SAFE & INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS APPROACH

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ABSTRACT Safe and Inclusive Schools Integrated Model Implementation of Equity in public institutions has always been a very political endeavor. The Halton community of Trustees, staff, students and stakeholders have debated the best strategies to promote a whole school approach to equitable, safe and inclusive schools. There have always been two schools of thought as to the most prudent strategy to permeate equity. Some advocated for an explicit person or group to be solely responsible for the implementation of equity and inclusion practices. Others advocated for all departmental responsibility with each group to govern how equity was embedded. After several years of conversation and experimenting, we all agreed that the work could not happen in isolation. The silo approach to implementation is not effective and does not integrate the concepts of equity in a seamless manner. We are all responsible but at the same time there needs to be a group to monitor, support and encourage the integration of equity and inclusion.

In order to move forward with this initiative we needed to develop a model that could gradually integrate the work of our academic departments in the Halton District School Board (HDSB). The Board of Trustees and the senior team expressed an interest in more collaboration and alignment in addressing issues of inclusion that have an impact on student success. By bringing together the Equity department and Safe Schools department under one Superintendent of Education, this allowed for the beginning of an integrated structure. The next step was to bring together key superintendents and individuals from departments that would have an immediate impact on our schools. This initial group involved EQUITY Department, which has the responsibility of developing inclusive curriculum; promoting our Equity Lenses; building teacher capacity in equity concepts and *responding to school and community issues relating to equity – SAFE SCHOOLS Department: which has the responsibility of supporting progressive discipline strategies; monitoring the application of suspensions and expulsions; providing alternate programing and interventions for students in jeopardy – PROGRAM Department: coaching teachers on the delivery and implementation of the provincial curriculum - STUDENT SERVICES Department: Supports students who are identified with a special education need – SCHOOL SUPPORTS: Guidance, Social Workers, Child and Youth Workers addressing mental wellbeing and social emotional state of students and – LEADERSHIP: Development of programs that build leadership competencies in our system leaders.

Once the framework was established at the Superintendent level, and all parties began to define their roles in the Safe and Inclusive Schools Integrated Model, an Integrated Working Group was developed including system principals from all areas. Although the initial dialogue revolved around Equity, Safe Schools, Well-being

and Inclusive Curriculum, it quickly moved to how these foci are connected to the other work in the various departments. This is where the "Build In" approach worked as opposed to the "Buy In" approach. Usually we bring people to the table and attempt to have them buy into a plan but in order to find systemic success, we had to ask individuals to come and assist in building something that can benefit students, and at the same time, fulfil some of their priorities. This has resulted in: strategies that have reduced our suspensions by 100s per year; Board Improvement Plan - Student Achievement that identifies engagement actions in Literacy and Numeracy, not just Safe & Inclusive Schools; alignment to support Mental Health Strategy through curriculum, Public Health and school communities and the feeling that our work is connected and aligned.

RÉSUMÉ L'introduction dans les établissements scolaires du Modèle intégré d'implantation de l'équité pour des écoles sécuritaires et inclusives (*Safe and Inclusive Schools Integrated Model Implementation of Equity*) est un processus très sensible. Les membres du conseil d'administration de la Halton District School Board (HDSB), ainsi que le personnel, les étudiants et les intervenants ont travaillé ensemble afin de réfléchir aux meilleures stratégies pour promouvoir une approche globale visant à rendre les écoles plus équitables, sécuritaires et inclusives. Deux écoles de pensée se sont dégagées quant à la stratégie la plus efficace pour établir l'équité. D'une part, ceux qui soutiennent qu'une personne ou un groupe doit être désigné explicitement en tant que seul responsable de l'application des pratiques d'équité et d'inclusion. D'autre part, ceux qui estiment que cette responsabilité revient à tous les services ou directions et que chaque groupe est responsable de l'intégration de l'équité dans leurs pratiques. Après plusieurs années d'expérience et de dialogue, nous avons constaté que ce travail ne peut pas être réalisé de manière isolée. Une mise en œuvre « en silo » n'est pas efficace et n'intègre pas les concepts d'équité d'une manière consensuelle. Cependant, même si nous sommes « tous responsables », il demeure nécessaire de constituer un groupe chargé d'administrer, de promouvoir et de faciliter l'intégration de l'équité et de l'inclusion.

