

**How to Teach Bad Boys a Lesson:
Student Experiences of Behaviour Support in
Mainstream Schools and Secondary Alternate
Education Programs**

by
Daniel Cooper

B.Ed., Simon Fraser University, 2013
B.A., University of British Columbia, 2011

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

in the
Faculty of Education

© Daniel Cooper 2022
SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
Spring 2022

Copyright in this work is held by the author. Please ensure that any reproduction or re-use is done in accordance with the relevant national copyright legislation.

Declaration of Committee

Name: Daniel Cooper

Degree: Master of Arts

Title: **How to Teach Bad Boys a Lesson:
Student Experiences of Behaviour Support in
Mainstream Schools and Secondary Alternate
Education Programs**

Committee: Chair: **Wanda Cassidy**
Professor, Education

Kumari Beck
Supervisor
Associate Professor, Education

Pooja Dharamshi
Committee Member
Assistant Professor, Education

Ann Chinnery
Examiner
Associate Professor, Education

Ethics Statement

The author, whose name appears on the title page of this work, has obtained, for the research described in this work, either:

- a. human research ethics approval from the Simon Fraser University Office of Research Ethics

or

- b. advance approval of the animal care protocol from the University Animal Care Committee of Simon Fraser University

or has conducted the research

- c. as a co-investigator, collaborator, or research assistant in a research project approved in advance.

A copy of the approval letter has been filed with the Theses Office of the University Library at the time of submission of this thesis or project.

The original application for approval and letter of approval are filed with the relevant offices. Inquiries may be directed to those authorities.

Simon Fraser University Library
Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada

Update Spring 2016

Abstract

This qualitative study examines the experiences of Canadian secondary school students who are enrolled in Behaviour Support-focused alternate school programs. Through semi structured interviews, I investigate students' understandings of their experiences as alternate school students and students who transitioned from mainstream to alternate schools. Three themes emerged in the data including ordinary violence in lives of the students, consistently disrupted education, tenuous feelings of belonging at school, and desire for connection. My findings suggest that traditional approaches of behaviour support do not address systemic inequalities and individualize 'problem' students to the point of harm. The findings suggest that behaviour-support programs have the potential to improve students' education by abandoning exclusionary disciplinary practices and working to integrate equity-focused approaches such as Restorative Justice in Education, Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy, and Anti-racist education. Finally, implications for schools, pedagogical approaches, and behaviour support policies are discussed.

Keywords: Behaviour support; culturally sustaining pedagogy; anti-racist education; restorative justice in education; alternate school student experience; violence; belonging; connection

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the alternate school students who let me into their lives - your kindness, grace under pressure, and resilience inspires me everyday

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank first my committee, specifically Dr. Kumari Beck and Dr. Pooja Dharamshi. Without their support, guidance, and teaching none of this would have been possible

Secondly, I would like to thank my wife Felicia Wall who sacrificed every day throughout this process to support me.

Lastly, I would like to thank my colleagues in the alternate schools at which I worked. Specifically, Linda Schiff, Peter van den Hoogen, Brandon Curr, Eryn Hart, Keir Calvert, Tristan Thompson and Duncan Ferguson. You folks taught me everything I know.

Table of Contents

Declaration of Committee	ii
Ethics Statement	iii
Abstract	iv
Dedication	v
Acknowledgements	vi
Table of Contents	vii
List of Tables	ix
List of Figures	ix
List of Acronyms	ix
Chapter 1. Introduction	1
1.1. Vignette	1
1.2. Context and Background	2
1.2.1. Alternate Schools in Canada	3
1.2.2. “Stakes is High”	5
1.3. Research Problem	6
1.4. Research Questions:	8
1.5. Overview of Study	8
1.6. Significance of the Study	8
1.7. Situating Myself	9
1.8. Thesis Structure	10
Chapter 2. Literature Review	12
2.1. Vignette & Introduction	12
2.2. Student Experiences in Secondary Alternate Programs	13
2.3. Traditional Frameworks for Behaviour Support in K-12 Schools	17
2.3.1. Historical Context	17
2.3.2. Positive Behaviour Support	18
2.3.3. Critiques and Limitations of PBIS	19
2.4. The Emergence of Trauma Informed Pedagogy for Behaviour Support	21
2.4.1. Theoretical Understandings and Historical Overview	21
2.4.2. Pedagogies of TIP	22
2.4.3. Limitations of TIP	23
2.5. Possibilities for Emancipatory Behaviour Support	25
2.5.1. Centering Principles of Anti-Racism Education	25
2.5.2. Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies	27
2.5.3. Restorative Justice Frameworks	29
2.6. Summary and Gaps in Literature	31
Chapter 3. Research Methods	33
3.1. Vignette	33
3.2. Introduction	33
3.3. Research Design	34

3.4. Researcher Positionality	35
3.5. Setting and Context	36
3.6. Participants.....	37
3.7. Data Collection	40
3.8. Data Analysis	41
3.9. Trustworthiness	43
3.10. Limitations	43
3.11. Significance	43
Chapter 4. Findings: Violence and Young Men’s Desire to Find Connection	45
4.1. Vignette	45
4.2. Introduction.....	45
4.3. Student Experiences of Violence	46
4.3.1. Violence at Home.....	46
4.3.2. Violence at School & Disciplinary Responses	46
4.3.3. Bullying	50
4.3.4. Discussion.....	51
4.4. Alternate School Students and Interrupted Formal Education.....	54
4.4.1. Suspensions	55
4.4.2. Administrative Intervention and Alternate Program Referral	59
4.4.3. School Disengagement Interrupting Formal Education.....	61
4.4.4. Discussion.....	65
4.5. Student Experiences of Belonging	66
4.5.1. Experiences of Surveillance and Mistrust (Not Belonging in the School)	67
4.5.2. Negative Self-Perception of Academic Potential (Not Belonging in the Classroom).....	71
4.5.3. Discussion.....	75
Chapter 5. Good Kid, Bad System.....	77
5.1. Vignette	77
5.2. Introduction.....	77
5.3. Key Findings.....	78
5.4. Alternate Schools as Indicative of Systemic Inequities.....	79
5.5. Implications for Behaviour Support Programs	79
5.6. Implications for Mainstream School Discipline	80
5.7. Alternate School Students and the Feeling of Belonging at School.....	83
5.8. The Importance of Story and Implications for Pedagogy.....	83
5.9. Conclusion & Possibilities for Further Research	85
5.10. Personal Reflection	86
References.....	88
Appendix A. Sample Recruitment Form	95
Appendix B. Semi-Structured Interview Questions	97
Appendix C. Sample Consent Form.....	99

List of Tables

Table 1.	Suggestions for Working With At-Risk Students	14
Table 2.	Proportion of accused of crime that were male, by age group and offence, Canada, 2014	38

List of Figures

Figure 1.	Restorative Justice in Education	30
-----------	--	----

List of Acronyms

PBIS	Positive Behaviour Intervention and Support
RJE	Restorative Justice in Education
TIP	Trauma Informed Practice

Chapter 1.

Introduction

1.1. Vignette

My first contract teaching position in public education began in 2015 when I covered for a teacher away on maternity leave at a small alternate school that we will call Choices¹; alternate schools often have vaguely optimistic names such as this. Choices welcomed 12 students from around the district and with no extra training, I oversaw some of the most made-vulnerable (Walia, 2020) students in the region. Many of my students had extensive involvement with the youth justice system, complex mental health needs, and unstable or tenuous family situations. The more experienced members of the staff at this small school (counselors, youth and family workers, and outreach workers) were all used to working with uninitiated teachers and, thanks mostly to their guidance and advice, I enjoyed my time at this small school. In just a few months I learned quickly how much I didn't know and just how much society valued these kids – sending naive, untrained teachers into their midst. Nonetheless, I dedicated myself to do the best job I could, with the skills and resources available to me.

Early on in my time at Choices, I developed a relationship with one student who would show up an hour early every day for school so he could use the computer. He would sit there as I prepared my lessons for the day and would narrate his Facebook feed to me. He would describe with great enthusiasm the memes, viral YouTube videos, and general teenage drama that populated his social media feed. Looking back now, it is easy to see that I did not remotely have the skills or experience to educate this young man in the way that he deserved. His mental health, neurodevelopmental profile, and history of abandonment from caregivers meant that I was far out of my depth. However, we bonded in those early mornings and even if I did not leave a lasting impression in our few short months together, I hope at least I made him feel heard and welcome in the time we did share.

¹ The name of the school, the city, and all the students' names have been given pseudonyms to protect confidentiality.

On my last day at the school before my contract ended, I walked in to find the young man insolent and hostile. He snapped at me for small indiscretions and was generally rude and insulting. It seemed he was intentionally picking on me and wanting me to feel like he hated me. I was confused. I had seen him act this way towards other students before, but never to me. When I asked an experienced colleague for his take on the situation during a break, he said “Dan, think, it’s because you are leaving today.” Suddenly I was no longer confused, but I was sad and now felt a little guilty for adding to the constant turnover the young man experienced. I had been trained to treat students with universal positive regard, a concept borrowed from clinical psychology, no matter how I am treated; however, as we all know, this is not always possible. When a student is mean to you, it is natural to feel hurt and thus it becomes more difficult to be warm and open. However, for the rest of that day, I worked hard to treat that young man as kindly and compassionately as I could. I took every barb he threw my way in stride and carried on being nice as if nothing had happened. This did not stem the tide of his anger, but I kept it up as best I could. Finally, at the end of the day, I walked him to the transit stop near the school, bought him a hot chocolate from a nearby Starbucks, and said goodbye and good luck. Just for a moment he softened and shook my hand, looked me in the eye, and got on the train.

1.2. Context and Background

The purpose of the vignettes in this thesis is to give a glimpse into the world of alternate schools that I have inhabited. I hope that these vignettes, along with the students’ own stories, will bring the context alive for the reader. It also brings my own narrative to bear on why I wanted to carry out this research.

Since 2014, I have worked as a teacher at various alternate schools in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. At these schools, issues of discipline, punishment, and compliance arise daily. When I began this research, I was a teacher at a secondary off-site alternate school for students ages 14-19 and currently work in a large mainstream high school with a focus on behaviour support for “made-vulnerable” (Walia, 2020) students. The term ‘made-vulnerable’ is used in this context as a direct response to the language of ‘at-risk’ and its emphasis of individual origin and fault for problems at school and in the community. It is my assumption that anti-social student behaviour is part of a

complex ecosystem of context and that any redress needs to focus on both the individual and the systemic.

The alternate schools at which I have worked welcomed students who had been identified by administrators and district staff as needing the highest level of wrap-around support available, from all over our district. The idea is that these students will have a better chance at completing their secondary school education safely and effectively at an off-site alternate program. The most common reasons that students are referred to our school are complex mental health needs, a history of violent or extremely disruptive conduct, involvement with the youth justice system, or they simply have not been attending their mainstream classes. Often it is a combination of many factors. Our school and several similar programs are at times the final option for students to complete their secondary school education before they self-select to drop out. In other cases, some students are deemed too great a safety risk and can legally be expelled from the district entirely.

1.2.1. Alternate Schools in Canada

Alternatives to mainstream schools have existed since the birth of public education in North America (Young, 1990); however, currently Alternate Education is a poorly defined catch-all term for schools and programs that exist separate from traditional K-12 public schools. In the literature, I have encountered the term 'Alternate Education' used to describe everything from private academic institutions, religious schools, programs based on highly specific philosophies such as the Montessori schools, and so-called last-chance schools (Lange & Sletten, 2002).

This study will focus on these 'last chance' schools. Alternate schools in this region enroll students when they have exhausted the disciplinary or support capacity of mainstream schools and they are often quite literally a last chance at an education before students leave public education altogether.

Before investigating how alternative school students might have better experiences in schools, it is imperative that we situate these schools in the larger context in which they exist. In Canada, these schools operate in a country with a history of Indigenous genocide (Lowman & Barker, 2015), a pervasive white-supremacist culture

(Dei, 1996), and an economic system married to endless neo-liberal expansion (Piketty, 2014). This study assumes that any discussion of improving school conditions without acknowledging these realities is going to be superficial and will not improve conditions for students in any long-term meaningful ways. As will be discussed later, these inequities clearly impact the participants of this study and provide further urgent impetus to address these oppressions in our schools and in our society.

Another aspect of both alternative programs and mainstream schools that I examine critically is the tendency to shift responsibility for the students considered problematic to abnormality experts; guidance officers, behaviour modification programme staff, alternative-site placement centre teachers, psychologists, doctors, pediatricians and psychiatrists (Graham, 2008). The desire to provide separate and expert services for problematic students succinctly explains the continued existence of alternate school programs – sites meant to treat or remediate deviance – and calls into question public schools' avowals of meeting the needs of all students.

Youth in alternate programs are often disproportionately burdened with histories of trauma exposure and experience a multitude of unique challenges for both daily functioning and developmental trajectories (Day et al., 2017). Trauma-informed practice (TIP) is currently a notable buzzword in educational circles and its origins, implementation, and limitations will be explored in Chapter 2. Though TIP alone cannot address the complexity of problems students face in our school, given the mounting body of work supporting the positive outcomes of a trauma informed approach in schools (Perry, 2006; Ginwright, 2018; Venet, 2021), I contend that it is an important piece of the puzzle of behaviour support despite its limitations.

My experience as a teacher in alternative schools has solidified my belief that, despite the problems inherent in the structures and approaches, these sites can be spaces of radical resistance, resiliency, and healing. This study attempts to give the students at these schools an opportunity to simultaneously support and complicate the positive possibilities offered by alternative schools. If we are to learn anything about behaviour support or teaching in general, let it be from the students.

Finally, because of their distance from the mainstream, alternate education sites can allow for greater freedom in pedagogy and, by extension, may have more potential

for radical change. It is also my experience that students arrive at our alternative schools almost universally having had negative histories at previous schools and cursory glances at their files shows that they have often been involved in disciplinary interventions from early elementary school onwards. It is through this work that I have become passionate about reconceptualizing how school systems could treat students who are considered deviant: those who do not comply with community standards and who challenge mainstream education systems to their breaking point. However, the voices of the actual students are too-often marginalized in the larger discourse of what to do with troublemakers (Shalaby, 2017), explosive children (Greene, 1998), those lost at school (Greene, 2008).

1.2.2. “Stakes is High”

Gloria Ladson-Billings (2013) borrowed the title of iconic hip-hop trio De La Soul’s song “Stakes is High” for a book on education in America. Ladson-Billings’ intent was to underscore the importance of the work ahead for educators, students, parents, community members, and researchers as they attempted to create a more just world. I believe that the consequences of research and practice in alternate schools in British Columbia are part of this high stakes movement. To illustrate, youth with complex trauma backgrounds are at greater risk for serious behavioural problems at schools (Perry, 2003; Jaycox et al., 2009; McLerney & McKlinden, 2019) and Indigenous and minority ethnic youth are overrepresented in school programs designed to support behaviour problems (Losen & Gillespie, 2012).

In the context of racial inequities and complex trauma histories, any educator concerned with justice should be interested in reforming and reimagining how we discipline our students. If we conceive of school disciplinary programs as precursors to youth criminal justice involvement, the statistics are alarming. In the United States research has shown strong relationships between out of school suspensions, disciplinary alternative school placement, and subsequent juvenile detention that disproportionately involve African American children (Vanderhaar et al., 2014). In Canada, where a similar school-to-prison pipeline exists (Salole & Abdulle, 2015), Indigenous youth accounted for 46% of admissions to youth correctional services in 2016/2017, while representing only 8% of the total Canadian youth population (Malakieh, 2018). If we hope to improve outcomes for youth involved in behavior support programs, listening to their voices and

exploring improvements is critical to the process of reform. These alarming statistics and findings inspired me to structure this study with the students at the centre – a design that will be discussed in much more detail later in this thesis.

In my experience, alternative schools in my area function as dumping grounds for 'dangerous and disruptive' students who are deemed as needing to be physically removed from mainstream schools. As previously discussed, many studies show that youth with complex trauma-backgrounds are at greater risk for serious behavioural problems at schools (Perry, 2003; Jaycox et al., 2009; Mclerney & McKlinden, 2019) and Indigenous and minority ethnic youth are overrepresented in school programs designed to support behaviour problems (Losen & Gillespie, 2012). These disproportionate representations certainly call for further inquiry into the root causes of these inequities, but for the purposes of this study I will limit the scope to direct inquiry of these special education programs and the students who populate them.

1.3. Research Problem

My experiences working in alternate programs for students labeled as in need of behaviour support was at once both rich and devastatingly sad. At times it felt like we were simply treading water, offering comfort to students who were being slowly 'sucked under', into addiction, gang entrenchment, and mental health crises and often a combination thereof. We were also on the front lines of complex racial discrimination at a systemic level evidenced by the underrepresentation of white students in these disciplinary programs. It was this feeling of treading water, fighting not only to educate and care for our students, but also against a system that kept isolating, oppressing, and incarcerating them, that led to my conviction that these issues deserved investigation.

Anecdotally, my students knew they were 'being screwed over', that it wasn't fair that they had no parents, or that their mother was addicted to cocaine, or that they were born with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS), and I believe their experiences were worth listening to, and documenting. At Professional Development workshops where I would mingle with other teachers from our district, when I described my school and my students, they either had no idea we existed, or were glad we had enrolled a student they had previously clashed with, so they were no longer in their classroom. Rarely, if ever, did those teachers know where their 'problem student' had ended up. Out of sight,

out of mind. In this way, I wanted to honour the experiences of my students by listening and writing about what they had to say. The problem as I saw it was complex, but I focused on two aspects. I observed both in the literature and in practice that many educators have an opinion on the right way to discipline their students but rarely did those opinions centre the voices of the students who will be most affected (Greene, 2014; Cooper, Heron, Heward, 2020). Further, despite our best efforts in these alternate settings, our students were being incarcerated, still dropping-out of school, and in some tragic cases, still dying of drug-overdose or by violence (B.C. Coroners Service Report, 2022; Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General Policing and Security Branch Crime Statistics in British Columbia, 2020).

What this study presupposes is that the labelling of students as 'at-risk' at school predetermines the type of outcomes that the system expects of them and is part of the well-documented school-to-prison pipeline (Ladson-Billings, 2007). Thus, any subsequent delivery of behaviour support services is fated from the beginning to operate under a system that limits the positive outcomes and narrowly defines success for students in the programs. By listening to the stories of students in behaviour-support programs, I wanted to not only give my heart and attention to their often devastatingly sad stories, but also to understand what structural and systemic issues kept students like them on the margins in our Western education system.

I wondered how we could do better. How could we intervene earlier in their education to avoid some of the more serious disciplinary problems that led them to enrollment in an alternate school in the first place? How can we expose the racism, classism and oppression experienced by those in mental health crisis that leads to disproportionate enrollment of racialized, poor, and mentally ill students in alternate schools? Is it possible to create a scholarly basis for a movement to abolish alternate schools in a spirit similar to prison abolition? Maynard (2017) explains that jailing criminals does not actually create a safer society and, in many cases, achieves the opposite by exacerbating existing social, economic, and racial inequalities. Thus, the research questions for this study emerged from my intention to approach these systemic issues from a student perspective, something that I had great difficulty locating in the literature, which I will discuss in greater detail in Chapter 2.

1.4. Research Questions:

The central questions of this study are concerned with how students who have been labeled as in need of behaviour support, specifically those in specialized high school programs, experience their support services. In doing so I hope that a small piece of the puzzle can be filled in, with the students' own words, and educators tasked with behaviour support might gain insight into how to more effectively respond to the needs of the students.

1. How do secondary school students currently enrolled in alternate schools in the Lower Mainland of B.C. experience their behaviour-support school programs?
2. How did these same students experience their behaviour support services while they attended a mainstream school?
3. What experiences at (either) school made the students feel valued and connected; and what experiences at school made the students feel unimportant and disconnected?

1.5. Overview of Study

This is a qualitative study, set in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, Canada on Musqueam, Tsleil-Waututh, and Squamish territory. The participants, aged 15-18, are all male-identifying students enrolled in off-site alternate schools at the time of the study conducted between 2020 and 2022.

1.6. Significance of the Study

Recently deceased human rights and justice giant Desmond Tutu said that “There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they’re falling in.” It is my intention that the significance of this study will be a trip up-river, led by the students, wherein we can experience through their memories how they experienced their schooling, specifically with regards to behaviour support and discipline and that this might offer clues for improving delivery of these services. Additionally, as discussed above, there was a noted lack of student voice in the literature concerning behaviour support services especially equity-seeking and promising behaviour support philosophies like Trauma-

Informed Practice and Restorative Justice. It is my hope that this study can add to the emergent conversations about behaviour-support services that are committed to equitable inclusion of all stakeholders, students, parents, and the wider school community. Finally, I hoped it would also be at least mildly therapeutic for the participants to have someone sit down with them and listen to their stories.

1.7. Situating Myself

I am a white, cis-gendered man. I was born in Langley, British Columbia, Canada in 1989 to kind, supportive, and financially stable parents. My ancestors came to Canada/Turtle Island from England, Scotland, and Ireland. My mother's maternal ancestors settled near present-day Edmonton on Niitsípiis-stahkoi (Blackfoot/Niitsítap/Nêhiyaw-Askiy/Plains Cree), Tsuu T'ina, and Michif Piyii (Métis) land² in the 1920s. My mother's paternal ancestors emigrated to present-day Cayuga, Ontario on land they acquired from the Canadian government, territory that had previously been the home of Indigenous people of the now-termed Six Nation circa 1845.

My father's paternal ancestors came to Calgary in 1908 and built a house in NE Calgary on Niitsípiis-stahkoi (Blackfoot / Niitsítapi), Ktunaxa ʔamakʔis, Tsuu T'ina, and Michif Piyii (Métis) land. My father's maternal ancestors emigrated to Bismarck, North Dakota, U.S.A in the early 1900s and settled on Cheyenne and Očhéthi Šakówinj traditional territories.

