksa and Potter 2011) that are rooted in different "cultural logics of child rearing" (Lareau 2011; but also Di-Maggio 1982; De Graaf et al. 2000; Demerath 2009; Kohn 1969, 1977; and Kohn and Schoenbach 1993).

Our paper offers a unique empirical contribution to this literature by examining how key school actors — principals, teachers and child and youth workers — respond to these parenting practices. Drawing on a case study of Ontario's Progressive Discipline and School Safety policy (PD), this paper asks: How does more discretion, flexibility and parent involvement affect the application of school policy? And what are the consequences?

Rooted in Progressive Pedagogy, PD has recently replaced the *Safe Schools Act* (or "zero-tolerance") as the official approach to student discipline in Ontario public schools. Described below, "zero tolerance" removes teacher and principal discretion and imposes automatic and standardized punishment. Such policies do not allow teachers to vary the punishment according to extenuating circumstances (e.g., recent loss of a grandparent) or the severity of the act (e.g., a push compared to a punch).

PD, on the other hand, gives school staff (e.g., teachers, principals, child and youth workers) a tremendous amount of discretion and allows them to take a variety of considerations into account when determining

the duration and severity of disciplinary measures. The policy affords parents opportunities to participate in disciplinary proceedings, work closely with school staff to improve their child's behaviour and negotiate appropriate interventions.

Our research findings are mixed, and suggest that policies offering the promise of high levels of discretion, flexibility and parent involvement (such as PD) need to take into account newer and more elaborate parenting practices. On one hand, practices consistent with PD policy appear to have the potential to encourage cultural mobility by exposing lower-SES students to the values, behaviours and skill sets that are needed to comply with schools' standards of behaviour. For example, students not only *learn* but also have an opportunity to *practice* reasoning, negotiation and problem solving skills. In addition, they gain confidence from interacting with authority figures. These skills reflect a middle-class cultural logic of child rearing that is seen to facilitate children's successful movement through dominant institutions and the world of work (Lareau 2007, 2011; Lareau and Weininger 2003; see also Khan 2011; Kohn 1969, 1977; and Kohn and Schoenbach 1993). From this vantage point, the freedom to work closely with students, and modify practices in accordance with student and family circumstances, appears to benefit lower-SES students. On the other hand, PD also allows higher-SES parents to effectively negotiate more favourable disciplinary outcomes for their children. Consequently, educators believe that lower-SES students receive harsher punishments and are disproportionately channelled into alternative education programs. Educators are not trying to systematically disadvantage lower-SES students, but rather are trying to avoid conflict and, in some cases, legal action when confronted with particularly demanding higher-SES parents.

Our analysis presents empirical insight into the transmission of advantages within schooling organizations and builds on an emerging area of cultural capital research that attunes us to the manner in which higher-SES families exploit "discretionary spaces" in schooling organizations (Davies 2013). "Discretionary spaces" is a term used to describe opportunities, either intentionally or unintentionally built into school policies, for such parents to participate, inform or manipulate educational processes or outcomes. Higher-SES parents are better equipped to take advantage of these opportunities, and we argue that this represents a newer source of cultural capital and inequality in schooling organizations.

Literature review

For decades, researchers have found persistent disparities in educational success between higher- and lower-SES youth (Conley and Albright 2004; Davies and Maldonado 2009; Krahn 2004; Roscigno et al. 2006; Sweet and Anisef 2005; Willms 2002, 2009; Wotherspoon 2009). Higher-SES students are more likely to receive good grades, graduate high school and enter post-secondary education. Few scholars dispute these findings. There is far more debate, however, about the sources of these gaps.

The literature can be roughly divided into examinations of "family" versus "school" effects. Family effect versions of cultural capital theory focus the potential ability of schooling organizations to compensate for disparities at home. At the other end of the continuum, social reproduction versions of cultural capital focus on schools, insisting that educators systematically reproduce inequality by providing superior learning opportunities for affluent children (e.g., Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Bowles and Gintis 1976; Willis 1977).

Cultural mobility versions of cultural capital theory

Cultural mobility versions of cultural capital theory highlight the importance of families, and their ongoing participation in activities that strengthen children's literacy and numeracy skills, oral communication and study habits (e.g., De Graaf et al. 2000; Hertzman 2009; Kingston 2001; Willms 2002, 2009). This perspective views schools as a compensatory rather than reproducing force, providing students with an alternative source of cultural capital.