My ancestors were not wealthy or powerful; however, their success in colonial Canada is my success and I am mindful of the unearned privilege of my background. An instructive story that demonstrates Canada's enduring legacy of colonial dispossession comes from my great-grandfather Robert Mitchell, my father's mother's father. Mitchell moved from Bismarck, North Dakota to Kirriemuir, Alberta with his family in 1911 where he received a 'quarter-section' of land, 160 acres to be exact, to homestead. In those days if you did a certain amount of 'improvement' to the land over a certain amount of time, the land was yours. My grandmother was born and raised on that homestead and her parents worked the land with horses until their retirement in 1942 - certainly not an easy or glamorous life but crucial to remember that their new ownership of that land

² All land acknowledgements courtesy of Native-Land.ca

disrupted thousands of years of Očhéthi Šakówiŋ, Cree, Michif Piyii (Métis), and Niitsitpiis-stahkoi (Blackfoot / Niitsítapi) stewardship and history. My ancestors came here as Settlers and a Settler I remain, with all the violence, bloodshed, suffering, and pain that entails.

I believe it is crucial to name and situate myself and my family as Settlers because as Indigenous people around the globe remind us daily, colonialism is far from a historical legacy and is rather a living, breathing, dispossessing force - alive and well - and the schools my research participants attend are part of this system. Thus, in the next section, I will try to situate my study and give context to the colonial, white supremacist, and neo-liberal ecosystem in which it was conducted.

1.8. Thesis Structure

My thesis is organized as follows. I begin each chapter with a personal vignette meant to provide a glimpse into the daily life at alternate schools. I will also briefly explain how the stories connect with the major themes of each chapter. I begin in Chapter 1 by setting the context, providing background for the study, justifying the impetus for research, describing the research problem and identifying the research questions. In addition, I briefly situate myself as a researcher.

Chapter 2 begins with a literature review of mainstream approaches to behaviour support, specifically Functional Behaviour Analysis (FBA), Trauma-Informed Practice (TIP), and Restorative Justice (RJ) wherein I survey the existing research, summarize the general philosophical approaches, and situate my study in the gaps in the literature as I have identified them. I conclude the chapter with a brief overview of theoretical perspectives that offer possibilities for behaviour support. I specifically focus on Dei's (1996) anti-racism education framework, Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies, and Restorative Justice in Education.

Chapter 3 is a description of my qualitative research design and the research methods I employed. Chapter 4 details the findings of my semi-structured interviews with the students, and the data are discussed in reference to the literature and the theories that inform the study. Chapter 5 concludes the thesis with implications for delivery of

behaviour-support services in schools, recommendations, and suggested directions for further research in this area.

Chapter 2.

Literature Review

2.1. Vignette & Introduction

Before I worked at off-site secondary alternate schools, I had a position in a mainstream high school teaching what was called a 2E or twice exceptional program. The program was designed to serve students who were designated gifted in one area, but learning disabled in another. Without diving too deeply into the fraught world of designations, let's just say it was an interesting experience. I was meant to be teaching the four core subjects (Math, Science, Socials, English) to a group of 14 Grade 9 boys (no girls had applied for the program), in 2-hour blocks each morning. I was a new teacher and had lots of enthusiasm, but, looking back, the situation probably called for more experience than I had to deal with its complexity. Regardless, we all had a good time – I think. One student who shall remain nameless taught me a valuable lesson about adaptations. Prior to taking over the class I had been told that he was struggling with anxiety. I tried everything in my power to make him feel comfortable and supported in the class, but it wasn't until he took matters into his own hands that I felt he really relaxed. One day he came into class, sat down behind the laptop cart, and constructed a fort for himself using the cart, some cardboard, and a blanket that was lying around. I would communicate to him through a slot in the fort and would slip assignments into him through the same slot. When he finished his work, a paper would come sliding out from under the fort's walls. I even heard him giggling in there. From that day forward, that is where that student 'sat' in my classroom, and, remarkably, his work output improved dramatically. Some may say that I should have tried to coax him out of the fort eventually, but he did attend regular classes in the afternoon, and I figured some time in a protective cocoon was probably what he needed at the time. Now, I think of him any time I see a laptop cart.

Not once in my teacher education did any of my instructors or supervisors mention the pedagogy of delivering lessons into student-constructed forts. The above story illustrates the complexity of classroom/behaviour management and the impossibility of preparing teacher candidates for every situation they are likely to face on

the ground. What teacher candidates and practicing teachers do learn are generally applicable approaches for behaviour management such as Positive Behaviour Intervention and Support, Trauma Informed Pedagogy, and Restorative Justice.

In this chapter I will first briefly survey student experiences in alternative programs to set the context for the study. I will then review traditional approaches to behaviour support, followed by the more recent trauma informed approaches for behaviour support. Next, I will consider theoretical perspectives and possibilities for behaviour support and, more specifically, I will focus on anti-racism education, culturally sustaining pedagogies, and restorative justice frameworks. I will conclude the chapter with a summary of the literature, identify the gaps in the literature, and situate my study in these gaps.

2.2. Student Experiences in Secondary Alternate Programs

What follows is a brief survey of the literature concerning student perception of their experiences in secondary (8-12) alternate programs. But before diving into the literature, it is important to set the context with regards to violence among youth which will be critical to understand themes that emerge in later chapters. A survey of 4000 Canadian young people in 2019 designed to fill a gap in statistics for country-wide school violence numbers found that 41 percent of boys say they were physically assaulted at high school; 26 percent of girls say they experienced unwanted sexual contact at school (CBC/Mission Research Partnership School Violence Survey, 2019). The fact that these numbers were far greater than the official statistics suggests that again, adults don't have the full picture of the youth school experience.

Many studies that I reviewed that investigated alternative school student experiences found that students reported improved autonomy, belonging, and competence at their alternative school as compared to their original mainstream school, and that relationships with school staff were critical to success (Hoffer, Perry, Mykkanen, & Brenner, 2021; Poyrazli et al., 2008; Reimer & Pangrazio, 2020; Zhang, 2008). These findings were similar to a study where graduates of alternative schools in Texas reported positive effects on their lives during and after their alternative school experience (Zolkoski, Bullock, & Gable, 2016). However, one of the limitations of this latter study is

the likelihood that students who were truly struggling after graduating from an alternate program may not have participated in such a study.

Table 1. Suggestions for Working With At-Risk Students

<i>Suggestion</i>	<i>Do...</i>	<i>Avoid...</i>
Teacher-student relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give one-to-one, personal attention to students on a regular basis • Offer to speak to students outside of class time • Give second chances when a student has broken a rule or disappointed you 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Labeling students (e.g., “troublemaker,” “pregnant teen”) • Making judgmental comments about students • Publicly criticizing students in front of others
Home-school connection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inquire about students’ out-of-school lives (e.g., hobbies, personal interests) • Show you are willing to talk to students about their out-of-school issues • Take an interest when a student seems upset or displays unusual behavior • Learn about students’ family compositions and circumstances • Reach out to student families • Help students find solutions to home-related problems that impact academics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assuming that students do not want to talk about their problems with adults • Assuming that students have academic or emotional support at home • Ignoring changes in student behavior
School climate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek to improve peer culture and schoolwide cohesion among students • Create a school culture of safety and personal responsibility through character education • Let older students teach younger students about positive school culture and expectations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perpetuating peer conflict. Do not tolerate bullying or harassment • Creating a school culture where cliques are accepted
Flexible rules and consequences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institute reasonable rules, expectations, and consequences • Seek student input and explanation for rule violations • Take individual circumstances into account when giving consequences. • Give students a choice of consequences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having unnecessarily rigid school rules and structure • Enforcing classroom rules too rigidly or uniformly • Giving consequences without discussing the problems with students and hearing their sides of the story
Offer education and support services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide in-school support services or community referrals to students with mental health or social issues • Sponsor in-service workshops on effectively working with at-risk students • Work with school counselors or social workers when you need assistance communicating with a difficult student 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assuming that students already have access to social service or mental health resources • Assuming that teachers and school staff members have existing knowledge about at-risk students
Strengths-based approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt a schoolwide strengths-based approach or solution-focused model • Focus on student strengths • Tell students that you do not want them to fail and that you will help them succeed • Allow students to set their own goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training only teachers in positive student interaction and strength-based approaches. All employees (e.g., administrators, cafeteria workers, janitors) contribute to school culture and should be trained equally • Focusing on student flaws or faults • Sending negative messages to students about their potential

Source: (Lagana-Riordan, Aguilar, Franklin, Streeter, Kim, Tripodi & Hopson, 2011)

Lagana-Riordan, Aguilar, Franklin, Streeter, Kim, Tripodi, & Hopson’s (2011)’ study interviewed alternate school students about their perspectives on traditional public schools and solution-focused public Alternate programs. Through analyzing these interviews, the authors came up with the above table of suggestions for educators who work with this student demographic. The suggestions applied to student-teacher

relationships, connections between home and school, the school climate, discipline, support services, and employing strength-based approaches.

While highlighting some important weaknesses of such alternate programs and identifying strategies for improvements that are compassionate and student-centred, a major limitation of the study is a lack of consideration of race and other oppressions that students may have experienced. Accordingly, there are no recommendations for taking up pedagogies grounded in, for example, anti-racism education, or culturally sustaining practices that emerge from such systemic considerations.

Not all studies found students reporting improvements to their life and/or education at alternative schools. A particularly powerful narrative inquiry from Kim (2011) tells the story of alternative school student Kevin Gonzales from Kansas. Kim's findings confirmed what others have found, that alternatives to oppressive and under-resourced mainstream public education are needed. However, Kevin's perceptions of his alternate program were not positive:

...from Kevin's perspective, his current alternative school functions as a dumping ground or sometimes as an interface between the school and the prison, like a juvenile detention center. The use of frequent backpack searches, implementation of a disciplinary policy such as zero tolerance, and the way students are referred to this school, e.g., cooling-out, indicate that Borderlands is far from being an 'ideal haven'" (Kim, 2011, p. 90).

This theme of students being 'dumped' and streamed towards the justice system re-emerged elsewhere in the literature, where chilling effects were noted in student self-perception (McNulty & Roseboro, 2009). Due to the stigmatization of alternative schools, student and parent perception of their lessened academic standards, and proximity to prisons can lead students to self-identify as 'bad' and resist that label to varying degrees. McNulty and Roseboro (2009) explain it as such:

From the students' perspectives, the alternative school was more than an anti-democratic space, it was a structure that reinforced the "bad kid" identity. The intersection of identity and space, in this study, demonstrates an inherent problem with the structure of the alternative school. Because the school's documentation process, the rules and procedures all served to articulate a specific message about who these students were, a message that the students felt defined them, the alternative school could not normalize the students' identities. Consequently, the school perpetuated students' deviancy (whether perceived or enacted). (p. 424)

Given the emergent nature of the scholarship and the lack of a comprehensive consensus on the definition of an alternative school (Lehr & Lange, 2003), it is vital that we include these stories of struggle alongside the studies that describe the transformative positivity of alternates to mainstream education. Kim and Taylor (2008) found through critical analysis of an alternative school in Kansas that while at times comforting, the school could only address individual problems and was unable to address the systemic aspect of the oppression faced by the students. This theme of systemic vs. individualized approaches to student problems will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

Very briefly, an area of literature that unexpectedly connected to this research is the emergent study of Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE). As the world grapples with increasing millions of people displaced by war, climate change, and other calamities, education scholars have remarked upon an increasing number of students in Western schools with limited or interrupted formal education. This phenomenon led to the creation of a formal label: “students with interrupted formal education” (DeCapua, Smathers, & Tang, 2009). Unlike migrant students, alternate school students who are subject to traditional forms of exclusionary discipline like suspension have had their education interrupted not by war, famine, or natural disaster, but rather by forceful removal from the learning environment. Further, in districts where truancy is common, alternate school students self-select to interrupt their formal education through what Kohl (1994) called ‘Creative Maladjustment’. Even for students who remain in the classroom, education can be interrupted through various means. Students and families can decide not to learn from teachers and schools with whom they don’t feel safe, and tragically this unwillingness to learn in a hostile environment is often misdiagnosed as an inability to learn which explains the streaming of students into frameworks of deficit – like learning disability designations (Kohl, 1994). Despite the different reasons for the interruptions, the participants in my study experienced prolonged educational gaps like those of migrant students, and the effects on their education are complex and worthy of further inquiry.

2.3. Traditional Frameworks for Behaviour Support in K-12 Schools

Having reviewed the scant literature analyzing student experiences and perceptions of their alternative schools, I now briefly survey the ‘water in which these students swim’ so to speak. These students didn’t arrive at school with a manual, informing their teachers and administrators that they had behaviour issues. This was a labeling process that happened *at* school that is both ideologically and politically influenced. To understand the experiences of these students, we must also understand how school conceives of and responds to their ‘behaviour’. The intent of the alternate programs is to provide intensive behaviour support for students who are deemed to need it to succeed. The research questions of this study are concerned with understanding how those students experience those services. To set the context, I will review the common approaches to behaviour support in Canadian schools. The three most common approaches to behaviour support are Positive Behaviour Support (PBIS), Trauma-Informed Practice (TIP), and Restorative Justice in Education (RJE). Each has its own tenets and foundational philosophies of discipline, punishment, and healing. What follows is a brief description of each behaviour support method and a review of the literature

2.3.1. Historical Context

The phrase behaviour support is both a generality and a specific reference to an orthodoxy. In general, behaviour support refers to providing the conditions for students to make prosocial choices – voluntary choices that benefit others (Eisenberg, Fabes, & Spinrad, 2006). With reference to school rules and codes of conduct, obeying the rules and conforming to socially accepted behaviors (such as stopping or avoiding cheating on tests and not solving school problems with violence) are also regarded as prosocial behaviors (Baumeister & Bushman, 2007). As an orthodoxy, Behaviour Support in schools refers to the established tradition of Positive Behavior Support or PBS (also referred to as Positive Behaviour Support and Intervention Program - PBSI or PBSIP) that emerged as the most popular response to a growing demand in the 1990s that children with challenging behaviours be supported at school without aversive punishment (Johnston et al., 2006).

2.3.2. Positive Behaviour Support

Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) as a discipline for teachers, with rules, boundaries, and protocols, emerged from the academic movement in psychology of Applied Behaviour Analysis or ABA. Dixon, Vogel, & Tarbox (2012) explained that ABA developed in response to the shift of psychological study away from explaining human behaviour through internal observation of mental processes towards a more naturalistic scientific approach of observing stimuli and environment and resultant behaviour. This idea, that behaviours can be predicted with observation and data analysis, was pioneered by Skinner (1938) who argued that the traditional model of Stimuli-Response/cause-and-effect should be abandoned and replaced by functional analysis of the relationship between the three-term contingency of antecedent–behavior–consequence or stimulus–response–stimulus (Dixon, Vogel, Tarbox, 2012). In this way, ABA and, in turn, PBS, encourage childcare practitioners such as teachers to become objective observers of children, recorders of data, and to experiment with different inputs – certainly a difficult proposal in the messy laboratory of schools and classrooms.

The ABA/PBS model of behaviour analysis, wherein the observer records the antecedents for a specific behaviour, describes and quantifies the intensity of the behaviour, and attempts to decode the function of the behaviour based on the consequences, is the basis of Positive Behaviour Support in education today. As an example, the district website for teachers in a BC school district provides guidance in this regard in the section for Behaviour Support Resources. The section is titled “Behaviour Support - What do I do if I have a student with challenging behaviour in my classroom?” and includes the following list of action items:

1. The first steps involved when a child is showing a pattern of problem behaviour (meaning it’s happened more than once!) is to:
2. Talk to teachers and support staff
3. Collect & analyze data (see data collection)
4. Determine function of the behaviour (i.e., What is this student trying to communicate?)
5. Develop a positive behaviour support plan
6. Implement the positive behaviour support plan

7. Evaluate the positive behaviour support plan (i.e., is our plan working?)

The webpage goes on to describe the importance of viewing behaviour (in this case undesirable behaviour) as "...a form of communication or serving a particular function" and thus enters the standardized response of this school district and most public schools across North America: The Functional Behaviour Assessment.

The Functional Behaviour Assessment (FBA) is a standardized and replicable protocol for analyzing behaviour, establishing its function, and including data to develop a PBS plan to modify or eliminate the behaviour. These assessments are meant to be carried out by counsellors, behaviour interventionists, and teachers and in British Columbia, and they contribute to the creation of more detailed and longer term plans called Individual Education Plans (IEPs). IEPs are defined by the B.C. Ministry of Education as:

An individual education plan designed for a student includes one or more of the following:

- learning outcomes that are different from, or in addition to, expected learning outcomes set out in the applicable educational program guide,
- a list of support services,
- a list of adapted materials, instruction or assessment methods.

(B.C. Special Education Services Manual of Policies, Procedures, and Guidelines, 2016).

In my practice, when a district sees fit to enroll a student at an alternate school, very likely the PBIS supports implemented at the original school will have been deemed unsuccessful and this leads into critiques of the practice which simply does not work for all students.

2.3.3. Critiques and Limitations of PBIS

According to the U.S. National Department of Education Center on Positive Behaviour Intervention and Supports, PBS is an "evidence-based" practice. Their website links to a paper by Horner, Sugai, and Anderson (2010) that proposes "that a sufficiently rigorous and voluminous body of scholarship establishes School-Wide PBS as an evidence-based practice for use in public schools, by typical educational

personnel, to decrease problem behavior and promote prosocial behavior” (p.1). The paper cites 13 studies from 1994 to 2009 to support these findings, however they also noted that in 2009 nearly 1000 high schools in the United States were at various stages of implementation of School-Wide PBS, but “a consistent finding has been that these high schools have had a greater difficulty in achieving implementation at high fidelity” (Horner, Sugai & Anderson, 2010, p.10).

PBS has also faced scrutiny from scholars who have pointed to the racial and gender inequities in its practice. Reno et al. (2017) found that in a Midwestern American state where over 800 schools were actively implementing PBS, that male students, students of color, and students from high poverty backgrounds were overrepresented as needing behavioral interventions by the predominantly White, female, middle class teachers. Cramer and Bennet (2015), succinctly summarized the problem PBS has with regards to racial equity: “segregation on the basis of race, social class, and disability continues as evidenced by disproportionate representation in special education programs, detention, suspension, and other areas of negative attention” (p. 18).

Vincent and Tobin (2011) reported that black students continue to experience a disproportionate rate of long-term suspensions (>10 days), despite the implementation of PBIS. Although PBIS is thought to be composed of universal principles that may be culturally neutral, Vincent et al. (2011) argue that such principles are implemented in school settings composed of students from [culturally diverse] backgrounds and thus need to be implemented in a culturally responsive manner if all children are to benefit. Harris-Murri, King, and Rostenberg (2006) point out, “Without consideration of culturally responsive instruction, discipline, and interventions within all stages of the RTI decision making model, there is continued possibility of misinterpretation of student behavior...” (p. 781).

Considering these findings, while the evidence suggests PBS has potential to improve the outcomes for students, it is clear it does not immediately nor effectively address underlying racial inequality (or any other inequity for that matter) in American schools. This study is constructed to give students a chance to express their experiences in schools dominated by PBIS as the hegemonic framework of behaviour support and to give them licence to speak to how it affected their perceptions of themselves and their schools. Finally, it is important to mention that PBIS often

culminates in exclusionary disciplinary practices that neither alleviate the original problem nor create conditions for healing or restoration (Zilberstein, 2014).

2.4. The Emergence of Trauma Informed Pedagogy for Behaviour Support

Trauma Informed Pedagogy (TIP) has exploded in popularity in recent years and is being implemented in many diverse sectors including child welfare, education, first responders, health care and juvenile justice (Ko et al., 2008). In the following section I will provide a brief overview of the history of TIP in education and how it is being used as a primary method of behaviour support.

2.4.1. Theoretical Understandings and Historical Overview

Recent medical research has corroborated what many working in the field of education have known instinctively: abuse and other trauma-inducing events during childhood, such as racism and poverty, lead to serious problems at school and in later life. For the purposes of this study, I adopt the working definition of trauma as a response to a negative external event or series of events which surpasses the child's ordinary coping skills. It comes in many forms and includes experiences such as maltreatment, witnessing violence, or the loss of a loved one. Traumatic experiences can impact brain development and behavior inside and outside of the classroom (McInerney & McKlindon, 2019). In a landmark study conducted over 10 years, Felitti et al. (1998) found a strong relationship between exposure to abuse or household dysfunction during childhood and multiple risk factors for several of the leading causes of death in adults. The study authors coined the term 'ACEs' or Adverse Childhood Experiences which has been adopted as a catch-all term for childhood trauma and their findings have launched multiple other longitudinal inquiries that confirmed the devastating effect of ACEs on adult mental and physical health outcomes (CDC, 2016; Corso et al., 2008; Dube et al., 2002; Dube et al., 2006). Through this body of research, scholars were faced with quantitative confirmation of long-held suspicions – children exposed to trauma were much more likely to die a premature death than those who were not exposed.

In a retrospective of 20 years of trauma-informed practices in education, Thomas, Crosby & Vanderhaar (2019) reviewed the most cited and freely available trauma-related resources for educators and found three key themes: (a) building knowledge – understanding the nature and impact of trauma; (b) shifting perspectives and building emotionally healthy school cultures; and (c) self-care for educators (p. 426). That same study then examined studies of TIP effectiveness over a 20-year period and determined that all but one of the studies they examined reported improvements after implementing TIP. However, the researchers made clear mention of the limitations of these findings given the fact that across the literature there was no formally agreed upon framework for implementing TIP, nor a universal or replicable method for evaluating its effectiveness. The study concluded that while educational research is ever-evolving regarding trauma implications, “Educational researchers along with school-based practitioners would be wise to incorporate pioneering research occurring in neuroscience, psychology, and social work to better inform their research and practice agendas” (Thomas, Crosby, & Vanderhaar, 2019, p. 448).

A review of three different trauma-Informed school programs in the United States by Phifer and Hull (2016) found that the success of TIP implementation in schools was dependent on expanding the community of care to include more than school staff. The researchers found that among the three successful programs they surveyed, “a key element in establishing trauma-informed practices is collaborating with school-based mental health professionals (i.e., school psychologists, school counselors, and social workers), universities, health systems, and/or community mental health agencies” (Phifer & Hull, 2016, p. 204).

2.4.2. Pedagogies of TIP

Medical research such as the ACEs study spurred the educational community to respond both at an individual and systemic level. Educational research revealed that schools in Canada, as well as the United States, were ill-equipped to respond to the trauma needs of students at a systemic level, and pilot programs were developed to address these shortcomings (Jaycox, et al., 2009). The success of this work led to the development of the current educational movement towards trauma-informed and trauma-sensitive schools (Walkley & Cox, 2013; Plumb, Bush, & Kersevich, 2016). However, many prominent scholars argue that we are still not doing enough. Psychiatrist

and leading trauma scholar Bruce Perry (2003) likened trauma to an epidemic and said that if any other 'disease' was found to cause the incredibly deleterious health effects as does trauma, there would be massive public outcry for a treatment or vaccine. He and others argue for the importance of recognizing the scope of the problem and imagining ways to address trauma in schools that are commensurate with the severity of the issues.

To understand the severity of the problem in the Canadian context we can look to the findings from the 2014 Canadian General Social Survey that indicate that one-third of Canadians aged 15 and older (33%) reported experiencing some form of child maltreatment before age 15. In this study child maltreatment was defined as physical and/or sexual abuse by someone aged 18 or older, and/or witnessing violence by a parent or guardian against another adult. This same study also indicated that Indigenous children experienced abuse at a higher rate than non-Indigenous children, 40% as compared to 33% and that Indigenous women reported a 15% higher rate of abuse than non-Indigenous women (42% to 27% respectively). Finally, almost half (48%) of respondents who identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual reported experiencing childhood abuse. Knowing what we do about the stigma and shame associated with abuse, it is not unreasonable to assume that these numbers are in fact lower than the reality and that is truly sobering. The variance in reports across demographics also suggests that children who experience abuse are not exempt from the racism, sexism, and heteronormativity that exist in the other realms of Canadian society.

In summary, trauma-informed approaches to education conceptualize discipline and student behaviour in radical ways, shifting the narrative surrounding 'troublesome' students from 'What is wrong with you?' towards 'What happened to you? And what can we do to help?' (Foderaro as quoted in Bloom, 1995, pg. 9).

2.4.3. Limitations of TIP

While these trauma-informed pedagogical tools are certainly compassionate steps in the right direction, some scholars have cautioned against TIP as a blanket solution. For one, a trauma-informed approach still operates from epistemologies of deficit, wherein the student is defined by their trauma history (Ginright, 2018). Labelling students as 'traumatized' in this way has the potential to overly focus on their trauma as

their defining characteristic and could confine approaches to their education to myopic and or overly clinical approaches, especially in the hands of educators underprepared for complex trauma care. In addition, the holes and gaps in TIP account for significant equity-related concerns that demand supplemental support. Often the overly clinical TIP approach ignores historical and intergenerational trauma (Venet, 2021) and trauma induced by the school itself (Goldin, Duane, Khasnabis, 2021) which have become two major criticisms of trauma-pedagogy that focuses solely on the individual. This study takes into consideration those limitations by dismissing the idea that trauma is something any individual like a teacher (as opposed to a community) can truly address.

In the words of an American high-school student engaging with the ideas of trauma-informed care: “I am more than what happened to me, I’m not just my trauma” (Ginright, 2018). A more radical conceptualization would be to approach possible trauma backgrounds in our students as we do any other difference apparent in the classroom. In this way we can perceive the student not just as an essential profile of their traumas, but rather as a singular and evolving constellation of capacities, needs, and interests (Simon & Campano, 2013). Simon and Campano (2013) also suggest we need to see these students as constellations situated within a larger universe of school, classroom, community, culture and beyond. As will be discussed below, I am in no way suggesting we do away with trauma-informed approaches, but rather that we try to listen to student voices as to how to move forward in their education, intensely attuned to their psychological and emotional needs, but at the same time pushing towards healing. This study attempts to achieve this by giving the participants a chance to narrate their own experiences in schools implementing TIP and analyzing their responses for implications for improvements to justice and equity in TIP.

The unfortunate reality is that youth in alternate programs are often disproportionately burdened with histories of trauma exposure and experience a multitude of unique challenges for both daily functioning and developmental trajectories (Day et al., 2017). For the purposes of this study, I adopt the working definition of trauma as a response to a negative external event or series of events which surpasses the child’s ordinary coping skills. It comes in many forms and includes experiences such as maltreatment, witnessing violence, or the loss of a loved one. Traumatic experiences can impact brain development and behavior inside and outside of the classroom (McInerney & McKlindon, 2019). Through this body of research, scholars were faced

with quantitative confirmation of long-held suspicions – children exposed to trauma were much more likely to die a premature death than those who were not exposed (CDC, 2016; Corso et al., 2008; Dube et al., 2002; Dube et al., 2006). Given the severity of the findings of trauma research conducted by medical scholars it is incumbent on educators, especially those who work with students with complex trauma histories, to update their pedagogy to reflect the reality of their students. Despite movement towards trauma-responsive education, research has shown that schools in Canada and the United States are systematically ill-equipped to respond to the trauma needs of students and major structural changes are needed to bridge the gaps (Perry, 2003; Jaycox et al., 2009; Mclerney & McKlinden, 2019).

2.5. Possibilities for Emancipatory Behaviour Support

This section introduces possibilities for Behaviour Support that contextualize disruptive conduct within wider social systems. These approaches don't assume individual or clinical reasons for misbehaviour and are open to the possibility that the problems are systemic as opposed to personalized. The first approach centres anti-racism in education and considers the implications for students of growing up racialized in a white-supremacist country. The second approach emphasizes the importance of culture for supporting children at school for both behaviour and academic concerns. The third approach is called Restorative Justice in Education (RJE) and seeks to heal and repair rather than punish and discipline. RJE borrows heavily from Indigenous ways of repairing relationship and has significant potential for crossover with CSP and decolonization in Education.

2.5.1. Centering Principles of Anti-Racism Education

The literature reviewed above on behaviour supports revealed a notable lack of attention to approaches that addressed racism, and oppressions of various kinds. This appears to be a significant omission given the over-representation of Black, Indigenous, and students of colour among young people enrolled in alternate programs and schools in BC. For the purposes of this study, I adopt the discursive framework conceived by Dei (1996) for anti-racist education. It is important to name it as a discursive rather than rigid theoretical framework and acknowledge the intersecting and context-dependent nature

of the oppressions faced by the participants of this study. A discursive framework allows for capillary (Foucault, 1991) and ongoing (Dei, 1996) contribution to our conception of the theories that inform the analysis. The framework consists of ten principles.

Dei's starting point is that anti-racism "recognizes the social effects of race" (p. 27) and that an understanding of these effects must come from "examining the intersections of all forms of oppression" such as gender, class and sexuality (second principle). The third principle is the interrogation of white power and privilege, specifically White (male) power and privilege and the rationality for dominance in society. Dei's critique of this White supremacy is conditioned by the historical processes of European enslavement and colonization and this history is at the centre of the anti-racism examination of political, economic, and cultural relations between, and among, social groups in contemporary Euro-Canadian/American society.

The fourth principle of anti-racism education problematize the marginalization of certain voices in society and the delegitimization of the knowledge and experience of subordinated groups in the education system. It follows that the fifth principle would assert that every form of education must provide for a holistic understanding and appreciation of the human experience, comprising social, cultural, political ecological, and spiritual aspects. Finally, the sixth principle of anti-racism education focuses on identity and how identity is linked with/to schooling. Dei explains that the issue of how students link their identity and their schooling is important to understanding the causes for student disengagement from school – especially racialized students who are consistently pushed to the margins and from whom the least is expected. This framework further appreciates and respects the values and experiences of all members of society providing a foundational place of respect from which to approach behaviour support.

One radical imagining of an anti-racist school is Toronto's Africentric Alternative School, founded in 2009. The school was conceived specifically to problematize the Euro-Canadian/American desire for uniformity and compliance to certain cultural norms (Dei, 1996, pg. 107). The creation of this school was the result of a 30-year struggle by members of Toronto's Black communities for a Black-focussed school as one measure to address anti-black racism in Toronto schools (Dei & Kempf, 2013). This school has faced criticism and threats of de-funding (Howard & James, 2019), but continues to

stand as a beacon of hope for what is possible when made-vulnerable communities are given self-determination to direct the education of their youth. Let the words of Clayton (a grade 7 student at the Africentric Alternative School) stand as a testament to the possibilities: “what I like most about this school is how all of us know each other and stuff, kind of like a family. So even if we fight in our class and stuff, it’s not like a permanent thing” (Howard & James, 2019, p. 332).

Countering these oppressions and centering principles of anti-racism education is rich with possibilities for both behaviour support and academic freedom. In this way the school strove to provide safety, justice, and freedom to students who were having negative school experiences as a means of preventing negative behaviour before it even arose. The Toronto District School Board Census in 2006 (3 years before the founding of the Africentric Alternative School) summarizes the experiences of racialized students in its schools as such:

... aboriginal and Black students are least likely to enjoy school, least likely to find school a welcoming place, least likely to feel that school rules are fair to them and are most likely to feel that learning about their race or culture will make learning more interesting for them. Within this framework of failure and negative perceptions about school, aboriginal and Black male students have the most dismal experience in their school careers. (Levine-Rasky, 2014).

Tangible manifestations of anti-racist education like the Africentric school are radical journeys ‘up the river’ to uncover and address the source of inequity and in doing so, prevent downstream issues like anti-social behaviour rendering obsolete behaviour-support frameworks that are reactive instead of proactive.

2.5.2. Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies

Though trauma-informed teaching asks us to be intensely attuned to our students' needs, very few trauma-informed school programs centre cultural relevance in their approaches, and I agree with scholars like Kokka (2018) who argue that ultimately limits their transformative potential. At the same time, many culturally-sustaining approaches to education naturally adopt trauma-sensitive principles. This to me suggests a shift in the discourse is necessary wherein we accept the importance of

trauma-informed approaches, though our practice need not be dominated by it. My research asks how our positive intentions in British Columbia to implement trauma-informed practice have manifested in the experience of the alternate school student.

Centring culture in education developed from Ladson-Billings' (1995) Culturally Relevant Pedagogy to more recent conceptualizations of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2017), although both approaches have always attempted to 'teach against' Eurocentric hegemonies in public schooling in North America (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy seeks to:

Perpetuate and foster – to sustain – linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of school for positive social transformation. CSP positions dynamic cultural dexterity as a necessary good and sees the outcome of learning as additive rather than subtractive.... Culturally sustaining pedagogy exists wherever education sustains the lifeways of communities who have been and continue to be damaged and erased through schooling (Paris & Alim, 2017, p. 1).

The success of culturally sustaining schools for Indigenous students, like Niigaane Ojibwe Immersion, an Ojibwe school in the U.S., and Tsi ni yu kwali ho:tu, an Oneida school in Canada (Sumida Huaman, 2020), speaks to the idea that disruptive behaviour is not inherent to certain students but rather that the Eurocentric, white-focused education system is the problem and this certainly has implications for the delivery of behaviour support systems in mainstream and alternate schools. Ultimately, culturally sustaining pedagogies (CSP) asks us to reconsider what we know, and accept a commitment to pluralistic education. Foundational to the scholarship is a commitment to constantly ask what our pedagogy would look like if whiteness and its accompanying patriarchal, cis-heteronormative, English-monolingual, ableist, classist, xenophobic, Judeo-Christian lens weren't the dominant forces in education (Alim & Paris, 2017). What this study seeks to explore is the same question, but framed around behaviour support: what would our behaviour support pedagogies look like if we started to chip away at (or at the very least shine a light on) the oppressions that dominate Canadian schools?

2.5.3. Restorative Justice Frameworks

Restorative Justice (RJ) is an approach to school discipline that emerged from the criminal justice system. Researchers and advocates pointed to the ineffectiveness of traditional punitive measures at reducing recidivism and existing inequities, so pushed for a more healing-centred approach which became the broad category of restorative justice practices. There is strong evidence that restorative justice in the criminal justice system reduces recidivism (Campbell-Strang, 2013; Lamer, 2005; Sherman, 2015; Sherman, 2007), so naturally educators became curious about the possibilities for RJ in a school setting.

Implementation of RJ in Western schools has resulted in positive outcomes for decades with participants reporting greater levels of satisfaction with regards to a sense of justice, greater levels of support for those affected, and a reduced level of reoffending (Department of Education, 1996; Education Queensland, 1998, as quoted in Cameron & Thosborne, 2001). Despite its relative success and popularity among participants, RJ has not taken over as the dominant form of discipline in Canadian schools.

Before describing the tenets of RJ in education (RJE) it is important to note that non-Western societies have been using similar techniques since time immemorial. Healing the harm of a transgression instead of seeking punishment has roots in Indigenous cultures worldwide and decolonizing RJE requires stringent resistance to the idea that the concepts are new or simply the product of Western educational theory (McCaslin, 2005; Pranis, Stuart, & Wedge, 2003; Horn, 2016). With that very important disclaimer, the following diagram describes the central tenets of RJE:

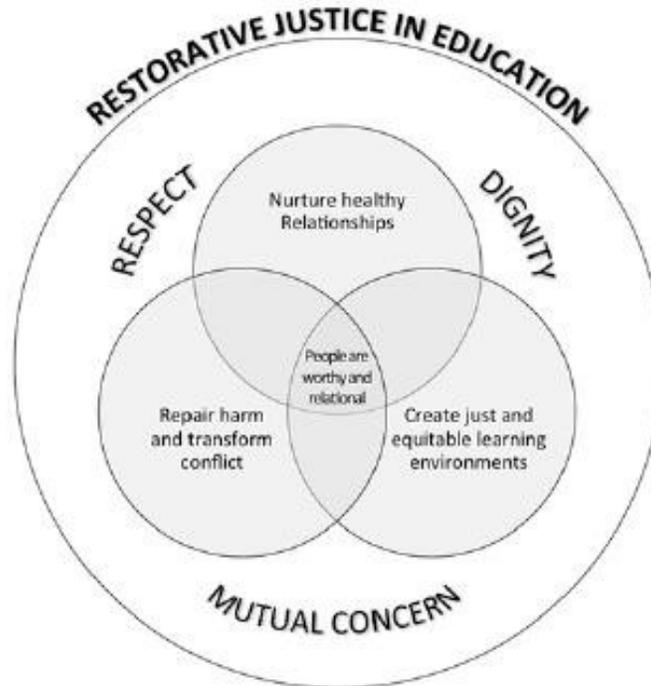


Figure 1. Restorative Justice in Education

Source: Evans and Vaandering, 2016

As can be seen in the preceding diagram. The components of RJE are intertwined, intersectional, and interdependent. One tenet cannot be established without the other. It is impossible to repair harm and transform conflict in RJE without nurturing healthy relationships in an equitable and just learning environment. In this way, one is not more important than another, or a prerequisite for another, all are essential (Evans & Vaandering, 2016).

Evaluating the implementation of RJE in three alternative high schools in California, Gregory (Carroll, 2017) found that, while incremental improvements were observed at all three sites, the focus on formal procedure over relationship was the principal undoing of true paradigm-shifting change. It is at this point of relationality where experts recommend beginning the work of RJE, even in the face of the seemingly insurmountable entrenchment of punishment-centred approaches. Observations indicate that schools adopting RJE should focus on relationships as centrally important with an awareness of harm done, rather than rules broken, and a collaborative approach that meets the students where they are at and seeks to help them grow individually, rather than towards a prescribed set of objectives. (Zehr, 2002; Amstutz & Mullet, 2005; Morrison, 2005).

2.6. Summary and Gaps in Literature

As discussed previously, PBIS has evidence to support its effectiveness in schools; however, I believe that it is not simply a problem of incomplete implementation that has prevented it from solving our school disciplinary problems. The lack of research specifically focussed on alternative schools became clear during the review of the literature. Even more troubling, was the lack of Canadian research addressing racialized discrimination in the school system both mainstream and alternative. There is a growing body of research in the United States focussing on the school-to-prison pipeline, however, more research needs to be done in Canada examining the connection between school discipline, alternative school placement, and youth incarceration. My study, in which I conducted qualitative research through semi-structured interviews with alternative school students and analyzed their narration of their experience at school, will attempt to be a preliminary addition to this field.

There are clear limitations with PBIS, most centrally the lack of acknowledgment of equity concerns (Venet, 2021). However, TIP, RJE, and western school-based discipline in general also suffer from racial-colour blindness and colonial adherence to Western ways of knowing. Thus, the gaps in the literature appear to me to be a lack of evaluation of implementation of school discipline that incorporates the positive aspects of disciplinary doctrine and measures addressing the racial, economic, gendered oppressions perpetuated by our schools. Joseph, Hnilca, and Hansen (2021) explain that failure to acknowledge and confront racial inequity leads to haphazard introduction of change policy that can only result in the partial success of practices like RJE and TIP. There certainly exists a need for further research in the effectiveness of paradigm shifting disciplinary practices in schools alongside critical anti-racist work on every level, from pedagogical to administrative.

While there are many studies that examine the effectiveness of Trauma Informed Practice and Positive Behavior Support by looking quantitatively at dropout rates and rates of disciplinary actions like suspensions, there are fewer qualitative studies about student experience in behaviour support programs, especially in the Canadian context.

In summary, this study seeks to contribute to our collective understanding of student experience of behaviour support, specifically for students who are targeted for

behaviour support and placed in secondary alternate programs. It is my belief that these students have significant lived experience that will lend credence to their perspectives and allow scholars to imagine possibilities for improved behaviour support frameworks by incorporating the insights of the participants. In this way, we can treat the students as experts in their own behaviour and experiences of behaviour support at school.

Chapter 3.

Research Methods

3.1. Vignette

Several years ago, one of my students whom I will call Linus, was living at the Kwekwecnewtxw Coast Salish Watch House on Burnaby Mountain near the Simon Fraser University campus as part of ongoing resistance to colonial occupation of the land and the proposed building of a pipeline for oil. I visited Linus there a couple of times and he showed me around the site and introduced me to several friends he had made. I was proud of him for participating in protests – for taking a stand for something that he believed in – and was impressed by the community he had found and co-created on the mountain; however, I knew that he had been couch-surfing for a while and was at risk for becoming unhoused, so I hoped that he also had a long-term plan for housing. I could tell he was proud of himself as well, and was excited when I organized a visit for other students. Colleagues of mine were wary of this field trip, and I admit I too was initially hesitant when my student suggested we visit. However, after thinking about it, I decided to go ahead with the field trip, and I am glad I did. Watching Linus show his peers around, animatedly describe the protocols around the sacred fire, and introduce them to various Indigenous elders, I was struck by how relaxed and natural it felt. I was ashamed of my initial hesitancy and thought about my own biases and socializations that affected my view of Linus' housing situation. Linus continued to live at the Watch House for several months and graduated from our school the next year, and I think about him often when I am on Burnaby Mountain.

3.2. Introduction

Just as I was hesitant to take my students to visit Linus on Burnaby Mountain, I initially had reservations about finding a methodological approach for my study that respected the students to whom I was hoping to listen. This chapter describes the methodology of my research which seeks to understand the experiences and perceptions of students enrolled in alternate programs in BC secondary schools. I first describe the research design that guided my study, including my role as researcher,

followed by descriptions of the data collection methods and protocols, my choice of data analysis, how I establish trustworthiness, and, finally, the limitations of the study.

3.3. Research Design

As discussed in Chapter 2, I had great difficulty finding research that focussed on alternate school students from Canada, let alone the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. Initially I was disheartened, as I was hoping to find an ‘adult in the room’ so to speak, who had already charted a path and whose methodology I could follow. After that initial disappointment, I returned to Creswell and Poth’s (2018) framework for qualitative inquiry and research design to conceptualize this study. I justify the choice to conduct qualitative research using their definition:

Qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem...The final written report includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, a complex description and interpretations of the problem, and its contribution to the literature or a call for change. (Creswell, 2013, p. 44)

Fittingly, this study seeks to understand the meaning individual alternate school students ascribe to their experiences at school and the problems they faced. Further, I believe the implications described in Chapter 5 are both a contribution to the emergent literature and a call for systemic change in behaviour support systems.

Additionally, I took inspiration from Paris (2011), who conceptualizes the notion of humanizing (qualitative) research when working with marginalized communities. To Paris (2011), this humanizing research is a methodological stance, which requires that our inquiries involve “dialogic consciousness-raising and the building of relationships of dignity and care for both researchers and participants” (p. 137).

3.4. Researcher Positionality

Noblit, Flores, and Murillo (2004) have asked researchers to centre their own positionality in qualitative inquiry. In doing so, we consider the ways in which our presence in the communities we are studying is itself an expression or manifestation of the inequitable political or structural relations of power that we are seeking to criticize and ultimately dismantle. They urge researchers to explicitly consider how their own acts of studying and representing people and situations are acts of domination even as critical ethnographers reveal the same in what they study” (Noblit et al. as cited in Madison, 2005, p. 7).

I hold no illusions about my time as an alternate schoolteacher prior to conducting this study giving me a foundation of ‘insider’ status, since my social background (race, class, trauma-history) is very different from that of the participants. However, I subscribe to Ingold’s (2014) conception of observation wherein there can be no observation without participation – that is, without an intimate coupling, in perception and action, of observer and observed. Thus, I believe my time as an alternate schoolteacher, working with the children who willingly participated in this study, prepared me well to do this research, at least in comparison with a complete newcomer to the context of alternate schools.

Paris (2010), Ingold (2014), Madison (2005) and others write about the relational aspect of qualitative research and, on one hand, I contend my established relationships with some of the participants solidified a base of dignity and care that allowed them to relax during the interviews and I hope gave them license to speak freely. On the other hand, my position as teacher solidifies an unequal power relationship between myself and the participants and both sides of this coin need to be considered.

How I conceived of my relationship with the participants is further discussed in the following section, but can be succinctly summarized by Ingold (2014, p. 389): “They are not subjects [or participants] at all, nor objects, nor are they hybrid subjectobjects. They are verbs. This is as true of humans as of beings of any other kind. Indeed, humans are not really beings at all but “becomings”. Wherever you find them, humans are humaning. They are corresponding—as letter writers do, scribing their thoughts and feelings and waiting for answers—living lives that weave around one another along ever-

extending” (Ingold and Palsson, 2013, p. 11). Perhaps it is more accurate to say that I came to this study with fluid conceptions of subject and object, participant and researcher, insider and outsider, and allowed my interpretations to be dynamic and relational.