Two main empirical findings have been substantiated with this literature: First, the research helped debunk the earlier version of cultural capital by demonstrating that few teachers systematically reward high-status cultures and linguistic competencies attributed to middle- and upper-middle-class forms of child rearing. In short, this research has found that teachers tend to favour students who do their homework, have mastery of the material, communicate well, and are polite. Highbrow cultural pursuits are consequential only if they also stimulate abstract thinking, pique intellectual curiosity or enhance verbal and written ability (De Graaf et al. 2000; Katsillis and Rubinson 1990).

Second, the research has shown that children learn cultural capital-enhancing skills not only from families, but also from schools. This literature has found that lower-SES children tend to benefit more from cultural capital-enhancing activities at home and in the school (e.g., De

Graaf et al. 2000; Dumais 2006; Lareau 2007). Research in this tradition has documented the ways in which schools teach skills and practices that contribute to school success (e.g., Alexander et al. 2007; DiMaggio 1982; Downey et al. 2008).

Social reproduction versions of cultural capital theory

Earlier versions of cultural capital theory focused on social reproduction and schools, examining whether education institutions actively reward elite-status cultures (e.g., Bourdieu 1984; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). In these analyses, families played a role in so far as they socially conditioned children to dominant values, preferences, practices, and skill sets. This earlier interpretation has been widely criticized for its over-emphasis on highbrow culture, particularly in the absence of empirical evidence demonstrating that teachers systematically punish students who lack the requisite tastes or consumption patterns (Kingston 2001; Lamont and Lareau 1988). Research conducted in Canada and the United States has also failed to empirically demonstrate connections between parental education, highbrow cultural capital and children's academic achievement (De Graaf et al. 2000; DiMaggio 1982; Katsillis and Rubinson 1990).

Recent advancements in cultural capital literature have compensated for these earlier shortcomings, with the result that there is now a focus on families. Lower-SES families have fewer resources at their disposal; they tend to raise their children differently (Lareau 2011); talk to their children less (Hart and Risley 1995); participate in fewer structured after school and weekend activities; and tend to incorporate fewer activities that develop their children's literary and numeracy skills (Council of Ministers of Education Canada 2013). Not surprisingly, lower-SES children are less likely to enter kindergarten "school ready", they receive lower grades, they are less likely to graduate from high school and enter post-secondary, and are more vulnerable to "summer setback," a term used to describe the loss of numeracy and literacy skills over summer vacation (Alexander et al. 2007). This body of scholarship has made substantial theoretical and empirical contributions to our understandings of the "micro-interactional processes whereby individuals' strategic use of knowledge, skills, and competence to effectively align with the institutionalized standards of schooling" in a manner that generates class-based inequalities (Lareau and Weininger 2003: 569).

These advancements can be attributed, at least in part, to Lareau's (2002, 2011; Lareau and Weininger 2003) path-breaking research. Lareau famously coined the terms "concerted cultivation" and "ac-

complishment of natural growth" to differentiate two cultural logics of child rearing. Concerted cultivation forms of parenting are grounded in an evolving conception of child development articulated by new professionals in medicine, psychology, social work and educational fields. Although this form of parenting is not inherently middle-class, higher-SES parents are more likely to practice it while actively teaching and modelling behaviours and skills that comply with schools' standards of behaviour. These lessons include problem solving, critical thinking and negotiation skills. Importantly, this approach subscribes to a philosophy of parenting that demands the ongoing and incremental cultivation of children's emotional, social and cognitive development.

Alternatively, working-class and poor parents are more likely to adopt the accomplishment of natural growth approach to parenting. This approach is less invasive and allows children to develop more organically. Unlike concerted cultivation, parents who subscribe to the natural growth approach see a sharper divide between home and school: they provide food and shelter, and schools supply more direct forms of cognitive stimulation. While this approach has many benefits (e.g., less hectic schedules and stressed out children), she argues that it is "out of synch with the standards of institutions" such as schools. These disparities tend to be associated to other types of deficits that begin long before children start school (e.g., Krahn 2004; Sayer et al. 2004; Statistics Canada 2007; Willms 2009).

Lareau and Weininger (2003) have called for research to identify not only how parents align with schools, but also the formal and informal standards educators use to evaluate students and their parents. While Lareau and others have examined the former, researchers have not sufficiently explored how parental cultural capital affects both their professional decision-making and the application of school policies. Instead, the relative success of higher-SES children serves as evidence that educators are highly attuned and responsive to this model of child rearing and that such parents must simply be better at manipulating institutional processes. Our paper starts to fill in this gap.

As documented below, we trace how policies generate mixed results that potentially generate new sources of inequality for lower-SES students. PD is seen to improve children's ability to engage successfully with their peers, cope with stressful situations and interact with authority figures in a manner that aligns with cultural mobility versions of cultural capital. These potential benefits, however, are overshadowed to some degree by the continuation and elaboration of higher-SES parenting practices. In our discussion, we bridge our findings to wider policy changes in education and to emerging developments in the cultural capital literature.

Methods

This paper draws on interview data with principals and staff working for the Manchester School Board in Southern Ontario, Canada (2010-2011). The school board was selected as a research site because of geographic proximity to the researchers. Manchester is responsible for approximately 60,000 students, 3500 teaching staff and 2000 support staff. To gain access to interview participants, an ethics application was submitted to the school board research ethics committee. We were able to attend a meeting held by the committee prior to approval, thus affording us the opportunity to discuss our research in greater depth. By the meeting's conclusion our application had been approved, with the committee identifying a person at the board office who would facilitate our data collection.

To generate a sample of participating schools, we provided our board contact with a letter informing educators about this study, as well as inviting their participation in an interview. Our contact then sent out a system-wide memo, and included our letter as an attachment. He also contacted several principals directly to encourage their participation. Following this initial communication, we contacted school principals asking them to participate in an interview and for access to interview their staff. Our board contact also identified a number of staff working within the school board office and in alternative education programs who would provide valuable insight.[1] Again, our contact initiated communication with these individuals; we followed up by contacting them directly and asking them to participate in an interview.

In total, forty-four interviews with principals, teachers and staff (e.g., social workers) in thirteen schools and two alternative education program sites were conducted. The interviews were broken down this way: thirteen principals; five vice-principals; six teachers; three child and youth workers; a special education assistant; a behavioural education assistant; two guidance councillors; four staff members from the school board; and a program facilitator from an alternative education program.

In some cases, multiple interviews were conducted. The principals and staff hailed from a variety of sites including: three junior schools (JK-grade 6); three composite schools (JK-8); four senior schools

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1. Students who have been given a full expulsion (expelled from all mainstream schools in Ontario) complete Ministry-approved alternative education programs and only return to mainstream school when the program's staff determines they are ready. Interviewees described these as intensive behaviour-intervention programs which provide an alternative school setting and structure for students struggling within mainstream education.

(Grades 7-8 or 6-8); three high schools (grade 9-12); two alternative education program sites; and the school board office.

The first author also spent over a hundred hours volunteering at one of the participating schools, serving as the "breakfast lady" every Monday during the 2010-2011 school year and attending fundraising and school events. She also conducted thirteen one-on-one interviews and focus groups with sixteen students. Through these ongoing activities, she was able to engage in informal discussions with staff and students, gaining their trust and a deeper understanding of the context of school-based decision-making.

Interviews ranged from one to three hours and were digitally recorded with the permission of the participants. All names and identifiable information were changed to protect the confidentiality of the participants. Pseudonyms reflect the gender of the participant and were selected from a "Top 100 Baby Names of 2013" website. The interview schedule was broken down into three main sections. The first section examined educators' knowledge, perceptions of, and experiences with zero-tolerance and progressive forms of discipline policies. The second section examined how PD policies were applied and practiced. Finally, to examine the impact of schooling practices on individual student outcomes, the third section of the interview schedule asked specific questions about how disciplinary strategies, plans and practices shape teachers' and students' schooling experiences and learning objectives.

To analyze the interview data, we used NVivo 7. We first coded the interview data descriptively, using the interview schedule as our guideline. We then moved these responses into more abstract, theoretically-informed nodes using two simultaneous strategies: one based on pre-established theories, and the other on an open-coding scheme that inductively added free and tree nodes as they emerged from the data (Saldaña 2009). As we sharpened our theoretical lens, the data was further subdivided into tree nodes to capture the complexity of interviewee responses.