I attempted to minimize the ‘domineering’ nature of my presence in these alternate school communities by allowing the students to direct the course of our interviews and being extremely flexible with my interview questions, allowing for a dialogic conversation in the spirit of the previously mentioned work by Paris (2010). However, I freely acknowledge that as an adult talking to children, as a white man talking to racialized youth, as a middle-class person speaking to youth in poverty, it was impossible for me to meet the participants on truly equal footing, and this undoubtedly deserves to be interrogated at all stages of the inquiry.

Finally, I believe it is extremely important to heed the words of Tuck and Yang (2014) when doing research in alternate schools where the personal histories of the students are complex, and intensely personal. Tuck and Yang remind us that “the stories that are considered most compelling, considered most authentic in social science research are stories of pain and humiliation. Reporting on that pain with detailed qualitative data and in people’s real voices is supposed to yield needed material or political resources; this is the prominent but unreliable theory of change in the academy ” (2014, p. 811). However, publishing trauma, pain, and humiliation in academic work raises numerous ethical and moral questions and thus I have worked to not simply fulfill the ethical requirements of the institutional review board, but to also constantly reflect on my positionality as collector and interpreter of the data – data that could and very likely will include stories of pain and suffering – and consider the ultimate usefulness of sharing these stories (in collaboration with the students themselves as storytellers). The purpose of this study is to explore possibilities for improving the delivery of education to alternate school students and not to lay bare stories of trauma – these considerations have guided the presentation of the data.

3.5. Setting and Context

This study was conducted in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, Canada. All participants were enrolled in secondary public alternate schools at the time of our

interviews in one school district. I had initially planned and gained permission to interview students from several school districts, but the COVID-19 pandemic caused all but one district to rescind their permission.

3.6. Participants

The participants of this study are all male-identifying students at off-site secondary alternate schools in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. Their ages ranged from 14-18. They were selected using purposeful sampling. I attempted to select cases that showed different perspectives on the problem (students with different racial identities, economic backgrounds, and gender identities), however due to the limited access granted to me due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the difficulty coordinating with youth on the margins, I had limited ability to reject interested candidates and eventually selected the participants who presented as 'ordinary and accessible' (Creswell & Roth, 2018, p. 100) within the confines of my research design.

The participants were recruited through my networks of colleagues and friends in the alternate school community in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. I distributed a flier to colleagues in my region to hand out to their students; however, I don't believe any of them read it. All participants, perhaps wary of unknown adults, agreed to meet with me only after their teachers vouched for me, and described the benefits of participating.

All the participants in this study were assigned male at birth and continue to identify as male. I reached out to several female-identifying individuals; however, none chose to participate in the study. I believe the gender homogeneity among participants limits the scope of my findings in some ways, but in other ways can provide insight into the lives of male-identifying secondary school students who unfortunately make up a disproportionate number of perpetrators of violence among youth. With the important caveat that the following statistics rely on police-reporting and knowing what we do about the problematic nature of colonial policing in Canada (Maynard, 2017), the table below illustrates the gender-imbalance with regards to youth violence. The graphic is pulled from a Statistics Canada report from 2014 that displays the higher percentage of male-identifying individuals who were accused of a crime that year, both youth and adult. Of note is the further percentage jump when looking at violent crime and sexual violence.

Table 2. Proportion of accused of crime that were male, by age group and offence, Canada, 2014

Type of offence	Youth aged 12 to 17	Young adults aged 18 to 24	Older adults aged 25 and older ¹	Total adults ¹
	percent male			
Total accused of <i>Criminal Code</i> offences (excluding traffic)	72	76	76	76
Violent crime				
Homicide and attempted murder ²	84	89	86	87
Sexual assault - level 3 - aggravated	100	93	86	87
Sexual assault - level 2 - weapon or bodily harm	97	91	92	92
Sexual assault - level 1	96	98	98	98
Sexual violations against children ³ , ⁴	92	93	97	96
Assault - level 3 - aggravated	75	85	82	83
Assault - level 2 - weapon or bodily harm	77	77	76	76
Assault - level 1 (common assault)	62	70	76	75
Other assaults ⁵	66	76	76	76
Robbery	90	88	85	86
Criminal harassment	61	75	78	78
Uttering threats	73	80	83	82
Other violent <i>Criminal Code</i> violations ⁶	74	78	75	75
Total	71	76	79	78

Source: Statistics Canada, 2013

Male-identifying individuals are accused of far more crimes than female-identifying people and this seems to extend to school disciplinary ‘crimes’ as well. (Ericksen & Pearson, 2021). These statistics are corroborated by my experience as an alternate schoolteacher where male-identifying students often outnumber female-identifying students in my behaviour-support classrooms. Also, of the students I know who have either perpetrated or been the victim of a violent act, the vast majority have been male identifying. While the scope of my research is limited by gender uniformity, it allows for the possibility of greater depth into this specific problem of male violence and alienation.

The names of all my participants have all been changed for anonymity and I have attempted to remove any information relating to their specific schools or home communities that may have allowed identifying details to be inferred through a process

of elimination. Most students were eager to share their ideas for improving school once they heard I was ready to listen. Finally, we know that students of colour are overrepresented in alternate school programs in North America (Vanderhaar et al, 2014; Dunning-Lozano, 2016) and my research participants were no exception to this trend: 4 of 7 participants were racialized. What follows is a brief description of each individual participant:

Seamus is a senior secondary level student at an off-site alternate program for students in grades 10-12 in the Lower Mainland of so-called British Columbia. I connected with him through his teacher, and he agreed to do the semi-structured interview via Zoom. I knew Seamus by name from an after-school program that I previously helped to facilitate, but not well enough to say we had a relationship. We had had no interactions outside of this program before the interview. I learned a lot about his academic and family journey through our conversation. Seamus is white.

John was a grade 9 student at an off-site alternate school program in the Lower Mainland of so-called British Columbia when I interviewed him. I connected with him through his teacher whom I know. He and I did the interview via Zoom. As mentioned in the interview, he was the victim of a shooting before his grade 9 school year. John is Indigenous.

Miguel was a grade 11 student at the time of our interview at an off-site alternate school program in the Lower Mainland of so-called British Columbia. He and I knew each other from an after-school program that I previously helped facilitate and I believe our relationship allowed for a basis of trust that gave greater depth to his answers to my questions. We conducted the interview via Zoom. It is not mentioned in his interview, but I have Miguel's permission to share that he was the victim of a horrific assault that left him permanently scarred the year prior to our interview. Miguel's family immigrated to British Columbia from Central America.

Elijah was a grade 11 student at an off-site alternate school program in the Lower Mainland of so-called British Columbia when we conducted our interview. I did not know him prior to the interview. We conducted the interview via Zoom. Elijah is white.

Dominic was a grade 12 student at an off-site alternative school program in the Lower Mainland of so-called British Columbia at the time of our interview. I connected with him via his teacher whom I know well, and he and I did not know each other before the interview. We conducted the interview via Zoom. Dominic is white.

Thad was a grade 10 student at an off-site alternative school program in the Lower Mainland of so-called British Columbia at the time of our interview. I connected with him via his teacher whom I know well, and he and I did not know each other prior to the interview. We conducted the interview via Zoom. I am unsure of Thad's racial identity.

Farhan was a grade 12 student at an off-site alternative school program in the Lower Mainland of so-called British Columbia at the time of our interview. He and I knew each other quite well from an after-school program that I previously helped to facilitate. Like Miguel, I believe our relationship allowed for a basis of trust that made the interview that much richer. We conducted the interview via Zoom. Farhan shares both Japanese and Persian identities.

3.7. Data Collection

I choose to conduct open-ended, semi-structured interviews with the participants in order to have a free-flowing and natural conversation but also allow for the use of common questions so the data from different interviews is directly comparable and able to be interpreted with the intention of developing themes (Guthrie, 2010). During the interviews I strove to give the participants generous attentiveness and relational depth, and I was sensitive to context (Ingold, 2014), and I believe my experience as an alternate schoolteacher gave me a background knowledge that allowed me to skip superficial questions that may have been required if I were truly new to the context. Ultimately, the choice to do open-ended interviews and the research questions were designed to give the students time and space to construct a story of their schooling to this point and offer us the chance for interpretation in our search for more equitable and emancipatory educational models.

It is perhaps necessary to mention here that all of this occurred during various stages of crisis during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. I had to amend my original ethics proposal with Simon Fraser University to avoid face-to-face interviews and to conduct research via online video-conferencing software. I connected with interested participants via email to set up Zoom meetings to conduct the actual interviews. In the end, all interviews were conducted online using video. Through email, I provided each participant with a copy of the consent form; however, my experience with such forms as a teacher prompted me to also read it aloud to the students before beginning the formal interviews to ensure they could give informed consent as much as possible. In the end, I interviewed every student who expressed interest which resulted in 7 participants and one practice interview with one of my own students, which helped me to amend my questions. Both the original and amended versions of the semi-formal interview questions are included in Appendix A.

The interviews ranged in length; most were around 45 minutes long and the longest was about 1 hour and 15 minutes. The range of lengths reflects that while the interviews were semi-structured, and all participants were asked the same questions, the interviews took various directions based on the where the participants chose to go with their responses. This was a conscious choice to follow the direction of Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) who see the qualitative research interview as “attempts to understand the

world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experience, to uncover their lived world" (p. 3). To limit the responses or cut participants off mid-response to me would violate the principle of allowing them to narrate their own experience.

The digital interview data was collected and protected in adherence with Research Ethics Board (REB) guidelines at SFU. All interviews were conducted on Zoom and audio recorded through the application and files were stored in a secure folder in an SFU server. Audio files were transcribed on an encrypted laptop. When not in use, the audio files and transcriptions were saved on a password-protected and encrypted hard drive. The audio recordings were deleted soon after transcription was complete. Only my supervisors and I had access to the recordings or journals. To maintain confidentiality, the only files with identifiable participant information were the informed consent documents. These documents were stored in a locked filing cabinet at SFU.

3.8. Data Analysis

In my experience as a teacher in alternate programs, I have seen first-hand how students create their worlds through dialogue. I am constantly struck by the creative and beautiful ways my students make and remake the world around them with language, often in situations of pain and struggle. Thinking back to the example of Linus from the preface to this chapter, when he said he 'lived' on Burnaby Mountain, I believe he saw the nobility and possibility of a brighter world while living at an Indigenous protest site, despite the misgivings of colonial Canadian society. However, as Carspecken (1996) reminds us, I can't truly 'know' how Linus felt. Further, Carspecken (1996) explains how we cannot know for certain what an actor intended with her act [or words] and you cannot know for certain what impressions of meaning were received by those witnessing the act [or hearing the words], but you can specify possibilities. This idea is central to my research and approach to qualitative research. Knowing what I do about bias and youth, and teenagers' ability to make themselves the protagonists of reality, in general, I intend for my data analysis to deal not with truth or absolutes, but to both uncover hidden realities and illuminate possibility.

To explore these possibilities in the data, I followed the 'Data-Analysis Spiral' as described by Creswell and Poth (2018). First, I organized the data using NVivo software; I then fastidiously read the data and kept notes for emergent ideas. Those ideas then became codes which I used to sort through the data. Those codes became the basis upon which I developed themes and with those themes I was able to develop and assess initial interpretations. Finally, I represented the data in the form of written description and excerpts, which can be found in Chapter 4.

I acknowledge that reconstructing meaning can never be reduced to a set of procedures and that interpretation itself is ultimately an art (Denzin, 1994). I arrived at the significant themes of my study without using a highly systematic method of sorting and classification, though I don't believe that this makes my interpretation of the data any less valid or the possibilities that resulted from my analysis any less significant. Rather, I subscribe to the materialist idea that data cannot be seen as an inert and indifferent mass (MacLure, 2013) waiting to be dissected and calibrated by us, the wise and analytic researchers. This materialist critique of representation and data analysis would also call into question our position as researchers standing separate and outside of 'the data.' Our experiences inform the data; we create the data together with our interview subjects.

It is necessary to acknowledge that the themes that emerged out my research didn't come from a recipe for distilling data into truth, but that I selected themes that emerged from bits of data that resonated in the body as well as the brain – moments of conversation that sent frissons of excitement, pain, or sorrow through my body, prompted energy to increase or decrease in myself or the research participants, or caused us to laugh. This is how MacLure (2013) describes data that 'glows' – data that catches us in the intensity of an event and, in order to think differently, to arrive somewhere else (p. 662). Ultimately, there is an intangible and indescribable nature to the parts of my data that I believe shimmer and glow – I trusted the students to make clear to me when something they said was important and worthy of further analysis. Additionally, the literature directed the course of my analysis. Systemic issues in education such as racism (Dei, 1996) and school-to-prison pipelines (Maynard, 2017) certainly provided a blueprint to which data was important to situate in the larger context of systemic oppression of difference and deviance in Canadian society.

3.9. Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1994) judge the goodness or quality of an inquiry in the critical theory tradition by the extent that the inquiry considers the social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender antecedents of the studied situation, the extent to which the inquiry acts to erode ignorance and misapprehensions, and the extent to which it provides a stimulus to action, that is to the transformation of the existing structure. I believe this study fulfills all categories in that the context is extensively considered, the findings are meant to fill a gap in the literature which is ignorant of the experiences of alternate school students, and, finally, I believe the implications provide clear impetus for systemic change to behaviour support frameworks.

Also inspired by Lincoln and Guba (1985) I employed triangulation strategies to increase the trustworthiness of my analysis. I interviewed multiple students and compared their responses in context. In addition, I employed numerous theories to analyze and interpret the data. Finally, I triangulated the data against multiple theories of behaviour support and the existing literature surrounding student experience in alternate schools. This allowed me to identify where my study fit in a knowledge gap surrounding secondary alternate school students in the Canadian context.

3.10. Limitations

As previously mentioned, only male-identifying individuals chose to participate in this study, which certainly limits the applicability of the findings across gender identities. Further, due to the COVID-19 pandemic I was unable to complete research in a school district that had initially agreed to work with me, and thus the participants all come from a single school district which again limits the generalizable nature of the findings.

3.11. Significance

Equity-focussed inquiry in alternate schools is an emergent area of scholarship and I believe there is a need for extensive further inquiry – especially in Canada. In addition, studies that de-pathologize ‘made-vulnerable students’, de-centre whiteness, and account for the systemic racism inherent in Canadian schools are even more difficult

to find. It is my intention that this study be a small piece of a much larger movement in that scholarship.

In summary, in this chapter I have described the qualitative methodology I employed in the study. I have described the setting and context, the participants, and my recruiting strategies. I have detailed the protocols I issued in collecting data via in-depth semi structured interviews, the strategies I used to analyze the data, and how I established trustworthiness of the research. In the following chapter, I present the findings.

Chapter 4.

Findings: Violence and Young Men's Desire to Find Connection

4.1. Vignette

In one of my early years as a teacher, a student of mine was kidnapped. During their ordeal they were tortured, filmed, and left to suffer. Descriptions of the events were hard to hear, and it is even harder to imagine the trauma implications for all involved – from victim to perpetrators to bystanders. I will never forget talking to a colleague about how the friends who stepped up for this youth, stood by their side in the aftermath, would forever be bonded to them and that we as teachers, youth workers, counselors would be hard-pressed to ‘compete’ with such a bond. Compete is a funny word in that context, but it feels right, every day working with students who are experimenting with organized violence, we are competing with the allure of that lifestyle, offering at times a pale comparison to the money, power, and brotherhood/sisterhood that ‘the life’, as it is called, can offer. Not all my students experience such senseless violence but what follows is a glimpse inside the lives of young people at school, for whom these sorts of events are not as rare or unthinkable as we might hope.

4.2. Introduction

After analyzing the data from my semi-structured interviews with the seven students, three major themes emerged that describe students' experiences of their support services in both their mainstream and alternate schools. The themes are experiences of violence, significant interruptions to education, and tenuous feelings of belonging. They are described separately although they overlap and intersect. For instance, if a student gets in a fight, they are suspended, their education is interrupted and the academic struggles that ensue would affect their feelings of belonging in the school. I begin with experiences of violence, move on to the description of educational interruption, and conclude with the students' experiences of belonging. Following each main theme, the data will be discussed in relation to the literature and theoretical perspectives described in Chapter 2.

4.3. Student Experiences of Violence

This section describes the participants' narration of how violence permeates their lives. First, I introduce the theme that emerged from the data that students carry violence and its impacts from home with them to school. Secondly, I explore the theme of violence at school and how students experienced the response to that violence from the schools. Lastly, I explain how the participants described violence in relation to bullying at school. After the three sub-themes in this section there is a brief discussion of the findings in relation to the literature.

4.3.1. Violence at Home

Charisma is hard to define but I am confident in saying that John, one of the participants in this study, had it in spades. At the time of our interview, I was unaware that John was to become a student at the school I worked at the following September.

During our interview John talked briefly about his home life in which his brother caused constant upheaval and disruption. “[My brother] is a little shit disturber,” he described, “so whenever he doesn’t get his way, he goes crazy and smashes the walls and stuff”. Further to the outbursts and destruction of their home, John described how the police were constantly visiting his home for the purposes of surveillance of his brother. “The cops come a lot for curfew for my lil’ bro,” John explained, “and um it’s pretty...pretty intense but on the weekends or whatever I don’t got work, I’m usually at my friends’ all day and then uh I’ll sleep over there sometimes”. Despite his little brother’s disruptive effects on his homelife, it was clear to me that John loved him dearly, and spoke of him fondly, often laughing ruefully when describing his antics.

4.3.2. Violence at School & Disciplinary Responses

Another participant, Miguel describes the roughhousing among male-identifying peers. When I asked him about how the school treated him during a time when he ‘got in trouble’, Miguel talks about a time he was in class and was playfully attacked by a friend that resulted in disciplinary action from his school, his own suspension.

M: I don’t know, I don’t know if this was my fault, but it happened. So listen I was in class one time that was like in grade 9, I was

in class and some kid I knew he came but I was sitting down in my desk and he came and put me in a chokehold and I don't know how I did it... but everybody in the class was surprised but while I was sitting down getting choked I like tipped him up and his legs were up to here and I stood up and boom!!... and threw him on the ground literally and like he wasn't that tall too, so he flew, and everyone was shocked, and I was even shocked myself I'm like 'how did that happen' *laughs* cuz like he was messing around me too right? Like we were friends.

Miguel wonders whose fault the interaction was. Decidedly, given the punishment of suspension that he received, the school assigned him blame; however, he has questions about that decision. A chokehold like the one Miguel describes, is a move borrowed from wrestling where a person uses their arms to restrict the windpipe of their opponent to get them to submit (admit defeat). Miguel laughed when recounting the story, but it is noteworthy that he did not have a choice in the matter and was required to participate in this 'play-fighting' as part of social life with his peers during class time. Indeed, Miguel finished the story by saying: "...I was fooling around too and literally picked him up and slammed him and he was done...honestly, I don't know, I don't really see nothing wrong in it". In the end, he received yet another short 2-day suspension and returned to his classes as normal.

I asked John to describe his school path to me, while making it a point not to push for specific details about the indiscretions of the participants, often explicitly saying "I don't actually care too much about the details of what happened, I am more interested in how the school treated you afterwards". However, many of the participants, including John, talked openly about the situations that got them 'in trouble'. John had a history of disciplinary difficulties in elementary school. On the last day before Spring Break in Grade 7, he got into a fight with another student that he describes below. Because of this fight and his extensive disciplinary record, the school district decided that it was safer for all involved for John to go to high school for the final months of grade 7 and he was placed in an alternate program located in a mainstream school in his area. This meant John spent his final months of Grade 7 in a Grade 8 and 9 classroom with other students who had been streamed into this behaviour-support program.

John: I was [placed in an alternate school program] in grade 7 in high school because I got into an altercation in grade 7...on the last day going into spring break, and like I guess I punched this kid too hard and I kinda dislocated his jaw and that like instead of going to the principal's office or whatever it was like the bell

already rang like just rang right after I punched him so I just I walked like they took that bad way I guess I should have went and confronted...

D: And faced the music?

John: yeah, I just avoided school because it was the last day or whatever and they kicked me out and I went to the [alternate school] program.

As we can see from the previous excerpt from our interview, John speaks matter-of-factly when discussing violence. He punched a kid in the face causing serious injury; he was removed from that school. There is no follow-up from him about any of the interpersonal conflict or visible signs of regret. John was relaxed when telling me this story and his voice didn't increase in cadence or volume. He was explaining to me how he arrived at his current off-site alternate school placement after being removed again from his mainstream school in grade 9.

D: ...how did that happen? Like how did the transition happen?

J: uh, I mean it was pretty slow uh I guess I went to [the director of safe schools for his district] and I had a few meetings with her. And they decided, it took them a long time that's why I missed the first 2 months of school, cuz it took them a long time for them to decide if it was even safe for me to go back to school at that point. And then they finally came to the conclusion that [his current school] was the best place for me when I was there.

D: Why were they looking into the safety of you going to [your current school]?

J: the main reason they were looking into that was cuz in the summer I guess I was in wrong place at the wrong time and I ended up getting shot at a couple times and shot and uh they said it was like unsafe for me to be like in a public school because they didn't want, I guess they didn't really know the situation, so they just gotta assume the worst, so they were assuming that someone was going to roll up at the school and try to shoot me and get other students or whatever and so that was obviously a safety issue

D: It sucks that they gotta assume the worst, eh?

J: yeah exactly, I wasn't even any part of it. It is what it is.

I wish I had asked whether John himself believed that it was unsafe for him to attend school during those 2 months he mentions, but retrospectively it is clear that the

school district was unwilling or unable to guarantee his safety during that time. This fact is significant in a later section on school belonging.

In the previous section I detail my interview with John who certainly has a remarkable story of the intersection of youth violence and the school system. This section details the responses from participants that suggest that for young male-identifying students who end up in secondary alternate-school programs, violence is almost ordinary. When I asked Thad, a grade 10 student from an off-site alternate school program, my standard final question about how to improve schools in general for students like him, his response was emphatic:

Uh, I'll just say this. At any school, there's always gonna be someone bringing a weapon, I definitely wasn't the only person I'm just not a snake personally...so there's no way to make school really safer. You are never going to have a fully safe school, just not something that you're going to have even if you tried and spent Hella money (That's mother who I did not know was listening or could hear us interrupts from off screen – "what would make it better?) What would make – yo like – what would make – yo like make the students sit down and talk to each other yo, like make them actually listen to each other, hear them out, not like sit there and go like "yeah whatever", like make them sit there and hear one other out.