Based on this strategy, we were able to move to a theoretically-driven master code of capital which was further sub-divided into responses related to cultural reproduction and cultural mobility. Broadly, capital included statements about how respondents felt that educator practices, aligned with progressive discipline policies, benefitted lower-SES students, as well as how respondents recognized that higher-SES students received less severe punishments, were less often channelled into alternative education programs, and had parents who sought to "work" or navigate the schooling system to the benefit of their children in disciplinary situations.

The central findings of the paper are shared by most of our interviewees. We did not originally include questions about social class in the interview schedule. Many of these insights, especially during the early stages of interviewing, emerged organically and spontaneously as staff discussed the problems and challenges associated with PD. Such observations were expressed by a range of professionals in our sample, from principals and vice-principals to child and youth workers. When we selected quotes, our intention was to not only select the most representative quotes, but also to capture the range of professionals we interviewed.

Background: the evolution of disciplinary policies in Ontario

Zero-tolerance discipline policies enjoyed a rapid ascent during the 1980s and 1990s, fuelled by public concern for school safety. Zero-tolerance is a non-discretionary, deterrent approach to discipline. Originating in the military and criminal justice system, these policies were intended to deal with violent and disruptive school offenses (Adams 2000; Suvall 2009) and included more direct forms of surveillance (e.g., gun detectors), codes of conduct (e.g., dress codes) and mandatory punishments that were universally imposed. As quickly as these policies developed, researchers and the public began to voice concerns, linking zero-tolerance to a wide range of negative outcomes that included increased rates of suspension and expulsions and encouragement of a "school to prison pipeline" (Dinkes et al. 2009; Gottfredson and Gottfredson 2001; Suvall 2009).

Like other jurisdictions, Ontario initially embraced zero-tolerance disciplinary policies. In 2000, the Ontario Ministry of Education introduced the *Safe Schools Act* or Bill 81, which mandated strict rules for student behaviour and mandatory punishments. Bill 81 was criticised for removing teacher discretion, and The Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) initiated complaints against the Ontario Ministry of Education[2], accusing the policy of inequitable and discriminatory treatment of visible minorities and students with disabilities.

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2. Terms of Settlement-Ontario Human Rights Commission and the Ministry of Education, online: Ontario Human Rights Commission (access date March 21, 2013) http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/resources/news/edsettlementen

In response, The Education Amendment Act (or Bill 212): *Progressive Discipline and School Safety* was introduced in 2007.[3] Bill 212 emphasises prevention and intervention strategies, as well as flexibility and discretion in determining appropriate discipline. As reflected in the policy's name, interventions progressively escalate to reflect the disciplinary situation involved, the frequency of behavioural issues as well as what is known about the student and his/her family.

PD has three main stages:

- The promotion of positive behaviours and preventative strategies.
- Early intervention and attempts to help students identify and replace negative behaviours with positive behaviours.
- Interventions that include addressing mental, physical, social, behavioural, and family environmental influences that may encourage problematic behaviour.

Ongoing support, discussion-based discipline, student participation and professional discretion are the hallmark characteristics of PD. Through the PD process, students and their parents are offered multiple levels of support in the form of social workers, child and youth workers, psychologists, speech and language pathologists, special education teachers, behavioural specialists and specialized programs. Students are included in the process, becoming active participants in defining the contours of problematic behaviours and reasonable punishments. Importantly, educators are encouraged to use their professional judgment to consider mitigating factors and students' personal circumstances and biographies when selecting the most appropriate way to address individual student behaviour.

Cultural mobility: calibrating student behaviours

> The problem is some of these kids grow up in an environment where that's how things are dealt with. You just punch the crap out of somebody, and that's how they deal with life… (Lexie, Child and Youth Worker)

3. To support the legislative amendments to the Education Act, a number of policy/program memoranda (PPM) were introduced - PPM No. 128: The Provincial Code of Conduct and School Board Codes of Conduct, October 2007; PPM No. 141: School Board Programs for Students on Long-Term Suspension, August 2007; PPM No. 142: School Board Programs for Expelled Students, August 2007; PPM No. 144: Bullying Prevention and Intervention, October 2009; PPM No. 145: Progressive Discipline and Promoting Positive Student Behaviour, October 2009

While zero-tolerance was seen to manifest inequality along race and class lines, PD was designed to inspire cultural mobility. While not a uniquely lower-class phenomenon, our educators mirrored findings from other studies when they articulated social class variations in students' and parents' ability to comply with schools' behaviour expectations (e.g., Kohn 1969, 1977; Lareau 2011; Lareau and Weininger 2003). As Lareau described, higher-SES parents are more likely to adopt a form of parenting that utilizes ongoing discussions, reasoning and negotiation. Higher-SES children are also encouraged to interact with people in positions of authority more often, and gain a degree of comfort and confidence in professional settings. This approach not only curries favour with educators, but allows these children to effectively align with schools and other institutions (e.g., Demerath 2009; Lareau 2011; Lareau and Weininger 2003). Our findings suggest that interviewees believe PD imparts concerted cultivation sensibilities and generates cultural mobility among lower-SES students by teaching them how to align with dominant behavioural standards, and how to more effectively interact with authority figures.

Teaching students behavioural and social literacy

Compared to the *Safe Schools Act* (or zero-tolerance), progressive discipline subscribes to the method of "discussion-based discipline" by engaging students in conversations about rules and expectations. Students participate in formulating classroom rules and determining appropriate disciplinary outcomes. All of our interviewees believe that the practice of discussion-based discipline has had the greatest impact on student learning and outcomes of behaviour modification.

As Ashley (the principal of North-Western Senior School) described it, teachers guide students through the stages of mediating conflict, including self-awareness, empathy and problem-resolution:

> The foundation is respect, for kids to understand the impact of their actions on others and to try and make it right, 'This is what you've done, how do you think other people feel about what you've done?' And many times they really aren't aware. 'How are you going to fix it, you've really got a problem. How are you going to fix it?' And then supporting the child through that process and mediating the conflict.

Similarly, students are encouraged to "come to terms with their own feelings" in a constructive and supportive environment. As Sally (a Grade 6 teacher) explained, students learn how to confront and articulate their feelings, and "exude appropriate behaviour":

> I think having to talk about it and deal with it, a kid then has to come to terms with some of their own feelings and their own behaviour, and understand and explain it. That's not always easy for an adolescent. That becomes more work for them and frankly it becomes easier just to exude appropriate behaviour. It's much easier to behave than have a discussion about it.

Discussion-based approaches also neutralize the power imbalance that characterizes more traditional forms of discipline. "Group" sessions, a strategy offered through alternative education programs, provide the most striking example of how educators attempt to empower students to effectively problem-solve and develop critical-thinking and language skills. These practices are seen to parallel concerted cultivation child rearing techniques (Lareau 2011; Lareau and Weininger 2003).

Alternative education programs target students who lack fundamental social, emotional and behavioural competencies. While the programs offer curriculum-based learning, the primary focus is on non-academic issues such as developing conflict resolution skills and coping strategies. Within Group sessions, educators guide conversation but refrain from direct instructional strategies. As Tyler, an alternative education teacher explained, Group is a student-led "integrated" process that is an exercise in "empathy as well as discipline." Armed with these skills, educators argue that lower-SES students are better equipped to cope with stressful situations, engage in constructive negotiations, and understand the consequences of their actions.

Improving advocacy skills and confidence

Beyond learning social and behavioural standards, part of discussion-based discipline also includes teaching students how to engage professionals or authority figures in a constructive manner. Tyler, the educator quoted above, further described that these exercises improve lower-SES students' interactions with authority figures, including the school administration. This training was seen to help students advocate on their own behalf, both within and outside of schools.

For example, Chris, a child and youth worker, described how he "trained" students to work with inflexible teachers:

> I like to work with students when they're dealing with a teacher who is inflexible. So there's training you do with students. 'So OK, that person is probably not going to change. So what can we do differently to make it work, to work around the problem teacher?' It's sad because is almost saying to the kid, 'OK, you're going to have to be the parent, like when you're at home or you're having issues with any adult.' So the problem is the teacher.

Unlike higher-SES parents, educators told us that lower-SES parents are less likely to understand how to work effectively within institutions such as schools and, therefore, are not able to teach these skills to their children (see Lareau 2011). Educators believe that PD provides them with the opportunity to teach lower-SES students how to work within the existing school system. Beyond the school walls, educators described how PD improves other institutional outcomes by offering such students and families multiple levels of support. For example, educators discussed helping lower-SES families learn how to navigate through health and medical institutions, including access to specialists such as psychologists, speech and language pathologists, psychiatrists, special education teachers, behavioural specialists, social workers, and child and youth workers.