Thad went on to describe his ideal scenario for schools dealing with bullying, student conflict, and the threat of violence among the students:

T: Make the bully sit down with the kid they bullied. If you can't make a school safer by removing weapons and making kids less inclined to fight each other then at least like make them like more humane to each other like if there's no way to like stop shit that happens outside of school then don't have don't make kids try and tell on each other, don't turn them against each other, and don't try to get someone to give you names ever. One you are gonna get that kid in way more shit – I am so lucky I knew this going into high school cuz I would have been fucked – don't purposefully try and make a student not like that cuz it's not going to work so the kid that's going to be bringing that knife or that baton or whatever to school they are always going to be like that, they have to decide to change, you can't make them change, so if you want a change, like they have to regulate it right? But that's what I mean, regulate it with a different way, don't like you can ask a kid. (Mom interrupts again "you want it be like a community where people actually work together and work stuff out") Yeah work stuff out! (Mom again: "not just punish them"). Yeah, instead of sitting there being like "Oh Tommy told me you did this, guess what you are suspended."

- D: yeah, Tommy is gonna get it the next day.
- T: (mom and Thad laugh and other people in the house, who are off-screen and never identified, laugh) Poor little Tommy, he weighs 110 man, he's in grade 8! And guess what?
- D: They kinda threw Tommy under the bus.
- T: (mum in the background: "Tommy's school is over") Tommy's school is over!

In summary, the participants described violence in various contexts of their lives, at school, at home, in the community, and in the classroom. Violence interwove throughout their lives and was discussed without fanfare or sensationalism.

4.3.3. Bullying

Bullying is another aspect of school violence that the participants talked about. Thad mentioned solutions for dealing with bullies in his answer about improving school discipline and Seamus discussed an instance of score-settling with a student he saw as a bully when he was in elementary school. When I asked him about the school response to him 'getting in trouble' at a mainstream school he described a fight with a classmate that resulted in suspension.

Well, this kid, he was always a jerk to a lot of people, he was a trouble student, always causing a commotion in class and things like that. And we kinda just, it was lunch time, and we were all out on the field and it kinda just I forget how it happened, it kinda just turned into a fight. And we ended up tumbling down the hill and then teachers got called so we were both sent to the principal's office. When that happened...then I was...we were told a little bit to say sorry...and I got sent home for a few days, and I think the other kid got sent home for a day maybe...

This story is like the one John told me about his exit from his elementary school. In both cases, John and Seamus were simply removed from the school environment, suspended and in John's case 'promoted' to high school. Considering the effects that violence can have on a developing brain from a trauma perspective, further study of student experiences of safety in both alternate programs and mainstream schools would likely result in positive possibilities for learning outcomes and will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

4.3.4. Discussion

The conclusions about school discipline that can be drawn from what the participants said are varied and complex, but I will focus here on the theme of violence. Thad states plainly that we "...are never going to have a fully safe school, just not something that you're going to have even if you tried and spent hella [lots of] money". Thad understands that making schools safe costs money, and again I wish I had followed up on this point because upon reflection I realize that I did not know what he meant. It is possible that Thad was referring to 'hella money' in terms of equipment like metal detectors, something that has failed to make schools safe in the United States and has deepened the connections between racism, prisons, and schools (Schildkraut & Grogan, 2019) or money in terms of more services and supports for youth involved in violence, such as counsellors and youth workers. In any case, Thad chose to describe to me that schools are generally unsafe and that approaches taken by administrators are not effective and that is truly worth listening to. Finally, of additional note, both Thad and his mom refer to the violent repercussions that students face for snitching - a code borrowed from organized crime that discourages people from testifying against others in court.

Given the unexceptional presence of violence in the lives of the participants, it is critical that any behaviour support framework considers the ongoing trauma implications. This again appears to be an argument for the importance of wide-spread adoption of TIP. However, as Ginright (2018) and Venet (2021) have argued, existing TIP programs tend to overemphasize the individual nature of trauma and to ignore the systemic oppressions that continue to re-traumatize students. This was not overtly apparent in the responses of the participants; however, I did notice that none of them tended to dwell on their traumas – there was a definite trend towards healing and 'moving past' traumatic incidents (if they were acknowledged as such).

Participants in this study described the ways that violence interweaves their lives as boys and students. John talked about how being a victim of shooting interrupted his education for several months and described a time where he punched a peer so hard his jaw broke. The shooting is noteworthy for many reasons. In Canada we tend to think of ourselves as above the type of horrific gun violence that plagues our southern neighbour; however, the statistics are troubling. Firearm-related homicides in Canada

have been steadily increasing, reaching a total of 249 in 2018 (Statistics Canada, 2018) and youth are no exception. Further, young male-identifying people are by far the most common group of Canadians to either kill or be killed with a gun (Boyce & Cotter, 2012; Austin & Lane, 2018; Public Safety Canada Report, 2012).

John described to me the fight that got him 'promoted' to secondary school early. My conjecture, based on my experience as an alternate schoolteacher, is that he was calm when discussing violence because it is not a novel or extraordinary occurrence in his life – something that appears to be common among most of my research participants. Another possibility is that he was attempting to be blasé when telling these stories to impress on me that he was not afraid of violence and that he was brave and tough in the spirit of traditional masculine performances. Regardless of the cause, his affect was similar when he told me these stories. By his account he severely injured the other youth involved and that resulted in him being moved to a secondary school several months before his peers. The rationale for this move is unclear; however, a reasonable explanation is that the school administrators involved felt that his needs could be better met by the secondary school, and of course the safety of his peers was likely a consideration. If we are to adhere to the principles of PBS then John's behaviour certainly warranted the highest level of support available – that which PBS calls Tier 3 supports, and estimates is needed in approximately 5% of cases (National Center on PBIS website, 2021). A tenet of Tier 3 supports is of course the FBA which was discussed in Chapter 2 and is on the behaviour support website for my own school district. This 'Key Practice' of FBAs is described by the National Center on PBIS (accessed, 2022) as the formal process for ensuring a student's plan centers on why a student behaves the way they do. FBA allows teams to identify which interventions are most likely to be useful for an individual student. Plans resulting from a formal FBA process will include strategies for: preventing unwanted behavior, teaching appropriate behavior, positively reinforcing appropriate behavior, reducing rewards for unwanted behavior, and ensuring student safety.

To illustrate the systemic and structural issues with an FBA we will conduct a cursory example with John's fight as the centerpiece. I think it is beyond controversy that educators would want to prevent the 'unwanted behaviour' of breaking the jaw of one's peers. However, the situation gets a lot more complicated when we consider the instruction to 'teach appropriate behaviour' and determine 'why a student is behaving

like they do'. Why a student is behaving in any manner is incredibly complex and includes larger social forces outside of the classroom. If John punches his classmate because his parents are abusive, that is a radically different situation than if John punches his classmate because he is a bully. In addition, from the very beginning, this practice assumes that our students want to learn from us and that we can effectively teach them appropriate behaviour. As Kohl (1994) describes brilliantly, we often misrepresent an unwillingness to learn as an inability to learn. Kohl observed in his own students that "learning how to not-learn is an intellectual and social challenge; sometimes you must work very hard at it. It consists of an active, often ingenious, willful rejection of even the most compassionate and well-designed teaching" (Kohl, 1994, p. 2). I believe this lens describes perfectly the failings of an FBA with regards to John's behaviour.

Another possibility of explaining John's behaviour is the social reward John would receive for being tough, for fighting someone with whom he had conflict, and for demonstrating physical strength in the form of violence as a male-identifying individual. These benefits are interwoven with the gender politics of Canadian society and would not be succinctly summarized on an FBA form. Also, these benefits would likely far outstrip any positive reinforcement that his teachers could provide and thus the idea of 'offering the carrot' becomes incredibly convoluted. In addition, those social rewards would very likely also benefit John far more than any reduction in 'rewards for unwanted behaviour' that his school could orchestrate. It appears that, in this case, the only aspect of the FBA that the school could guarantee was 'ensuring student safety' by removing John from his elementary school entirely; however, this ignores John's own safety, and it did little to prevent the shooting he experienced. So, John, very astutely, chose to not-learn the prescribed lessons of his assumed FBA (don't fight other students) because it was in his self-interest not to.

If we refer to the principles of PBIS and were to perform an FBA with John, given his dynamic and convoluted home life, it is very likely that the 'function' of his behaviours would be far more complex than can be encapsulated within the limited framework. Even if we were to apply a trauma-informed behaviour support plan, it is unlikely that schools can account for the consistent re-traumatization of John and students like him at his home and in the community. Thus, in order to fully support John and students with similarly unstable home situations, a combination of behaviour support approaches is

necessary, and I contend that the centrality of relationship and compassion at the centre of TIP and RJE would prove most effective.

Thad for his part, alluded to an inherent understanding of the positive potential of RJE. Word for word he said: “make the bully sit down with the kid he bullied”. It doesn’t matter whether Thad identifies as the bully or the bullied, the point remains that he can articulate that relational healing holds far more potential than punitive or exclusionary measures (to which he was repeatedly subjected). Further to this point, the PBIS guidelines stipulate that it is important to “collect and analyze data” when a student is displaying problem behaviour. However, it is not clear whether this extends beyond the individual situation. Is the data limited to “student punches a classmate,” end of story? Or rather, does the data include the context? For example: “student’s parents are violent towards him and each other.” The distinction matters significantly and illustrates whether schools want to simply provide the conditions for students to be compliant or if, more radically, they want to address the inequities that cause violence to permeate the lives of their students in the first place. The normalization of violence was evident among all the participants of this study and it is incumbent on educators to accept this reality when considering any changes to behaviour support frameworks.

4.4. Alternate School Students and Interrupted Formal Education

This section details the ways in which the participants described their disengagement and removal from school. First, I detail their responses that concerned formal suspension from school. Secondly, I include a section describing the participants’ engagement with school district level disciplinary practice and referrals out of mainstream schools into alternate programs. Lastly, I talk about student disengagement from the learning environment in self-directed ways, such as absences and intentional non-learning (Kohl, 1994). These sub-themes are followed by a brief discussion of the data.

4.4.1. Suspensions

I asked Elijah to describe to me a time when he got in ‘trouble’ at school and he was able to come up with an example that he felt described well the type of profiling and pre-judgement that he faced at his previous mainstream school.

E: Ok I have a perfect example actually, I was suspended for like 2 to 3 weeks for something I was, I wasn’t even, I was at home for it, but I was involved in it because of my friends, so I was guilty by association in like a sort. I was suspended because I was an innocent bystander that’s why I was suspended... but anyways after that, that suspension it just completely killed my schooling because I missed almost a month of school and I just had like this much work in every class *mimes a stack of paper* and it was just so much. So, I just wasn’t able to do it.

D: With that work that they sent home did they offer you any support for that work?

E: They just said like if you have any questions, you can just like email us.

Elijah went on to explain how things were improving now that he had made the switch to an alternate school and that he particularly enjoys the “straightforward” nature of the classes and the fact that if you do a question wrong on an assignment, the teacher will “sit down with you and like show you what you did wrong and explain to you what you did and then help you redo the entire question and do it properly.”

Miguel described his journey from mainstream to alternate school that included almost every form of schooling available in his district and is detailed in our conversation below:

M: ...Grade 8 I went into [former mainstream school] and half of grade 9...then I left, I wasn’t doing well, so I did online school, I was doing online for a bit.

D: Oh, ok what grade was that in?

M: That was in grade 10, some grade 9, yeah grade 10. Like grade 10 and um and some grade 9 classes. I was doing online. Then after that I wasn’t doing so well so my parents wanted me to go to like an actual school then I ended up going to this school called Chances it's in [the Lower Mainland of British Columbia], it’s an alternative school.

D: I know it well

M: I was there for a bit but just because it was pretty far from my house, we were trying to find another school nearby and we found [current off-site alternate school] ...and that's where I'm at now. So, I've tried a bit of everything.

I was interested to learn more about why things were not going well for Miguel at his former mainstream school, so I asked him about why he saw it that way and he described his experience as such:

M: Yeah, I wasn't doing well in school like skipping a lot, not caring, and like just doing dumb things.

D: What I am trying to get a sense of is how [your former mainstream school] treated you. So, when you were skipping school and that sort of thing was there anybody that sort of tried to keep you coming to class?

M: like not, just not really, just like my parents. Like the teachers don't really care, they are just like, they have other people to deal with, they don't care if you come or don't come, if you don't come, they just put you absent for the day.

Like Dominic and Elijah, Miguel made a point to mention that he believed that teachers in mainstream schools don't care if you attend class or not. Finally, Miguel described another suspension he received for hiding under a desk.

M: yeah so, this one time, it was pretty stupid, I was in grade 9. I didn't want to go to classes after lunchtime and I was just wandering, *laughs* I was wandering around the hallway, cuz like there's nothing else to do there's nowhere to go, so I just wander around the hallways and I saw my art classes which was like, I had that class, but the next block, and then saw some buddies and they said 'come here, come here' and I went there, then the teacher is coming right? So, I hid under the table, and I was there for 5 minutes...

D: 5 minutes?!

M: yeah, and I started laughing because the teacher was right next to me, and she couldn't see me, so I started laughing under and she noticed, and she sent me to the office. Then, after I talked to the VP and then he, they suspended me, yeah, they suspended me just for that. A day or two, I don't remember if it was a day or two.

Miguel went on to say that his suspension for this incident was an 'indoor' suspension which he explained meant he was supposed to spend his suspension working in the administration office. However, he laughed and said he did not actually attend his

prescribed time in the office and stayed home instead. When I asked if there was follow-up from staff for his absence, he said no, there was “nothing, yeah, I kept going, I kept going back to class”. This seemed to be the end of it.

Farhan was a grade 12 student when we talked. He was open about how his racialized and religious identities affected his schooling and peer groups during our interview. His father is Persian, and his mother is Japanese, and he is a practicing Muslim. He was happy with his homelife and described how grateful he was that his parents supported him despite his troubles at school. He explained to me that “...the thing is that it's really rare in Middle Eastern stereotype for parents to be ok with you not wanting to go to college and for you to pursue your own career, so like I'm really grateful that I have that kind of support that they kinda believe in [my dreams to be a stock trader]”. He was also a member of the after-school program that I helped to facilitate so he and I had a pleasant relationship though I knew very little of his backstory before our talk. He and Miguel were close and often talked about helping to support each other in making good choices.

Farhan and I had the longest interview of any in the study. We spoke for approximately an hour and half – about double the average time. He gave long and complex answers and his stories were not always easy to follow. His longest suspension was for 2 months, and it stemmed from an incident of racial conflict at a community centre near to his school. Farhan described the incident below when I asked him about how teachers and administration viewed him at his mainstream schools:

- F: Well, I can't really blame them because they had a very negative view on me ... they would kind of look at me as somebody who's lower tier like in the classroom somebody who just doesn't really like care as what they would probably say. Or somebody ...like a bad person almost, like they would always question me where I was going, they kept me in for a full two months at school because I got into an argument [with someone] who was being racist to me, ... they are just judging me from how I carry myself at school
- D: I would like to learn more about two things. Number one, can you tell me a little bit more about the incident that kept you in for two months?
- F: ... so basically what had happened is that at (second former mainstream school) like there's a rec centre right next to it and then me and someone else got into like an argument and they

were just like saying racial stuff to me and my friends ... cuz we're all kind of like from the same ethnic background and then like I just got mad, and me I really speak out for myself, so I just started like getting upset at them and we had this whole altercation ...and the principal just came and they obviously got mad at the both of us for making the school look bad. ...But like we both went to the office and like I don't mean to like to put race into this but ...I believe, personally, that they chose that kid's side over mine because he was free for the whole like whatever for 2 months and I had an in-school suspension for 2 months so like I had to stay inside.

D: Was the other kid white?

F: Yeah, he was.

D: And you think that they chose his side because...so I don't quite understand. Can you explain a little bit more?

F: I don't necessarily, I'm not the type of person to say 'oh yeah he chose this person cuz he's white or whatever and stuff like that' but it really seemed like it. They didn't give me a proper reasoning as to why I should be in the position that I am and why someone else walks freely from the same situation so I believe that I was treated really poorly and unfairly based off maybe how I carry myself or it could just be my ethnic background or whatever it was. But I didn't like, ye know, I didn't try to speak out for myself after that, so I basically just sat in for two months I just let it go past.

D: Did you tell the vice principal or whoever about the student saying racist things?

F: It wasn't, I did, I did say that but like they just didn't care like I don't know how to explain it. I told them that, but they basically just made it seem like it's an excuse for me to get mad at that person and start yelling at them and stuff. So, it's just I just decided what's the point? There's no point, it's just 2 months I'm just gonna work on schoolwork inside and just gonna get it over with.

D: Did they talk to the other kid about not being racist in the future?

F: I have no idea. I don't even know if they believed me in the first place about him being racist at all. But if they did, I wouldn't have seen it because they talked to us individually in a private room or whatever.

In hindsight, I believe it would have uncovered important information if I had asked follow-up questions to Farhan about the specifics of the racial abuse the other student directed towards him at the community centre. I also wish I had questioned him

further about the discrepancy in suspensions between him and the other party. He does make passing reference to him “provoking” the altercation though it is hard for me to understand how that would completely exonerate the other party from discipline if racial abuse was involved. More investigation of this situation was warranted. Regardless, it resulted in an indoor suspension for Farhan where he was removed from his classes for 2 months and asked to work on his schoolwork away from the subject matter experts and any learning supports (the teachers and educational assistants) and under constant surveillance from the administration.

4.4.2. Administrative Intervention and Alternate Program Referral

In our interview, John described a much longer interruption in his education than the other students, with the delay seemingly caused by the school district taking time to decide whether it was safe for him to return to school. John explained the process when I asked about why he was out of school for so long:

uh, I mean it was pretty slow, uh I guess I went to [the director of safe schools at the school district] and I had a few meetings with her. And they decided, it took them a long time, that’s why I missed the first two months of school, cuz it took them a long time for them to decide if it was even safe for me to go back to school at that point. And then they finally came to the conclusion that [former alternate school] was the best place for me when I was there.

This break in his schooling was in addition to the suspensions he had received previously. The school district, in concert with local law enforcement, took two months to decide where to place John for his re-entry to school after the shooting. It is unclear from his interview how much of the time out of school was the school district deliberating and how much of it was law enforcement keeping him out of school for the violent conflict to cool off. In my experience, it can be a combination of both.

We met Thad and his mother in the previous section. In our interview, Thad described a complex and long-standing relationship with school discipline and support systems. He made passing mention of suicidal ideation, weapons charges, and multiple school suspensions. An exchange that I believe succinctly summarizes the complicated web of school supports and community services that kick in when a student is missing class and is repeatedly suspended follows:

- D: So, when you were at (Original Mainstream School) did you feel like there was anybody who was kinda like on your side? Like someone who was trying to listen to things from your perspective.
- T: Well, I feel like there came a point where they had stopped trying to like get me in trouble and were trying like to stop me from getting into trouble, but that was like after I was already in trouble, I felt like "what are doing, just leave me alone, I don't really want to deal with you"
- D: See that is what I'm interested in, can you tell me more about that? because that sounds interesting to me.
- T: Yeah like, this was after I had gotten charged with an illegal knife, uh I was in the office with my mother, and there was like this ministry worker, I dunno, there was like a youth and child service like somebody, there were like...I don't really know
- D: Somebody official?
- T: An official yeah, and they were asking me all these questions about like if I have thoughts about hurting students and like, they was acting like I was getting was getting bullied almost, I was like "who do you think you are, I am not getting bullied" One, I was getting treated unfairly by you so like I don't really need to hear this and like the illegal knife that had nothing even to do with school it had to do with other people I was having problems with it didn't have to do with school. I left the knife because I was way more willing to go deal with them with my hands. I was not going to do nothing like that, I'm smarter than that for one. For two, when I was in that meeting, there was a cop, there was the official or whatever you call them, and the official was like basically telling me that "yeah you know like this like last straw like you've been suspended like 16 times" and I was like "damn I didn't know had been that much" *laughs*. And then she said like, I don't remember what she said, she asked me about why I was suicidal, and shit and I was like "Dude it has to do with my shit, my life, get out of it like if I talk to a counsellor that's cuz I wanted to talk to someone" then they went behind my back! Why do I even care? Why should I...
- D: (Interrupts) So they asked you this in a room full of people you didn't really know?
- T: Yeah, well, yeah kinda actually. And uh, when I was uh before that, there was a counsellor named Ed. He's not even a counsellor he's like a school supervisor or something. But I used to talk to him sometimes. I would try to like to get a number or something I could call. And he kept giving me this one number, but it was like the number was connected to a school cuz like I have found other numbers for suicide hotlines and shit, but I've

never found this number... like I've never whatsoever, don't know if it was, shit was kinda weird, I have to say like I guess... I guess I didn't really feel comfortable talking to like teachers to be honest.

My original question was about whether Thad has anyone at school he could connect with. He answers with a story about what appears to be an ICMP (Integrated Case Management Planning) meeting. These meetings are held with students who are involved with 'outside agencies' and are organized by their care team which often includes a school representative. Thad describes that a police officer and an official from the British Columbia provincial government's Ministry of Children and Family Development were in attendance. It is likely that school administration was present as well, but he does not make specific mention of them. He explains that this meeting was called because of an illegal knife that was found in his backpack but then says that it was just the latest in an apparent string of incidents and the government worker mentions 16 previous suspensions. It appears that the official does try to address one of the root causes of the problem by asking Thad about his suicidality and intentions to hurt other students. However it is not clear if this was conducted to formulate a plan for healing or simply to address a potential threat to the safety of the wider school community. As Thad makes quite clear, he didn't feel supported or uplifted by the meeting and it was clear there was a lack of trust on his part to engage in any sort of restorative or healing practices at that time. Impressively, he remembered my initial question and wrapped up by saying that he didn't feel comfortable talking to teachers (which I take to mean all school staff) about his problems at this time. Ultimately, 16 exclusionary suspensions are unequivocally a significant interruption to his formal education.