   Educators also helped families and students learn how to constructively engage with police officers, probation officers, and security officers. Educators described routinely drawing on their status as professionals working within the education system to improve institutional outcomes for students. It's important to note, however, that embedded in this process is a clear understanding that lower-SES students and families must take responsibility for the process and learn how to effectively negotiate with authority figures.

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> I think we're still singling out some groups more than others, and there's no way to track it. I know there are marginalized groups that don't do well in education generally, (and) I suspect that the same is true with behaviour. And I know that informally, through the number of problems that come to my door, that the same is true with behaviour (Peter, Principal, Riverside School).

Beyond its cultural mobility potential, our interviewees initially described PD as "fairer" and more "equitable" than zero-tolerance policies. When reflecting on the policy, however, they also believe that lower-SES students receive harsher punishments and are disproportionately channelled into alternative education programs. While zero-tolerance (Bill 81) left educators with little discretion, our interviewees discussed how the hallmark characteristics of PD — discretion, flexibility and opportunities for parent involvement — unintentionally allows parents, particularly higher-SES parents, to "work" or "game" the system. Not only are such parents able to downgrade the severity of their child's offense,

but the policy provides administrators with few tools to justify harsher punishments when confronted with demanding and litigious parents. Such actions compromise the cultural mobility potential of progressive discipline.[4]

Discretion, flexibility and parent involvement: advantages and disadvantages

Unlike zero-tolerance, PD allows teachers to bend behavioural standards to accommodate student circumstances and individualize student treatment. Our interviewees routinely discussed the benefits of discretion to "modify our discipline policies to reflect the types of students that we get" and "keep in mind what's going on with them" (Danielle, Vice Principal, Alternative Education Program). Describing a student who routinely came in late, Danielle explained the importance of understanding his needs, compromising, and most importantly, keeping him in school:

> I don't like coming down on them because that's what these kids have experienced: having authority figures coming down on them and telling them they're screw ups or whatever…So I try to work with them and make small steps. He's coming late five days a week. We sat down and he signed a student contract. He signed it and I signed it. We agreed he would come on time 2-3 days a week. So we're not going from five late days a week to zero, we're working with him. We both agreed that that was achievable for him, and now we are going to try tomorrow and see what happens … it is always about working with them and finding a solution together and taking those steps. But removing them from school is only the last resort. We want to keep them here.

Our interviewees, however, feel that greater discretion, flexibility and parent involvement generates unequal punishments that they believe vary along social class lines. The interviewees told us that higher-SES parents are more likely to challenge teachers and principals and tend to

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4. U.S. research suggests that students living in poverty are more likely to be removed from school as a result of disciplinary measures (American Academy of Pediatrics 2003; Petras et al. 2011). At this time, Ontario does not systematically collect information on the characteristics of students who are suspended, expelled or moved into alternative education programs including by race, ethnicity, religion or social class. Consequently, the available research on this topic is based on qualitative data (e.g., see Ruck and Wortley 2002). We recognize that we are unable to conclusively argue that lower-SES children are disproportionally suspended, expelled or placed into alternative education programs. In the absence of quantitative data, however, drawing on the experiences and perceptions of principals, teachers and other support staff is a credible source of information.

have more experience in negotiating (or bending) institutional rules. As Debbie (a Special Education Consultant) explained, higher-SES "parents sometimes have a strong role in advocating with how things happen within the system." Such "advocating" includes having a clear understanding of how schools work, and the fortitude to negotiate the terms of disciplinary procedures. Our interviewees explained that not all parents understand that they have the right to participate in a pre-hearing conference to consider alternative disciplinary options prior to student expulsion, or even the right to appeal a particular disciplinary outcome in the first place. Higher-SES parents are more likely to understand how such procedures work and participate in the pre-hearing conference. Consequently, several of our interviewees believe that lower-SES students are disproportionately channelled into alternative education programs for expelled students (i.e., the most severe form of punishment). Ryan, a facilitator at the Aurelia Court Alternative Education Program, made this observation:

> Something you should note in your research and something that needs to be said out loud, it would be interesting to look at the socio-economic data about our students, because the kids who don't fight expulsion, tend to not have the resources to fight expulsions. Whereas the kids who fight expulsions tend to win, and they don't come here. So you can imagine what that looks like in terms of the strata, in terms of the kids and the resources.

"Resources" cited by our interviewees that allow parents to more fully and effectively participate in disciplinary proceedings include: flexibility to leave work and attend a school disciplinary proceeding; confidence to stand up to school officials; ability to hire a lawyer to assist the family in negotiating disciplinary outcomes; personal contacts within the school system who can assist parents from the inside; and knowledge about how schooling organizations work more generally.

As many researchers have observed, higher-SES families are more likely to possess these resources and are more likely to have the skill set to effectively utilize these resources to their children's advantage (e.g., Demerath 2009; Lareau 2011; Stevens 2001).

Family resources play a role not only in the severity of the punishments described above, but also the range of disciplinary outcomes that are considered in the first place. Principals, who ultimately decide disciplinary actions, discussed how their knowledge about the family invariably influences their decision making. One principal noted how he protects himself from reprisal: "Maybe (with) one student I have to be more careful, (but with another) maybe not so much" (David, Principal, Parkville Avenue school). When discussing higher-SES parents, he de-

scribed how these parents will take a courtroom approach and search for a "technicality" to avoid disciplinary measures:

> They will deflect what their child has done and will come in because they have issue with how things were handled, maybe that I didn't ask the same question of all the kids…So in order to avoid that pointless discussion, you have to make sure you have followed strict procedure because you will be challenged in it right away. I liken it to a court system where someone had thrown it out, based on a technicality. Parents will act like a lawyer and look for a technicality. And that's when they'll call a superintendent or take a suspension to an appeal process or whatever. There are more threats about legal action these days, about suing, and people will throw those cards out almost as leverage.

David, like the other principals we interviewed, does not automatically downgrade punishments for higher-SES students, particularly for more egregious offences. However, David also considers the degree to which he believes a particular decision "will come back to haunt [him]." When moving forward on a potentially difficult case, David attempts to mitigate challenges and threats of legal action by asking student witnesses and participants to provide signed written statements about the details of an event in question. He also interviews these students, and even asks them to re-enact the event. In the case of very young students, David asks students to draw pictures of what transpired. David then goes over each student's documentation of the event during one-on-one interviews, making detailed notes. Such measures take hours of preparation and do not necessarily reduce potential challenges and threats from higher-SES parents.

While the role of parents and educators is greatly limited with zero-tolerance, it flourishes in the context of PD. These conditions — discretion, flexibility and parent involvement — create conditions that unintentionally generate an uneven application of the policy. Below we extend our findings to wider policy changes in education and to emerging developments in the cultural capital literature.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Progressive discipline is part of two inter-related shifts in education policy. First, PD is part of a broader philosophical and pedagogical move toward "progressive" forms of schooling designed to support students'

individual academic, social, emotional, and behavioural learning needs (Davies 2002: 271).[5]

Second, PD is part of a suite of changes that institutionalizes parental participation. The wholesale endorsement of greater parent involvement has generated new policies and programs, endorsements on official websites and funding. It has also led to the creation of various kinds of parent engagement professionals who work in an official capacity for school boards and ministries of education. Such policies are part of a broader shift in education toward making schooling processes more "inclusive" by including parents at various stages of decision making, positioning them as "partners", and recognizing that parents want a more customized approach to their children's schooling (Furstenberg 2011; McNeal 2012).

For several decades, education policies have incrementally expanded the scope of parental power and advocacy (e.g., Ong-Dean 2009). Ideally, more progressive and inclusive policies such as PD recognize that "one-size fits all" policies leave many parties dissatisfied, and that parents *should* be included in key decisions, particularly decisions that directly relate to their children. Importantly, such approaches are meant to take into account the diversity of contexts, perspectives and student circumstances. The expansion of parental rights has occurred across Canada (e.g., Ontario Ministry of Education 2010, 2012), and also in several other countries such as the United States (U.S. Department of Education 2007) and Australia (Australian Government 2012). These two shifts dovetail with the well-documented philosophical change in child rearing practices that are not only more intensive and elaborate, but that also see parents as primarily responsible for their children's academic outcomes (see Hays 1996; Lareau 2011; Quirke 2006).