4.4.3. School Disengagement Interrupting Formal Education

In the previous section, Seamus described a fight with another student whom he saw as a bully. This resulted in a two-day suspension for him; however, he described this bullying, fighting, and suspension relationship as not just a one-time incident but a cycle. When talking about liking his original principal at his mainstream elementary school he described noticing a change when the new principal took over. He explained that "...when the new principal came...with ye know, bullying and stuff, like that nothing

ever got done. You said you're sorry and got sent home for a day, and that was it. Nothing happened, nothing changed, it was the same thing over and over again”.

The main interruption to his education was not from suspension however but from disengagement and missed classes. He described that at his previous alternate school in his former city and his former mainstream school in his current city that he “kept missing classes and skipping school a lot”. He went on to say that the reason was not because he didn’t like the schools but that they “weren’t great for [him]”. He explained that “I kept skipping out and it definitely heavily impacted my grades, how well I was doing. I don’t regret what I did, I don’t like that I did, but I don’t regret it at the same time”. Interested in what caused his disconnection, I asked him why he felt like he didn’t want to attend his classes:

D: What could have been better about the school that would have made you want to go more?

S: Probably um, I dunno... it being a smaller school where you don’t have a ton of people in the classroom where I could get more help during math or English and things like that. And I guess the way certain things were taught don’t really sit that well with me depending on what it is. Also, the options that are at a certain school whether it's to go to a different school to go to a high school or other things like that.

He mentioned several times during our interview that he didn’t like the experience at large schools and one of the main reasons he liked his current alternate schools was the smaller classes.

Another student who disengaged from school slowly was Dominic who was finishing Grade 11 at an off-site alternate school when I interviewed him. He described for me his disengagement from mainstream school when I asked him to describe his school path:

Dom: um I started at (former mainstream school) secondary school in grade 8. And um I was doing pretty well, maybe I wasn’t the best student academically, but I was always going to classes and trying never skipping a class. Uh same in grade 9. I was uh working a little bit harder cuz I heard grade 9 is a hard year...still going to a lot of classes and stuff. And uh, in grade 10...classes were just getting harder for me, I wasn’t like, most of my friends actually got kicked out of the school I was at. I lost a lot of good connections when I was at (a former mainstream school) which resulted to me missing a big amount

of classes that I couldn't really come back from. Even if I tried, I would probably be taking like 2 years if I did do all of that at (former mainstream school) secondary school.

Dominic eventually explained to me how he and his mum decided to give an alternate school a try, and how the increased connection between staff and students really made a difference

...and then in my grade 11 year, I was talked to more by the counselors at (former mainstream school) and um yeah I took on alternative school. In grade 11 at alternative school, I uh, I noticed a big big difference in my attitude and my attitude for learning, I think uh yeah, I was going to way more classes than I was in regular mainstream school, and it really bettered me...the one thing that mainstreams didn't really do was communicate to my mom if I was missing classes. And then if I missed 20 minutes of a class in alternative school my mom would be getting like a couple calls a day so...

Daniel: There's the youth worker, eh?

Dom: Yeah *laughs* yeah but there was a lot more communication between the school and my mom for alt school and I also think that took a big part in my schooling.

Daniel: Interesting

Dom: Yeah, it made me start going to school, start taking it more seriously. Um yeah, I just noticed great improvements.

Dominic then went on to tell me about how despite the challenges he faced in mainstream school, he felt he was succeeding in alternate school and though he was in his own words a "slow learner", the smaller classes and extra help were helping him move through his education quickly and enjoyably. Also of note is his evaluation of his social life. Dominic talks about how all his friends were kicked out of school and how that made him feel isolated and unhappy - making it more difficult to focus on his academics and feel motivated to push through the challenges associated with his learning.

Elijah was in grade 11 when I interviewed him. He was attending the same off-site alternate school as Dominic and had similar things to say about his experience disengaging from mainstream school. Before a public mainstream school, Elijah had attended a private religious school in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia; however, his experience of disconnection is remarkably like that of Dominic.

Elijah: I'm in grade 11... in grade 10 I wasn't doing like super well in school because at (former mainstream school) it was really

structured like up to you. Like if you want to go class... if you want to be there then it was just up to you right? And then there was not really like an incentive for like kinda like a discipline if you didn't go to class for example and so after a while I just... long story short I just wasn't going to school and that's why I'm at (current alternate school) now...now (current alt school), like just them asking you why you're not there for an example or just anything... them texted you, them calling you, just knowing someone actually just cares. Just checking your whereabouts It's just like for me personally just makes me feel nice because...

Daniel: Someone gives a shit?

Elijah: Exactly...exactly.

Like Dominic, Elijah notes that at mainstream school, parents are not immediately involved if a student didn't show up to class and that puts the onus on students to attend classes in an individual responsibility model. Elijah goes on to describe a time when his education at his previous mainstream school was interrupted formally by suspension and his inability to keep up with the work sent home with him. Elijah explained his disconnection from his original private secondary school as such:

Um the school wasn't like beneficial to me in a way I just wasn't like connecting to the people there. Like I had like friends there, but it was I dunno it just wasn't great for me personally. And there wasn't like a lot of support there cuz it just seemed like everyone was always busy all the time. Because like my counsellor for an example is a teacher who is teaching every single class every single period so like I'm like not able to talk to her any time there is class or anything like that.

Dominic, when talking about missing class, did not use the word "skipping" but explained it in this way:

And uh, in grade 10 I uh classes were just getting harder for me, I wasn't like, most of my friends actually got kicked out of the school I was at, I lost like a lot of good connections when I was at (former mainstream school) which resulted to me missing like a big amount of classes that I couldn't really come back from.

For his part, Seamus described his skipping as such:

Well, there was a time where um both at [my original mainstream secondary school and the alternate high school I attended in my old city] where I kept like missing classes and skipping school a lot cuz most of the schools I liked but really weren't great for me. So, I kept skipping out and it definitely heavily impacted my grades, how well I was doing,

I don't regret what I did, I don't like that I did, but I don't regret it at the same time.

4.4.4. Discussion

Every participant in this study had their education interrupted by suspension at one or multiple points in their K-12 journey by suspension or disengagement, as if educators are working deliberately to get them to divest from their education. John was suspended for fighting, Thad mentioned that his counsellor had told him he had been suspended 16 times, Farhan was suspended for an incident at a community centre near to his school, Miguel was suspended for play-fighting in class, Elijah mentioned an incident as a bystander that landed him a suspension, and Seamus was suspended for fighting. Dominic was the only one who did not mention suspension. From a behaviour-support perspective it is hard to understand how exclusionary suspensions are supported by any existing framework. PBIS extolls the value of consequences connected to unwanted behaviours; however, it hard to justify completely removing the student from the learning environment as any reasonable means of motivating them to behave better once they return. All of the participants in this study had been suspended from school and Thad's 16 suspensions neatly supports this idea that exclusionary discipline is in no way restorative or healing in the ways that they could be (Evans & Vandering, 2016). Fundamental to RJE is the idea that people are worthy and relational, and suspension (forceful removal from the learning environment) sends the exact opposite message – you are not worthy of being in school and the relationships you have with staff, students, support workers need be severed for a period of time. In this light, it is hard to imagine any healing is occurring during these exclusions.

Neither are suspensions particularly trauma-informed. TIP in education with its focus on safety, acceptance, and relationship (Venet, 2021) reminds us that you can't rely on punitive consequence to discipline students who are misbehaving because of trauma history, because their actions are partially initiated by brain responses that are involuntary and hardwired (Perry, 2006). Suspending students with a trauma history influencing their behaviour will simply reinforce in their minds school as a place where they are unsafe to be dysregulated and will risk further disengagement. Students with interrupted formal education (SIFE) require different pedagogies to succeed (DeCapua, Smathers, & Tang, 2009), and I contend that is clear impetus to implement anti-racism in

education and CSP with alternate school students to retain their investment in their education.

Further to this discussion is the impact of identity and school disengagement conceived by Dei (1996), who explains that, within Euro-Canadian/American schooling contexts, the social construction of “Blackness” and ‘Whiteness” has serious implications for all students. Dei illustrates this point by linking the lowered academic expectations for Black students to their overrepresentation in “technical” or “vocational” classes (p. 33), which can lead to disengagement from academics. I would extend the argument to include alternate schools and the social construction of “goodness” and “badness”. We know that racialized youth are overrepresented in alternate schools, which was evident among the participants of this study. We also know that white supremacy expects goodness from White students and badness from racialized students – which was not overtly referred to by the participants, but the traces of it are all over their responses – specifically Farhan’s story of his school dismissing his claims of racism as worthy of any follow-up or restorative measures. So, in the same way that black students internalize the racism that they are subjected to, alternate school students (many of them students of colour) internalize the “badness” that is ascribed to them – especially when they are physically removed from school - and that certainly impacts their connection to school and their education in general. In this way, racism and the social construction of a ‘good’ student are inextricably linked.

4.5. Student Experiences of Belonging

Throughout my interviews, students made frequent mention of their experience at school with regards to belonging and attachment. Specific themes that emerged were experiences of surveillance (not belonging in the school) and negative self-perception of academic potential (not belonging in the classroom). In this way, most of the students described feeling uncomfortable in their original mainstream schools in some form or another. Below are excerpts that illustrate these themes.

4.5.1. Experiences of Surveillance and Mistrust (Not Belonging in the School)

John told me how he felt like his Vice-Principal at his previous mainstream elementary school “had it out” for him and how he went out of his way to make his feelings known. John told me about how the VP called the families of his friends to warn them about him and their children’s relationship to him. I asked him why he felt this VP didn’t like him and this was his answer:

J: So, I was in grade 7 going into, this is in my grade 7 year, and I finally find my group of friends or whatever and this guy goes out of his way to call all my friends’ parents and tell them that I’m a bad influence on their kids. I smoke weed and do bad things with their kids even though I’m the youngest kid in the school. How am I influencing their kids? And all these parents didn’t like me, and I haven’t even met them in my life before and that was because of him.

Notable in that excerpt is John’s use of “finally” when describing finding friends which suggests some social alienation. This in addition to the sense of belonging that is removed when the wider community is warned of him as a threat.

Farhan described the suspension as being “...inside the office for straight like 7 hours at this point, I only had 3 bathroom breaks and I could only go get water which was right outside the office, and they gave me a 1-minute timer for that. No lunchtime, no nothing.” One other story that Farhan told demonstrated how small, seemingly insignificant, exchanges between school staff and students can have consequential impacts. Farhan was talking about how he was in the office, already feeling under surveillance and unhappy when a school district staff opened the door:

F: These superintendents of that school which are pretty much best friends with the VP. He opens the door slightly and he peeks through; he's like this fat guy, right? He just peeks through, and he just looks at me and he knows I get so irritated by him doing that because I just don’t like the way he looks, because he takes everything so seriously when I’m not doing anything like, I’m so nice to him but he just, he just, I don’t know how to explain, he just irritates me a lot and he knows that. So, I’m like ‘this isn’t even his situation, he’s not even dealing with this situation’, so he just looks, and he then he just says: ‘you better behave’ and he points at me, and I just like got mad and I was just like ‘what the hell do you have to do with this situation? Just go back to your office!’, like I got mad

because I don't want to be disrespected by two people especially if somebody doesn't even know what's going on

Farhan notes the friendly relationship between the vice-principal and the school district staff – leaving him on the outside, as antagonistic. Further Farhan remembered specifically that the school district staff pointed at him, a decidedly aggressive and accusatory gesture.

When I asked Seamus my standard question about how he would envision school in any way he chose, to make students feel happy and connected, he responded:

S: I guess the main thing would be try to be patient with people cause sometimes they can be going through something and to want to talk about it a lot and just being patient and letting things not slide but kinda just letting things go for a little bit to be able to kinda bring them back to reality and give them time to just whether it's to adjust to a change or just feel better and things like that. And I guess ask certain questions, I don't know exactly what those questions would be but, just like starting a small conversation that lasts a little bit can be nice.

D: Treating people like humans can be nice, eh?

S: Yeah, not like students or teachers but like another person.

This excerpt came at the very end of our interview and is significant given Seamus' struggles to find happiness and connection in school. He made brief mention of a former elementary school principal who hosted students in the gym at lunchtime that Seamus described as "...back at [my old] school, [there was] a really nice principal who hosted on Fridays at lunch there would be indoor hockey at the gym where you could either play the hockey or you could hang out on the gym stage and either draw or read and do stuff like that at lunch". There was a lack of expectation for students – students could belong (draw, play, read) without any other requirements.

As discussed previously, Thad has a complicated relationship with school and the feeling of belonging. When I asked him about if he connected with anyone at his original mainstream school he talked about a positive connection with peers and an ambiguous and constantly evolving relationship to staff.

T: I had friends, I had friends

D: But no adults?

T: Not really to be honest. Like at a certain point there was people who didn't like me and then there was adults who tried to be like almost like buddy-buddy. And I was like "dude you are still part of the school program", like at the end of the day the principal is still telling you what to do, so I can't say that I am going to trust you too."

Thad has been burned by the administration and feels like he cannot trust them, which colours his perception of all the school staff, who he views as working under that administration. I asked him about staff that he felt he did not connect with:

T: Yeah, I would say there was this one principal who liked me least, Mr. Green I think his name was. Oh, and there was a principal who actually kinda had my back.

D: Who?

T: Mr. Marshall I think his name was.

D: And why do you say that?

T: Well, when it came down to everybody else had kinda given up on me and shit, he was still trying to make me come to school and he was still trying to tell me there's a better future if you go this way than if you go the other way. But I guess at the end of the day like I had already stopped liking everybody else, so I kinda just turned my back on him too.

D: Was it too late?

T: I wouldn't say too late, I wouldn't say too late. It was more like I would rather work in a different place; I wouldn't want to stay in a place that I had already fucked up at.

D: You wanted a fresh start, is that what you mean?

T: Uh, yeah, I mean I just wanted to go to a different school, I wanted to go to make different friends. But I realized I already had enough friends and then I wanted to go like, yeah like a different school to be honest

It is important to pause and note here that Thad literally felt that he did not belong at a school where he had already "fucked up". I then asked him what things were like at his current alternate school:

T: *laughs* Ah, well my new school I would say is...yo like...I still don't like teachers. And I still don't like police and stuff. But I have to say that they have a way better way of teaching. Like they are more lenient to accept that if you are not willing to get taught. The day that you are not doing well or something they

will ask you "yo do you want something to eat? Do you want some coffee or something?" That was one thing, Mr. Marshall, anytime like I didn't have food or something, or went to school and didn't make myself food, he would be like "yo do want me to buy you something at the [food] program? I was like damn that's really nice of you. Normally I wouldn't accept it, but I started to just cuz like I didn't care to be honest I would just go get food somewhere else.

D: Still, it's a nice gesture though, eh?

T: But yeah, it's like, everybody else is telling you what you are doing wrong, and not telling you how to fix it really, well I mean I did get told how to fix it that's kinda a lie. Uh it's just kinda nice to have one person that's like "Hey yo I get it, fuckin up is something that everybody does" but also like I dunno, I couldn't necessarily be like yo that's totally cool, I'll start going to your school and I'll start doing good like I wasn't ready at the time. So, I dunno like I didn't really need him to keep trying that I kinda just wanted him to switch me an alt school but at the same time it was kinda nice to see that someone actually gave a fuck. Yeah [my former mainstream] school had like a lot of teachers that could probably just turn a blind eye to most of the shit that happened.

Even though I had asked Thad about his new alternate school, he briefly mentioned the food, but pivoted directly back to his experience at his previous mainstream school. He was clearly not finished telling me what he wanted to say. Of note is the suggestion that Mr. Marshall made Thad feel like making mistakes is something that everyone does and imparted a sense of belonging despite those mistakes, if only a little and perhaps too late to mitigate his previous negative experiences at that school.

Miguel explained that he didn't feel connected to any of the staff at his previous mainstream school. He mentioned a few times where counselors encouraged him to attend school more often but didn't remember any specific strong connections with an individual school staff member. This lack of positive connections could certainly contribute to the feelings of disconnection he describes below:

M: I just didn't like it I dunno...first of all I wasn't really doing well with schoolwork and let's say I would try like no one would... I would get a little bit of help but that's it. No one would keep pushing nothing ye know? It's not like where I'm at now. Like they help me a lot and I get stuff done. Before I wouldn't. I would go and I dunno, I only had a couple friends, and I didn't like many people cuz people are snaky people nowadays are snakes, and I don't like that. I didn't really feel connected to others and that's it ye know? The teachers I didn't really like

them either, most teachers give me dirty looks even though I didn't know them.

D: And why do you think that is?

M: no idea, I still to this day I don't know why. But it's ok I don't care.

Miguel's story was consistent throughout our talk, he did not form any positive connections with staff at his previous school and was very happy to have found a sense of community and belonging at his new alternate school. At his new school, Miguel said it was nice that "they're always like looked out for me even though I haven't been going to school and everything now too they always like reach out to see if I'm fine and everything and like other teachers that wouldn't do that like from other schools, they wouldn't do that". This echoes what other participants have said where the simple act of reaching out when they are not there, makes them feel like they matter, they belong.

4.5.2. Negative Self-Perception of Academic Potential (Not Belonging in the Classroom)

John was upbeat during our interview, but his answers gave the sense that he had not found a secure sense of belonging at any of his previous schools. John described an experience with a mainstream high school science teacher that left him feeling exposed in front of his peers.

J: yeah, I guess uh I just didn't like the way he acted towards me, and I just bombed out of that class... The way I didn't like how he acted towards me was I dunno like he called me out in class a lot, like almost like making fun of me type thing. Stop me from like talking or whatever and I like I dunno.

D: Like disrespecting you?

J: Yeah, disrespecting me, like at that point when someone disrespect me I just gotta disrespect them back. So I would say something and then uh I'm sent out of that class and I'm waiting outside and I don't like to wait around and just, if you're gonna send me outside and say you're going to talk to me later may as well just talk to me now so I just walked off – I'm out of there right? – eventually they will convince me to go back and try it again and we will be going pretty steady or whatever and um I would just be out of there. And then around third term they ended up just giving me all my work in a booklet and putting me in [an on-site alternate classroom] for science. Math was not really the same type of guy, he was a different type of

guy um, I didn't really like that class either, I ended up failing math that year too. Because I dunno I guess I didn't pass – I wasn't comfortable enough to ask for help pretty much.

D: It's hard when the class is going *snaps fingers*

J: Yeah, the whole class is just getting it and yeah it was crazy.

D: That's tough.

J: And then uh at that point I kind of got into smoking weed and like that just set me off completely

...Yeah exactly, yeah so at that point I just stopped going to math, stopped going to science, most of the time, PE's always in the morning you know I'm not going to go to the morning PE. So, like the only blocks that I was in was in [the on-site alternate program] so...

John describes here three different types of belonging that he lacked. First, he describes how the teacher made him feel singled-out and disrespected with sarcasm and actual removal from the classroom. Secondly, he talks about how he felt he didn't belong in class because he felt he was not grasping the material at the same rate as his peers, and finally he talks about starting to smoke marijuana during school hours and how that doesn't mix with school – or, another way of looking at it would be that he believed that students who smoked marijuana didn't belong at school.

Dominic previously talked about identifying as a 'slower' learner that which certainly affected his sense of belonging at the school. He himself was enrolled in adapted math at his previous mainstream school which is a math class designed to prepare students for upper-level math courses when schools have identified that they struggle with numeracy. Dominic describes the experience of a friend switching from regular to adapted math below:

laughs even yeah this is an example from my buddy he told me this, we had the same counsellor at (former mainstream school) and he was actually asking his counsellor if he could get into adapted math which is an easier paced or slower paced math however you wanna word it and his counsellor...this guy was uh in regular math before and he wanted to move to adapted cuz slower paced or whatever... and the counsellor he asked my buddy what was your dream occupation. And my buddy was like oh I don't know but I want to do something in the military when I grow up. And the counsellor goes and says to him "oh if you go to adapted math the only place you are going to have in the military is cleaning toilets". And that was I dunno, even the counsellors they are not the most genuine people either honestly.

Here it is important to note how school staff view learning difficulties and whether people with learning difficulties are destined for success or belong in 'prosperous' society. Later in our interview he described his experience once he was switched into an adapted humanities course and the difference between how mainstream teachers would treat him when he did work incorrectly in class and how he was treated in his new class:

So, the program... [I joined was] this humanities course and I would say it's like an alternative school inside the mainstream school type of thing. Just like small classes for English and socials...there was way more help given to the students in these classes cuz it was only like 12 people in the class at most for grade 8 or whatever. Yeah there was just a lot more support and [my new teacher] would never get mad at you for even trying the work and getting it wrong or something and yeah most other teachers at (former mainstream school) they would uh, I don't know they would just like they feel like disappointed if you're getting stuff wrong on your work and this guy was not the same, he was just always wanting to help better the students and actually he was probably like that only teacher for an academic subject that talked about mental health and why it's necessary to be going on walks and stuff. He actually took us on walks during English's classes and stuff so yeah.

This theme of poor treatment of students who are failing in a traditional academic sense was a common experience for other participants.

In the section on interrupted education, Elijah talked about how it felt nice that at his current alternate school, staff noticed and followed up with his family when he didn't attend class. This demonstrates that he enjoyed feeling like there were formal protocols to ensure he attended school and that they deemed his attendance important enough to devote resources. He went on to talk about how he felt more connected at his current alternate school because of the procedures to keep him organized and on track with his academic work. When I asked him at the end of our interview how he would structure school to make students feel happy and connected, he answered:

Yeah, um I would make [school] so it's kind of like a stricter structure in a way. So, you can't just, it's not just like you are coming and going, in a sense. Like it's kinda just like 'oh if I miss class, it's not that big of a deal, I'll just go to the next one' or 'if I just missed this one, I'll just not go the entire day'. But like if you have an actual structure around that you would be forced to actually go to these classes. Say if there's like if you're not allowed to leave the school grounds for an example and they can use that if you are in like lower grades and stuff like that and that would kinda just give you when you are at the beginning of school getting into the actual rhythm of going to classes and everything to

make sure you are actually going to go and make sure you are not missing anything.