What do these shifts potentially mean for social inequality? Technically, all parents have the right to intervene and advocate — but the question becomes *which* parents actually can and do take advantage of these

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5. In particular, at the more intensive stages of PD, alternative education programs focus on comprehensive social and behavioural rehabilitation strategies that aim to help students integrate back into mainstream schools. As described by Ryan, an alternative education program facilitator, "You're not expelled for academics, you're expelled for social emotional and behavioural issues … We tell kids, 'You didn't get expelled because you weren't performing in English class. You got expelled because you brought a knife to school, or you were dealing drugs, or you stab somebody, or you beat someone up in the community, or were involved in a sexual assault' … 'you won't go back [to your home school] because of credits, you go back to your home school because of performing socially, emotionally, and behaviourally.' When we see that maintained over time, they're ready to go [back to mainstream school]."

opportunities, and what is the relative effectiveness of such actions. In the case of PD, while the policy is designed to compensate for social and behavioural deficits, educators are unable to fully tame parents who understand how to effectively use their institutional knowledge in ways that advantages their children involved in disciplinary processes. According to our interviewees, higher-SES parents are more likely to participate in disciplinary proceedings, confront authority figures in schools and negotiate more favourable disciplinary outcomes for their children. Others have similarly written about how higher-SES parents exploit programs and policies to their children's advantage. Ong-Dean (2009), for example, found that higher-SES parents are particularly good at making "effective claims about their children's disabilities and related needs" and more often access services and programs that greatly improve their children's school success. Consequently, students in special education programs have very different experiences, placement and outcomes. Demerath (2009) documents how higher-SES parents shamelessly game competitive processes through the proliferation of awards. These parents also work behind the scenes to get their children into the "right" special education classes — not necessarily because their children have a learning disability, but because such classes provide additional supports and accommodations. In their study of American college students, Armstrong and Hamilton (2013) explore how social class affects students' experience of college life, and ultimately the consequences of their choices. Their research demonstrates that even when students have access to the same program and institutional supports, higher-SES students are simply better at exploiting social and academic opportunities (also see Mullen 2010; Radford 2013).

We use Davies' term "discretionary spaces" to capture policy and program openings and opportunities that parents can access, and how they do so with varying degrees of success (2013). As we have reviewed above, cultural capital theory has evolved from examinations of highbrow culture, to how parental resources, practices and alignment with the institutionalized standards of schooling generate class-based inequalities. Like these newer innovations to the cultural capital literature, we document a newer source of "active capital" that demands high amounts of parental knowledge and agency (Looker 1994). Beyond helping with homework, supporting children's academic and social development, and institutionally aligning with schools, parents' ability to seek out and effectively exploit social and academic opportunities or ameliorate a particular outcome represents a powerful source of cultural capital, one that we have argued can have serious consequences. The ability to exploit discretionary spaces is a more recently acknowledged aspect of what it

means to possess cultural capital, and is potentially just as powerful as other parental resources or investments. While higher-SES parents have always been relatively good at finding ways to give their children "a leg up," the institutional and policy conditions (e.g., more flexibility, greater parent involvement) have never been more favourable.

This approach moves beyond more simplistic cultural deficit and school-bias accounts and instead documents the way in which parents intervene and manipulate institutional processes — even those that are intended to encourage greater access and fairness. What our research suggests is that newer forms of inequality go beyond readily observable and standardized school policies. Such policies have long been over-hauled to reduce these problems, and great efforts have been made to accommodate students' needs and compensate for various kinds of so-cial and economic disparities. And while relative disparities in attain-ment have persisted since the 1970s, aggregate school attainments have risen markedly, even among the working class and poor, casting doubt on older "cultural deficit" explanations.

Instead, schooling inequalities have emerged by the *relative* ability of parents and students to work within institutional processes, respond to changing educational contests, add value to or inflate the academic profiles of their children and, as we document in this paper, "work" poli-cies and programs to their children's advantage (Demerath 2009; Lareau 2011; Khan 2011). This represents a new "black box." To open it, cul-tural capital theory needs to focus less on the supposed biases of schools and "pathologies" of lower-SES families and more on the agency of higher-SES families to influence discretionary spaces in schooling or-ganizations.

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