It is important to note his mention of how missing class has a snowball effect. If you miss one class, you might as well miss the entire day and how missing class impacts your grades and learning, which will in turn affect motivation to attend future classes. Elijah envisions school in a way that has a proactive solution to prevent students from disengaging and helping them find secure attachment and belonging that can withstand academic and attendance struggles.

A common refrain in alternate school circles is that the simple act of reaching out to students when they don't attend class can mean the difference between life and death, and I always thought this was an aphorism that contained an oversimplified and overly dramatic version of the problems our students face. As with many clichés however, it appears this one contains a grain of truth. Dominic summed it up nicely when I asked him how things were going after he switched to an alternate school:

In grade 11 at alternative school, I uh, I noticed a big big difference in my attitude and my attitude for learning, I think uh yeah, I was going to way more classes than I was in regular mainstream school, and it really bettered me it uh, plus there's way more, the one thing that mainstreams didn't really do was communicate to my mom if I was missing classes. And then if I missed 20 minutes of a class in alternative school my mom would be getting like a couple calls a day so...yeah *laughs* yeah but there was a lot more communication between the school and my mom for alt school and I also think that took a big part in my schooling. ...yeah, it made me start going to school, start taking it more seriously. Um yeah, I just noticed great improvements.

This was a common theme among the participants when talking about how they felt undervalued at mainstream school specifically connected to the lack of follow-up when they began to miss class. Elijah talked about wanting to be "held accountable" by the school when he skipped. Farhan described the school response to his increased skipping as such:

I started failing more in school. I was just like what's the point of even going to school. If I really know what I wanna do. Like and then they basically like kinda saw that ye know? There just like they basically saw that I'm not really trying and stuff and all that and they pulled me into the office and said ye know what? You're not even from this city, we can literally kick you out any time if you decide to not go to your classes or skip.

For Seamus and John, their desire to be heard was simpler, more relational, another central tenet of both TIP and RJE. When I asked Seamus to design a school to make students feel happy and connected, he explained that:

I guess the main thing would be try to be patient with people cause sometimes they can be going through something and to want to talk about it a lot and just being patient and letting things not slide but kinda just letting things go for a little bit to be able to kinda bring them back to reality and give them time to just whether it's to adjust to a change or just feel better and things like that. And I guess ask certain questions, I don't know exactly what those questions would be but, just like starting a small conversation that lasts a little bit can be nice.

In summary, all participants in this study, at one time or another, felt disconnected, under surveillance, or like they didn't belong at school. The following section discusses the significant impacts of disconnecting on students' relationship to learning and school in general.

4.5.3. Discussion

The participants of this study felt, in numerous ways, unwelcome and disconnected from their mainstream schools. Further than that, not one the participants of this study described a teacher or administrator who implemented anti-racist or culturally sustaining measures to improve their lives at school. Kokka (2018), argued that ignoring culturally sustaining and anti-racist frameworks ultimately limits the effectiveness of trauma-informed and other approaches to behaviour support and I argue that this is an important piece of the puzzle for retaining alternate school students in their mainstream schools by making them feel like they belong. The success of the Africentric school in Toronto (Howard & James, 2019) further supports my contention that traditional euro-centric pedagogy and behaviour support practice are limited by their cultural monotony.

The identity of these participants as 'bad boys' is also central to their feelings of belonging in school. Many of the participants reported felt that they were treated as 'bad', were under constant surveillance, and expected to be always doing wrong. This is evident in their stories of being stopped and interrogated by administration while walking the hallways and their stories of being physically searched for contraband. As (Dei,

1994) elucidates in his anti-racist framework, construction of identity is crucial to the anti-racist framework. Race, class, gender, ability, and sexual identity affect individuals and how they live in society. How racial identity is formed, and the related individual and collective struggles are part of the critical anti-racist discourse. Thus, it is important to continuously examine the construction of Blackness and Whiteness. For example, Black youth live in a society in which a stereotype is depicted as 'true' identity: i.e., that they are always in trouble with the law or involved in some illicit activity. As mentioned previously, most participants in this study were non-white, and the ways in which their racial identity and their perception of their belonging at school are interwoven, complex, and worthy of further academic inquiry.

In addition, the systemic oppressions present in schools in British Columbia further complicates students' feelings of belonging. Dei (1994) again explains another principle of anti-racism that questions pathological explanations of the family or the home environment as answers as to why some youth experience problems. It suggests that such explanations divert attention away from a critical analysis of the institutional structures within which the delivery of social services takes place. Attributing causal explanations for failure to individuals avoids critically examining institutions and how they contribute to producing and maintaining racism (Dei, 1996). In this way we can see how students might blame themselves for the 'problems' they cause at school and internalize oppression while all the time existing in an educational structure that, in intersectional ways, delegitimizes their culture, racial identity, gender, and economic status.

Chapter 5.

Good Kid, Bad System

5.1. Vignette

Several years ago, I was charged with teaching a 16-year-old student Social Studies 10. His family had immigrated to British Columbia from North Africa several years prior. He was bright, funny, and compassionate to staff and peers alike. He had a history of long periods of absence from school and was in danger of not graduating on time. He came to us hoping to catch up and return to a mainstream school. He was struggling to complete introductory assignments and I pulled him aside to ask what was wrong. He said he was struggling with Social Studies in English and that most of the time he was trying to translate from French to English in his head. I hadn't had the presence of mind to realize that most of his education to that point had been delivered in French and that he was struggling with mental health concerns, involvement with the youth justice system, *and* navigating school in his third language. I continued to give him assignments in English, but encouraged him to answer in French. His work output improved dramatically. Unfortunately, later in the year, he was shot at while hanging out with friends in the community. This was the start of a downward trend in attendance and his eventual removal from our program. To this day, I wonder how his school life might have changed had his mainstream schools realized the wealth of linguistic and cultural knowledge this boy had and leveraged it to improve his engagement, self-esteem, and learning at school.

5.2. Introduction

This study was conceived to answer the research question that sought to understand how secondary alternate school students experience their behaviour support programs. The inquiry was amended to include experiences of behaviour support in mainstream programs as well when it became clear the two were inextricably linked. The principle sub-question sought to understand experiences that made students feel connected and engaged, and experiences that made them feel disconnected and alienated. The purpose of the study was to explore possibilities for improving behaviour

support services at both mainstream and alternate schools and, following a qualitative methodology, I interviewed seven male students enrolled in secondary off-site alternate programs with a focus on behaviour support. The themes that emerged from the data, which were discussed in the previous chapter, were violence, interrupted formal education, and impacts on students' feelings of belonging. This chapter highlights the implications that arise from these findings.

I will first summarize the key findings from the data, which suggest that alternate schools themselves are indications of a larger systemic problem. I then discuss implications for behaviour support programs, followed by implications for mainstream school discipline. Next I summarize alternate school students' feelings of belonging, which leads to implications for pedagogy and the importance of student story. In conclusion, I make recommendations for further research and reflect on my personal journey in carrying out this research.

5.3. Key Findings

The key findings of this study are as follows:

The participants experienced pervasive and at times horrific incidents of violence, both at school and in the community.

The participants were subjected to harsh exclusionary disciplinary policies that, in many cases, mirrored prison-like conditions. This removed them from the learning environment and often accelerated their disconnection from academics by leaving them far behind their peers.

The participants of this study were often made to feel disconnected and like they didn't belong at school, and this had negative effects on their identities as learners and as people. The racialized identities of the participants further complicated this finding and suggested that they were subject to systemic racist oppression in school.

5.4. Alternate Schools as Indicative of Systemic Inequities.

The findings of my study point to the urgent need to improve the schooling of alternate schools' students, especially their original mainstream schools. The emphasis on mainstream schools came from my observation that, during the interviews and data analysis, the students were especially interested in talking about their experiences in mainstream school. When asked the question "Do you think things have gotten better or gotten worse since you made the switch to an alternate school?", all 7 of my participants replied in various ways that things have gotten better in their alternate schools. However, given their accounts of their experiences in mainstream schools, excerpted in the previous chapter, the bar was not set very high.

Yet who truly benefits the most from alternative education in this format? Kim and Taylor (2008) found that a critical analysis of an alternative school yielded similar results as those offered by my research participants: alternative students may find trust and care in their new schools but, ultimately, the school will "serve merely as a tool to reproduce ideologies of the dominant social groups and their hierarchy of the class structure rather than promote social change, equality, and equity" (p. 217)., The findings of my research, and studies like Kim and Taylor's (2008), have led me to believe that while the work done in alternate programs is often caring and kind, the most equitable solution for the students is likely to be providing the supports necessary to keep them successfully in their mainstream schools. In this way, I believe that alternate schools offer hints at possibilities for improving the student experience in mainstream schools, and that this is a worthy and timely goal; however, this, in and of itself, does not do anything to disrupt the social conditions that exist outside the school.

5.5. Implications for Behaviour Support Programs

The final tenet of an FB, ensuring student safety, I believe succinctly encapsulates the limitations of the entire discipline. As Thad very eloquently put it, "You are never going to have a completely safe school – even if you spent hella money", and I believe he is right. Under the current circumstances, it is functionally impossible to guarantee student safety. As the data in this study illustrates, socialization of male-assigned or male-identified individuals into a violent gender identity happens young and is deeply entrenched. Considering these findings, I believe that any approach to

behaviour support must first acknowledge the scope of the problem of violence in school and operate under the assumption that we haven't yet been able to guarantee safety for our students in a meaningful way while at school. In addition, I contend that how Canadian schools react to increasing trends of youth violence has the potential to de-escalate violence, which supports the importance of anti-violent behaviour support programs and violence prevention work.

Going forward, this study supports the phasing out of FBAs as the primary means of understanding troublesome or disruptive behaviour in behaviour support programs. Furthermore, the violence that interweaves and permeates the lives of the participants supports a reimagining of the ways that schools, community programs, and police liaison programs attempt to provide safety to our youth. Several participants of this study mentioned a negative interaction with law enforcement and that is certainly an area of research that requires further inquiry – especially with regards to how school and policing intertwines and the impacts of students' sense of safety and belonging. This study supports the idea that TIP appears to have the potential to increase student feelings of trust and safety, specifically the focus on relationality, which builds foundations of trust and mutual care that can increase the chances of student disclosure of unsafe circumstances.

5.6. Implications for Mainstream School Discipline

All but one of the research participants in my study, without being specifically asked about a suspension, mentioned a time during their experience at school when they were suspended. This is certainly troubling. Knowing as we do, that alternate school students are at a higher risk for complex trauma backgrounds, the exclusionary punishment model (suspensions, in-school suspensions, separate classrooms) presents several issues. Howard (2016) argues that schools have a responsibility to discipline their students with the least amount of exclusion and attachment disruption as possible – both on moral grounds and based on neurological research with survivors of trauma.

Using exclusionary disciplinary measures, in addition to behaviour contracts for school re-entry, can have the opposite effect from that desired. Suspension can damage relationships and disrupt student attachment, which neuropsychological research shows are the most important factors to protect after a crisis event (such as one that would

require a suspension) and, in this way, schools are doing the exact opposite of what the child needs (Zilberstein, 2014). School re-entry contracts and very strict behaviour expectations like those Farhan faced during his in-school suspension can also have the opposite effect. As Howard (2016) explains, for complex trauma-surviving students, strict monitoring and behaviour expectations with high stakes like the threat of further suspension “can exacerbate anxiety and emotional dysregulation, which can increase the likelihood of more troubling behaviours and additional punishment” (Howard, 2016, p. 39). Thus, before we even begin to talk about the emotional and mental disengagement of alternate school students in their original mainstream schools, the data from this study show how the exclusionary disciplinary model, which is clearly still the norm, damages relationships, impedes attachment, and increases the likelihood of further misbehaviour.

Besides suspension, many of the participants talked about disengaging from school intentionally, and their education being interrupted in a more gradual way. The language the students used was “skipping” which means the active choice by a student to not attend class, usually having to get creative to avoid detection or consequences by administration. Elijah explained his disconnection from his original private secondary school, and this led to him skipping more and more classes and falling further and further behind in his academic progress, eventually resulting in his switching to a different school. Farhan partially blamed his peer group for his school disengagement. Like Elijah, Farhan eventually left his original mainstream secondary school seeking connection at a different school in his area. John talked about clashing with a science teacher in his Grade 9 year at his original mainstream secondary school. Because of this, he explained that it soured the experience of his classes in general and began a trend of missing other classes as well. Miguel and Thad also reported “wandering” to avoid class and “ditching class” respectively. Dominic did not use the word “skipping” but explained that when his peers left the school it removed incentive for him to come to class. Seamus in turn described his skipping as a response to disliking school in general.

Of note in Seamus’ answer is the issue of regret. This is a complex and multilayered aspect of student disengagement with school. Of the seven participants in this research, three of them answered affirmatively to the question of whether they had a choice of switching from a mainstream school to an alternate program. The other

respondents felt that they were forced to go to an alternate program in that they were offered no other choice. The idea of choice, agency, and student response to unjust or inadequate school support systems certainly deserves further study, but in the narrow scope of this research it appears that “skipping” is one of the methods that students used to feel a modicum of agency and control in a system that is constantly seeking to control them.

In total, six of seven students in this study reported being suspended, and all reported missing significant amounts of class time due to other factors like skipping and general disengagement with their education. Referring to John, it is unacceptable that he spent more than 2 months waiting to return to school. Farhan, for his part, endured prison-like conditions during his in-school suspension wherein he was under constant surveillance and had his movements restricted. Thad was suspended an estimated 16 times, which to me suggests that its repeated use was not having the desired effect. Considering these findings, this study recommends a thorough re-examination of the policy of suspending students for ‘bad behaviour’. It is clearly still commonplace in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, and the effects appear to be twofold:

1. Suspension negatively affects the education of the suspended student in terms of removing them from academic supports and putting the onus on them to reach out to teachers for academic help through ineffective ways such as email or phone – which, if the relationship with the teacher is not strong, is unlikely to happen.
2. Suspension negatively affects the students’ feelings of belonging in the school, which leads to further disengagement from academics and a higher likelihood of engaging in anti-social behaviour to justify their new feelings of alienation.

Further study of the reasons for disengagement are necessary if attempts to retain these students are to be successful. In addition, re-examination of the philosophy of exclusionary discipline practices is critical from both a moral and neurological (Perry, 2006) perspective. RJE has the potential to address many of the outstanding issues left behind by exclusionary disciplinary frameworks and should be at the forefront of systemic changes to school discipline.

5.7. Alternate School Students and the Feeling of Belonging at School

As discussed in Chapter 4, whether students felt like they belonged at school or in the classroom was critical to their engagement. This extended to the common feeling that students felt more valued when their absences were noted by school staff and there were some formal follow-up procedures that would be activated when they missed school. Essentially, they felt valued when someone reached out to notice that they weren't there. The issue of personal responsibility vs. school support system reemerges here and the participants felt that the school put the blame for their absences squarely on their shoulders and felt it appropriate to threaten their school placements as an incentive to attend more classes. It is not hard to imagine how this threat to remove them from school could negatively affect their feelings of belonging. Given the possibility of increasing student sense of value, one possibility to improve the experience of students in mainstream schools who are disengaging with schools is more direct follow-up from school staff with the explicit purpose of making it clear to that student that they belong in school, their absence was noticed and significant, and that the school feels that it is important to make changes to help them attend classes regularly. It appears that threatening to remove them from the school is not an incentive to attend more regularly, but rather has the opposite effect and makes them feel devalued and unstable in their attachment to the school itself. Conversely, previously discussed possibilities for more equitable pedagogies like anti-racism in education and CSP have been shown to secure student attachment and a sense of belonging at school, and should thus, I argue, replace exclusionary models of incentive/punishment for students who need behaviour support.

5.8. The Importance of Story and Implications for Pedagogy

Finally, an aspect of the students' feelings of belonging that is worth discussing is the importance of listening. Feeling like their perspective is worthy of the attention of adults was something that several participants mentioned in different ways. In Elijah's case, he asked that schools practice what they preach in the form of more democratic approaches to behaviour support. Trauma-Informed practice in behaviour management clearly states that students need to feel empowered to heal. Restorative Justice in

Education has as a central tenet that there needs to be mutual concern for both victims and those who transgress. What better way to make students feel like we are concerned with their needs than by giving them a meaningful stake in their own discipline? Or perhaps better put, what better way to make a student feel like there is no concern for their well-being than top-down punitive and exclusionary discipline? To illustrate, I present this exchange between myself and John:

- D: Ok so I got two last questions. Imagine that you are talking to a teacher who is just starting to be a teacher and they are going into a mainstream school...what advice would you give them to handle dealing with students that maybe the pace of learning is slower or whatever. How would you tell them to be like [teachers you have liked in the past]?
- J: I dunno, usually new teachers are pretty shy, so everyone fucks with them.
- D: *laughs* I mean you are not wrong
- J: That's uh, I mean...
- D: But think a little deeper, like think about what would you tell them to be like "hey this is how – for little me's that are coming along later – how is it that you are going to be straight up with me and connect with me? What do you need to do?"
- J: Show interest when I start to talk about my stories. Cuz, I tell a lot of stories in class, I don't know why. And when I get back from my weekend, I tell my whole weekend, it's like a replay so get ready for that.
- D: I'm excited. Are you able to edit out certain parts or is it rated R?
- JH: yeah! It's usually edited out because [my current teacher] tells me that I gotta... I can't tell him everything. At some point he's gonna have to say something to the authorities.
- D: *laughs* but I really like that you said that: showing interest in when I tell stories. That's really important.
- J: Yeah, stories is like a good way that I interact when I link up with someone. It's like – or if we have similar stories, tell them back, I dunno – don't shut me down. Sometimes they shut you down and just try to get you to work cuz like I guess that's their job and that's all they think they're there to do, but they are there to be teachers.

The importance of story in general is critical; this study suggests that the stories we tell each other and the stories that inform our school curriculum in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia are Eurocentric and white-focused. It follows that behaviour support and pedagogies that incorporate CSP and Restorative Justice directed by cultural traditions have potential to increase student engagement at every level, from academic buy-in, to engagement in the restorative practices, and finally the maintenance of positive relationships at school.

John encapsulates many of the key implications of this study for working with students who exhibit challenging behaviour. Firstly, the simple assertion that students need to feel like their teachers are listening to them and are there to respond to their needs, rather than as corrective forces meant to shape them into a 'normal' child in the spirit of PBIS. Secondly, John wants to hear similar stories reflected at him, which explains why schools and teachers should reflect the identities and stories of their students and why cultural experience, racialized representation, and similar life experiences among students and school staff are critical. Further, I argue that the data in total supports the urgent need to implement culturally relevant pedagogy and anti-racism in education at every level of our curriculum and practice. In addition, the lack of culturally relevant/sustaining behaviour support or pedagogy provided the participants supports the importance of its widespread implementation.

5.9. Conclusion & Possibilities for Further Research

The scholarship (Maynard, 2018; Kokka, 2018) has demonstrated the overrepresentation of non-white students in behaviour-focused alternate programs. In my experience, Indigenous students are the most affected by the disproportionate referral of non-white students to these programs. At our alternate school the rate of Indigenous students enrolled hovered around 25-30% year to year and that is in a district with approximately 3% Indigenous students (Burnaby Schools Aboriginal Education Year End Report, 2016). These statistics clearly call for further research into the sources of these inequities and for recommendations for significant systemic changes at all levels of behaviour support.

The findings of this study pointed to the transformative and emancipatory possibilities of implementing RJE, CSP, and anti-racist education for behaviour support

in response to the limitations of PBIS, exclusionary disciplinary practices, and TIP. However, as of yet, in the context of the Lower Mainland of British Columbia these are still just that, possibilities. Further research is necessary to examine these frameworks in practice.

Finally, the intersection of RJE and decolonization in education is an area of further research that I believe has enormous potential to improve behaviour support programs especially considering the overrepresentation of Indigenous students. It is my firm belief that research and practice that is led by Indigenous scholars and practitioners is critical to improving the education and lives of the students.

5.10. Personal Reflection

This was at once, both invigorating and difficult research to conduct. On one hand, I was energized that the literature and the answers of the research participants were corroborating my experience as a teacher. I have indeed observed that things do get better for students in the more caring and supportive environment of alternate programs. However, I have also seen in practice what the literature supports, that we are stuck in reactionary mode until we address the systemic inequities that cause students to misbehave at school in the first place.

The importance of this collaborative approach is confirmed by my experience as an educator of students with high incidences of complex trauma. Indeed, I believe it was not possible for traditional school staff (teachers, counsellors, administrators) alone to provide the standard of care required to educate this population. Further, I believe it is impossible for things to markedly improve until the community of care (teachers, counsellors, administrators, support staff, mental health professionals, group home staff, foster parents) reflects the community of students in terms of both race, culture, and economics. The simple fact is that I and most of my colleagues are white, middle class, and monolingual, and most of our alternative program students are not. I truly believe this limits our potential, not because we aren't trying our best, but because our whiteness, economic security, and comfortable anglophone status is indicative of a larger issue in Canadian society of who gets to achieve what. This is certainly an area that deserves further inquiry and frankly, I don't think I should be the one to do it.

Another important issue that came forward during this work was the ongoing debate surrounding police in schools. I wish to listen to my racialized colleagues and assert that armed police have absolutely no place in schools. A far more interesting area of inquiry to me is the potential alternative community approaches to youth violence (a domain typically reserved for police). In our district, a restorative justice program exists into which students can self-select to participate, but only after they have become involved with the youth criminal justice system. It is not available to students who haven't formally been involved with police, courts, and probation.

Anecdotally, I have seen my students express what I perceived as real remorse for their transgressions and demonstrate empathy for the victims. However, most often I saw students writing superficial letters to their victims to satisfy their probation officer and the mandate for a more restorative approach in B.C. youth criminal justice. One student I worked with named Desire³ was writing a letter of apology to another girl she had assaulted, and I remember her saying 'she deserved it!', but that it would look good in court if she had the letter completed. In this way we can see a complete breakdown of the RJE framework. This again is an area that deserves more funding, more programs, more staff, more scholarship, more emphasis in general.

In conclusion, I want to deeply thank the participants for letting me into their lives. I want to thank my colleagues whom I have seen bravely fill the cup of another before their own. Finally, I urge anyone who reads this, and who works in the field of education, to try one simple thing when they get the chance: find a student who hits, a student who fights, a students who yells, a students who your colleagues say sells drugs, a student who scares the other kids, and tell them a story about your life, repeat this as many times as you need to until they reciprocate, then listen to them.

³ Pseudonym

References

- Amstutz, L. S., & Mullet, J. H. (2005). *The little book of restorative discipline for schools: Teaching responsibility, creating caring climates*. Intercourse, PA: Good Books.
- Austin, K., & Lane, M. (2018). The prevention of firearm injuries in Canadian youth. *Paediatrics & Child Health*, 23(1), 35–42. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pch/pxx164>
- Baumeister & Bushman (2007). *Social Psychology and Human Nature*. Cengage Learning. p. 254. ISBN 9780495116332.
- Bloom, S., MD. (1995). CREATING SANCTUARY IN THE SCHOOL. *Journal for a Just and Caring Education*, 1 (4), 403-433.
- Brinkmann, S., & Kvale, S. (2015). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (3rd ed.). Sage
- Brooks, S., & Conroy, T. (2011). Hip-Hop Culture in a Global Context: Interdisciplinary and Cross-Categorical Investigation. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 55(1), 3-8.
- Canada, Stats Canada. (2014). *Canadian General Social Survey*
- Carroll. (2017). Evaluating Attempts at the Implementation of Restorative Justice in Three Alternative Education High Schools. eScholarship, University of California.
- Carspecken, F. P. (1996). *Critical Ethnography in Educational Research*. Taylor and Francis. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315021263>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2016). *Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)*. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/ace>
- Cooper, Heron, T. E., & Heward, W. L. (2020). *Applied behavior analysis* / John O. Cooper, Timothy E. Heron, and William L. Heward. (3rd. ed.). Pearson/Merrill-Prentice Hall.
- Corso, P. S., Edwards, V. J., Fang, X., & Mercy, J. A. (2008). Health related quality of life among adults who experienced maltreatment during childhood. *American Journal of Public Health*, 98, 1094–1100.
- Cramer, E. D., & Bennett, K. D. (2015). Implementing culturally responsive positive behavior interventions and supports in middle school classrooms. *Middle School Journal*, 46(3), 18–24. <https://doi-org.proxy.lib.sfu.ca/10.1080/00940771.2015.11461911>

- Day, A., Baroni, B., Somers, C., Shier, J., Zammit, M., Crosby, S., Hong, J. (2017). Trauma and Triggers: Students' Perspectives on Enhancing the Classroom. Experiences at an Alternative Residential Treatment-Based School. *Children & Schools*, 39(4), 227-237.
- DeCapua, A., Smathers, W., & Tang, F. (2009). Students with limited or interrupted schooling: A guide for educators. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Dei, G., (1996). *Anti-racism Education: Theory and practice / George J. Sefa Dei*. (DesLibris. Books collection). Halifax, N.S.: Fernwood Pub.
- Dei, G., & Kempf, A. (2013). New perspectives on African-centered education in Canada. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press.
- Dixon, D. R., Vogel, T., & Tarbox, J. (2012). A Brief History of Functional Analysis and Applied Behavior Analysis. In *Functional Assessment for Challenging Behaviors* (pp. 3–24). Springer New York. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-3037-7_2
- Dube, S. R., Anda, R. F., Felitti, V. J., Edwards, V. J., & Williams, D. F. (2002). Exposure to abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction among adults who witnessed intimate partner violence as children: Implications for health and social services. *Violence and Victims*, 17, 3–17.
- Dube, S. R., Miller, J. W., Brown, D. W., Giles, W. H., Felitti, V. J., Dong, M., & Anda, R. F. (2006). Adverse childhood experiences and the association with ever using alcohol and initiating alcohol use during adolescence. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 38, 444.e1–10.
- Dunning-Lozano, Jessica L. (2016) Race and opportunity in a public alternative school, *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 19:2, 433-460, DOI: 10.1080/13613324.2014.911163
- Madison, D. (2005). *Critical ethnography: Method, ethics, and performance / D. Soyini Madison*. (1st ed.).
- Ellis, C., Adams, T. E., & Bochner, A. P. (2011). Autoethnography: An overview. *Forum : Qualitative Social Research*, 12(1) Retrieved from <http://proxy.lib.sfu.ca/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.proxy.lib.sfu.ca/scholarly-journals/autoethnography-overview/docview/870465772/se-2?accountid=13800>
- Eisenberg, N., Fabes, R. A., & Spinrad, T. L. (2006). Prosocial Development. In N. Eisenberg, W. Damon, & R. M. Lerner (Eds.), *Handbook of child psychology: Social, emotional, and personality development* (pp. 646–718). John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Erickson, & Pearson, J. (2021). Excluding Whom? Race, Gender, and Suspension in High School. *Education and Urban Society*, 1312452110275. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00131245211027510>

- Evans, & Vaandering, D. (2016). *The Little Book of Restorative Justice in Education*. Good Books.
- Felitti, V., Anda, R., Nordenberg, D., Williamson, D., Spitz, A., Edwards, V., . . . Marks, J. (1998). Relationship of childhood abuse and household dysfunction to many of the leading causes of death in adults. The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, *14*(4), 245-258.
- Howard, & James, C. E. (2019). When dreams take flight: How teachers imagine and implement an environment that nurtures Blackness at an Africentric school in Toronto, Ontario. *Curriculum Inquiry*, *49*(3), 313–337.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03626784.2019.1614879>
- Ginwright, S. (2016). *Hope and healing in Urban Education: How urban activists and teachers are reclaiming matters of the heart* / Shawn Ginwright.
- Ginwright, S. (2018, May 31). The Future of Healing: Shifting from Trauma Informed Care to Healing Centered Engagement. Retrieved from <https://medium.com/@ginwright/the-future-of-healing-shifting-from-trauma-informed-care-to-healing-centered-engagement-634f557ce69c>
- Goldin, Duane & Khasnabis (2022) Interrupting the Weaponization of Trauma-Informed Practice: "... Who Were You Really Doing the 'Saving' for?", *The Educational Forum*, 86:1, 5-25, DOI: [10.1080/00131725.2022.1997308](https://doi.org/10.1080/00131725.2022.1997308)
- Graham, L. (2008). From ABCs to ADHD: The role of schooling in the construction of behaviour disorder and production of disorderly objects. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *12*(1), 7-33.
- Greene. (2014). *Lost at school: why our kids with behavioral challenges are falling through the cracks and how we can help them* / Ross W. Greene. (Second Scribner trade paperback edition.). Scribner.
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. *Handbook of qualitative research*, 2(163-194), 105.
- Guthrie. (2010). *Basic research methods: an entry to social science research* / Gerard Guthrie. SAGE Publications.
- Gutiérrez, K. D., & Johnson, P. (2017). Understanding Identity Sampling and Cultural Repertoires: Advancing a Historicizing and Syncretic System of Teaching and Learning in Justice Pedagogies. In *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies: Teaching and Learning for Justice in a Changing World* (pp. 247-260). New York & London: Teachers College Press.
- Ingold, T. (2014). That's enough about ethnography! *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, *4*(1), 383-395.

- Jaycox, L. H., Langley, A. K., Stein, B. D., Wong, M., Sharma, P., Scott, M., & Schonlau, M. (2009). Support for students exposed to trauma: A pilot study. *School Mental Health, 1*, 49-60.
- Kim, & Taylor, K. A. (2008). Rethinking Alternative Education to Break the Cycle of Educational Inequality and Inequity. *The Journal of Educational Research (Washington, D.C.)*, 101(4), 207–219. <https://doi.org/10.3200/JOER.101.4.207-219>
- Kokka, K. (2018). Healing-Informed Social Justice Mathematics: Promoting Students' Sociopolitical Consciousness and Well-Being in Mathematics Class. *Urban Education*, 004208591880694.
- Ko, S. J., Ford, J. D., Kassam-Adams, N., Berkowitz, S. J., Wilson, C., Wong, M., Brymer, M. J., & Layne, C. M. (2008). Creating trauma-informed systems: Child welfare, education, first responders, health care, juvenile justice. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 39(4), 396–404. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0735-7028.39.4.396>
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2013). "Stakes Is High": Educating New Century Students. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 82(2), 105-110. doi:10.7709/jnegroeducation.82.2.0105
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32(3), 465-491.
- Lagana-Riordan, Aguilar, J. P., Franklin, C., Streeter, C. L., Kim, J. S., Tripodi, S. J., & Hopson, L. M. (2011). At-Risk Students' Perceptions of Traditional Schools and a Solution-Focused Public Alternative School. *Preventing School Failure*, 55(3), 105–114. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10459880903472843>
- Lehr, C. A., & Lange, C. M. (2003). Alternative schools and the students they serve: Perceptions of state directors of special education. Policy Research Brief (University of Minnesota: Minneapolis, Institute on Community Integration), 14(1), 1–12.
- Levine-Rasky. (2014). White fear: analyzing public objection to Toronto's Africentric school. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 17(2), 202–218. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2012.725043>
- Losen, D., & Gillespie, J. (2012). Opportunities Suspended: The Disparate Impact of Disciplinary Exclusion from School.
- Maiter. (2009). Using an Anti-racist Framework for Assessment and Intervention in Clinical Practice with Families from Diverse Ethno-racial backgrounds. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 37(4), 267–276. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10615-009-0198-0>
- Malakieh, J. (2018). *Adult and youth correctional statistics in Canada, 2016/2017* (Canada, Stats Canada, Correctional Service of Canada).

- Marcil, L. (2010). *CAPPD: PRACTICAL INTERVENTIONS TO HELP CHILDREN AFFECTED BY TRAUMA* (Health Federation of Philadelphia, Multiplying Connections)
- Marshall, C. & Rossman, G. (2016). *Designing qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- McInerney, M., Esq., & McKlindon, A., M.S.W. (2019). *Unlocking the Door to Learning: Trauma-Informed Classrooms and Transformational Schools* (Publication). Philadelphia, PA: Education Law Center.
- McNulty, & Roseboro, D. L. (2009). "I'm not really that bad": Alternative School Students, Stigma, and Identity Politics. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 42(4), 412–427. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10665680903266520>
- Noblit, Flores, S. Y., & Murillo, E. G. (2004). *Postcritical ethnography: reinscribing critique / edited by George W. Noblit, Susana Y. Flores, Enrique G. Murillo, Jr.* Hampton Press.
- Paris, D., & Alim, H. (2017). *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies: Teaching and learning for justice in a changing world / edited by Django Paris, H. Samy Alim.* (Language and literacy series (New York, N.Y.)).
- Perry, B. D. (2006). Applying Principles of Neurodevelopment to Clinical Work with Maltreated and Traumatized Children: The Neuro-sequential Model of Therapeutics. In N. B. Webb (Ed.), *Working with traumatized youth in child welfare* (pp. 27–52). The Guilford Press.
- Perry, B. D., Child Trauma Academy, & Linkletter Media (2003). *Understanding traumatized and maltreated children: The six core concepts* [Video recording]. Sherbourn, MA: Aquarius Healthcare Videos.
- Phifer, L. W., & Hull, R. (2016). Helping Students Heal: Observations of Trauma-Informed Practices in the Schools. *School Mental Health*, 8(1), 201–205. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12310-016-9183-2>
- Plumb, J., Bush, K., & Kersevich, S. (2016). Trauma-Sensitive Schools: An Evidence-Based Approach. *School Social Work Journal*, 40(2), 37-60.
- Poyrazli, S., Ferrer-Wreder, L., Meister, D. G., Forthun, L., Coastworth, J. D., & Grahame, K. M. (2008). Academic achievement, employment, age and gender and students' experience of alternative school. *Adolescence*, 43(171), 547-556. Retrieved from <http://proxy.lib.sfu.ca/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/academic-achievement-employment-age-gender/docview/61680600/se-2?accountid=13800>

- Reimer, & Pangrazio, L. (2020). Educating on the margins: young people's insights into effective alternative education. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 24(5), 479–495. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2018.1467977>
- Salole, A., & Abdulle, Z. (2015). Quick to Punish: An examination of the school to prison pipeline for marginalized youth. *Canadian Review of Social Policy*, (72/73), 124-168.
- Simon, R., & Campano, G. (2013). Activist Literacies: Teacher Research as Resistance to the "Normal Curve". *Journal of Language and Literacy Education*, 9(1), 21-39.
- Statistics Canada. Table 35-10-0072-01 Number and percentage of homicide victims, by type of firearm used to commit the homicide, inactive DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25318/3510007201-eng>
- Sumida Huaman. (2020). Small Indigenous Schools: Indigenous Resurgence and Education in the Americas. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 51(3), 262–281. <https://doi.org/10.1111/aeq.12335>
- Thomas, M. S., Crosby, S., & Vanderhaar, J. (2019). Trauma-Informed Practices in Schools Across Two Decades: An Interdisciplinary Review of Research. *Review of Research in Education*, 43(1), 422–452. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X18821123>
- Tuck, E., Yang, K., St. Pierre, E., & Jackson, A. (2014). Unbecoming Claims: Pedagogies of Refusal in Qualitative Research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 20(6), 811-818.
- Vanderhaar, J., Munoz, M., & Petrosko, J. (2014). Reconsidering the Alternatives: The Relationship between Suspension, Disciplinary Alternative School Placement, Subsequent Juvenile Detention, and the Salience of Race. *Journal of Applied Research on Children*, 5(2), 33.
- Vincent, C. G., & Tobin, T. J. (2011). The relationship between implementation of school-wide positive behavior support (SWPBS) and disciplinary exclusion of students from various ethnic backgrounds with and without disabilities. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, 19(4), 217–232. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1063426610377329>
- Walkley, M., & Cox, T. (2013). Building Trauma-Informed Schools and Communities. *Children & Schools*, 35(2), 123-126.
- Warren, C. A. (n.d.). Qualitative Interviewing. *Handbook of Interview Research*, 83-102. doi:10.4135/9781412973588.n7
- Zhang, K.C. (2008). Through new lens: young adolescent girls' perceptions of their school experience in an alternative education program. *International journal of special education*, 23, 96-100.

Zolkoski, Bullock, L. M., & Gable, R. A. (2016). Factors Associated with Student Resilience: Perspectives of Graduates of Alternative Education Programs. *Preventing School Failure*, 60(3), 231–243.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1045988X.2015.1101677>

Appendix A.

Sample Recruitment Form

Participate in a Simon Fraser University Master's Thesis Study to Improve Our Understanding of Alternate Schools

Hello alternate schoolteachers and students,

As part of my master's thesis, I am hoping to interview alternate school students to ask them about their experiences in an effort to better understand them and hopefully improve school experiences for future students.

Participating in this study means setting up a time to be interviewed by me (Daniel Cooper). We will meet online using video conferencing software and we will talk for no longer than 1 hour. I will ask you questions about your experiences at both mainstream and alternate school. Your participation is completely up to you, there is no pressure to answer any of the questions, and you can back out at any time.

If you are interested in participating, you can contact me.

Thank you very much for your time,

Daniel Cooper

(More formal information on page 2)

Student Experiences in Secondary Education Alternate Programs
SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

Research Project Title: Student Experiences in Secondary Education Alternate Programs

Principal Investigator: Daniel Cooper, Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University (SFU).

Faculty Supervisors:

Dr. Kumari Beck, Associate Professor, Faculty of Education, SFU.

Invitation and Study Purpose

The purpose of this study is to learn more about the experiences of students currently enrolled in secondary alternate programs. The idea is to more fully understand the experiences of these students in their original mainstream schools, how they transitioned to an alternate setting, and the experiences that they had along the way.

I plan to investigate the following central research question:

How do secondary school students currently enrolled in alternate schools in the Lower Mainland of B.C. experience their behaviour-support school programs?

Sub-questions include:

1. How did these same students experience their behaviour support services while they attended a mainstream school?
2. What experiences at school made the students feel valued and connected; and what experiences at school made the students feel unimportant and disconnected

If you are interested in being interviewed – please reach out to Daniel Cooper.

Appendix B.

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Student Experiences in Secondary Education Alternate Programs

Semi-structured Interview Questions:

These questions are illustrative of the questions that will be asked of the participants. Follow up questions may be asked based on participant responses.

Could you please describe yourself and your background in any way you choose to?

Can you please describe the people that you live with? What is life like for you at home?

How do you think the people at school (teachers, principals, peers) see you? If a classmate were to describe you, what might they say? If a teacher were to describe you, what would they say are your strengths? What might they say are your struggles? If a principal were to describe you, what would they say are your strengths? What would they say are your stretches? What do the people at school think of you? (Prompt: students, teachers, VPs)

When did you arrive at (current school) and could you please describe how you arrived at (current school name)?

What was life like at your previous school? What do you remember most about that place?

Can you please describe a time at your previous school when you got in “trouble” with teachers or the admin - you can choose something big or small it doesn’t matter - I am just interested in how they handled it and whether you felt like they cared about you,

At (previous school) do you remember a time when you felt really connected? – either to a staff member or coach?

What is life like at your current school? What are the teachers like? What are the classes like? Do you find things have improved or gotten worse since you made the switch?

At (current) do you remember a time when you felt really connected? – either to a staff member or coach?

Do you feel like you had a say in where you went to school? Did you feel like you were involved in the decision? How was the idea to change schools presented to you?

When you are at school - how are you expected to act? What things are allowed and what is not?

How did you learn this?

If you feel comfortable, can you tell me about a time when you did something at school that was 'not allowed'?

Is there anything else you would like to share that we haven't talked about?

If you could imagine school in any way you like, what would it look like for you? How would school make sure that the students were happy, connected, and trusted?

Appendix C.

Sample Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT FORM
Student Experiences in Secondary Education Alternate Programs
SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

Research Project Title: Student Experiences in Secondary Education Alternate Programs

Principal Investigator: Daniel Cooper, Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University (SFU).

Faculty Supervisors:

Dr. Kumari Beck, Associate Professor, Faculty of Education, SFU.

Invitation and Study Purpose

The purpose of this study is to learn more about the experiences of students currently enrolled in secondary alternate programs. The idea is to more fully understand the experiences of these students in their original mainstream schools, how they transitioned to an alternate setting, and the experiences that they had along the way.

I plan to investigate the following central research question:

1. How do secondary school students currently enrolled in alternate schools in the Lower Mainland of B.C. experience their behaviour-support school programs?

Sub-questions include:

1. How did these same students experience their behaviour support services while they attended a mainstream school?
2. What experiences at school made the students feel valued and connected; and what experiences at school made the students feel unimportant and disconnected

Your Participation is Voluntary

Your participation is voluntary. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to participate, you may still choose to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences to the education or other services to which you are entitled or are presently receiving.

Study Procedures

As a participant of the study you will be asked to participate in 2 interviews where I will ask you about your experiences at school. I will meet you at your school and we will find a quiet space where we can talk for no more than an hour. I will record the interview using audio recording equipment and will transcribe your answers onto paper. No one except myself and my professor will have access to these audio files or written records. The audio-recordings will be permanently deleted soon after transcription is completed. The transcriptions will be kept for five years after completion of my thesis completion under SFU safeguard. After this period, information will be permanently eliminated.

If you decide you wish to participate you will first need to seek the permission of your legal guardian. They should read over this form clearly and sign it if they consent to your participation. Should they have any questions at all they are encouraged to contact me via email or telephone.

After you decide you wish to participate and have obtained the consent of your legal guardian, you should reach out to me directly via email or phone so we can coordinate when your participation will take place. After we find time to meet, I will explain the purpose of the study again and will review the informed consent form with you. The investigator will answer any questions you may have.

During our meeting I will ask you for some general information (i.e. your age, racial background, gender). Next, I will ask you an initial broader question regarding your understanding of your journey through school up to this point. Mostly I will be asking you about your time in mainstream school, your transition to an alternate program, and your experience at your current school.

Potential Risks of the Study

Risks associated with participation of this study are minimal. Participants may experience emotional moments as they discuss their experiences. However, the risks of harm as a participant are unlikely to be higher than those encountered in everyday life. Some of the questions the investigator might ask may seem sensitive or personal. To minimize risks, participants will be informed that they may refuse to respond to any question and can withdraw from the study at any time.

Potential Benefits of the Study

You may benefit from this study by gaining an awareness of what experiences of school strengthen your connection and what experiences made you feel disconnected. This could help you going forward to self-advocate for education of connection. This could also help other students by informing their educators as to how to best design their alternate education programs.

Confidentiality & Anonymity

Confidentiality and anonymity will always be strictly protected. Your identity will not be released without your consent unless required by law. Pseudonyms will be used, and participants will not be identified by name in any reports of the completed study. Any descriptions of the schools will also be generalized to the point of unrecognizability. All data reports and audio tapes will be kept on an encrypted and password protected computer disk or in a locked file cabinet. Only the principal investigator (myself) and faculty supervisor (my professor) will have access to the data. Audiotaped material will not be used in any presentations without your written permission.

Withdrawal

If you decide to withdraw at any time, all data collected about you during your enrolment in the study will be destroyed and nothing negative will happen to you.

Study Results

The results of this study will be reported to a masters thesis committee and may also be published in journal articles and/or books. The findings may be presented at academic conferences and/or events.

If you would like a copy of the study results, please contact me at xxx@sfu.ca or verbally during interviews. Results can be shared via e-mail.

Contact for Information About the Study

If you have any questions or would like more information about this study, you may contact Daniel Cooper.

Contact for Concerns

If you have any concerns about any aspects of this research, please feel free to contact:

Dr. Kumari Beck, Associate Professor, Faculty of Education

Dr. Jeffrey Toward, Director, Office of Research Ethics

Participant consent and signature

You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to participate, you may choose to leave the study at any time without giving a reason.

Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study, and that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

Participant Signature

Date (yyyy/mm/dd)

Parent/Legal Guardian Signature

Date (yyyy/mm/dd)

Printed name of the participant signing above

Please check one box below:

- I consent to be audiotaped for the purposes of this study.
- I do not consent to be audiotaped for the purposes of this study.

Your name (Please print)

Your Signature

Date (yyyy/mm/dd)

Please check one box below:

- I consent to be re-contacted if my interview is required for use in a future study.
- Add consent to be re-contacted for follow up interview if needed**
- I do not consent to be re-contacted if my interview is required for use in a future study.

Your name (Please print)

Your Signature

Date (yyyy/mm/dd)