Pour aller de l'avant avec cette initiative, nous avons développé un modèle qui intègre progressivement le travail de nos diverses directions universitaires au sein du Halton District School Board (HDSB). Le conseil d'administration et l'équipe senior a communiqué son désir d'établir une plus grande collaboration et une meilleure coordination entre les directions lors du traitement des questions d'inclusion, qui ont un impact direct sur la réussite des élèves. L'intégration de deux départements (traitant respectivement de l'équité et de la sécurité scolaire) sous une seule direction nous a permis de construire une structure plus intégrée. Pour sa part, l'équipe « équité » est responsable du développement d'un curriculum inclusif, de la promotion des orientations en matière d'équité, du renforcement des capacités des enseignants et de la prise en charge des enjeux scolaires et communautaires liés à l'équité. Ensuite, l'équipe « Écoles sécuritaires », est responsable de soutenir le développement progressif de stratégies disciplinaires, du suivi de l'application des suspensions et des expulsions, et de la création de programmes alternatifs et d'interventions novatrices auprès des jeunes en difficultés. L'équipe « Programmation » est en charge de la prestation et de la mise en œuvre du curriculum provincial, alors que l'équipe « Services aux étudiants » fournit de l'aide aux étudiants ayant des besoins éducatifs particuliers. Enfin, l'équipe « Soutien scolaire » est composée de travailleurs sociaux et d'intervenants jeunesse qui s'occupent des enjeux liés à la santé mentale et émotionnelle des étudiants, et l'équipe « Leadership » est responsable du développement de compétences de gestion des dirigeants scolaires.

Une fois que ce cadre a été établi au niveau de la direction, et que toutes les parties ont commencé à définir leurs rôles dans le modèle intégré des écoles sécuritaires et inclusives (*Safe and Inclusive Schools Integrated Model*), un groupe de travail a été créé qui rassemble les directeurs de toutes les équipes. Bien que le dialogue initial portait sur l'équité, la sécurité dans les écoles, le bien-être et la nature inclusive du curriculum, il s'est rapidement réorienté vers la façon dont ces problématiques sont liées au travail des autres départements. C'est à ce niveau que l'approche « build in » (basé sur la coopération) s'est avérée beaucoup plus efficace qu'une approche « Buy in » (basé sur l'imposition par le haut). Habituellement, nous discutons avec les gens et tentons de les convaincre d'adhérer à un plan, mais si nous voulons réussir à implanter le changement à travers tout le système, nous devons demander aux individus de s'impliquer et de collaborer ensemble afin de bâtir quelque chose qui peut profiter aux élèves et, en même temps, répondre à leurs priorités. Les résultats sont assez probants : la réduction des suspensions d'élèves par centaines ; l'implantation d'un Plan du conseil axé sur l'accroissement de la réussite des élèves et l'identification d'actions pour favoriser leur engagement en littératie et numératie ; l'introduction de la Stratégie pour la santé mentale dans le curriculum, la santé publique et les communautés scolaires de même que le développement le sentiment que tous travaillent ensemble et dans le même sens.

INTRODUCTION

In 2009, the Ontario Ministry of Education's Inclusive Education and Equity Strategy adopted the phrase, *"Realizing the Promise of Diversity"*. The promise started in the 1970's and probably well before that with many equity seeking initiatives. In 1993 the Ontario Ministry of Education issued Policy Program Memorandum 119 – Anti Racism and Ethno Cultural Equity Policy to be implemented in all school boards.

This promise was not realized and many district school boards continue to struggle to implement safe, equitable and inclusive practices. Structurally in institutions, the philosophical debate on implementation of equity principles has been a central obstacle. One side of the debate states, let us be explicit about equity and have implementation done through; a single strategy, single individual, or department in addition to the things we are doing. The criticism to this approach is that it can be seen as additive; creating additional work and distracting from the "real priorities." The opposing argument states, let us have everyone implement and integrate equity into their work. The criticism to this approach is that when everyone is responsible then no one is responsible and it becomes lost in departments core work. You can see the dilemma. Well, I believe for continuous systemic change you need a balance of both *"We need to be explicit about our integration"*.

The Halton District School Board (HDSB) has assigned a lead superintendent to integrate the work of Safe Schools, Equity, Inclusive Curriculum and other programs. This allows HDSB to be explicit about the integration of equity of access, opportunity and outcome for students. As illustrated in figure 1, the approach we are calling "Safe and Inclusive Schools" requires all to play a role in building it together but lead by a few.

The HDSB is a school district located west of the Greater Toronto Area. It serves over 60,000 students and has close to 6,000 employees in a demographically diverse suburban – rural region. I will share the journey we have begun to establish equitable and inclusive practices within our system and although we are proud of the start, we know that there is still much to do.

SAFE AND INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS INTEGRATED MODEL

Having support from the Director of Education, our initiative started with developing a model for integration as illustrated in figure 2. This meant bringing together key superintendents and individuals from departments that would have immediate impact on our schools. The first circle of departments included: Equity, Safe Schools, Program, Student Services, School Supports and Leadership.

FIGURE 1: SAFE AND INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS – COLLABORATION AND LEADERSHIP

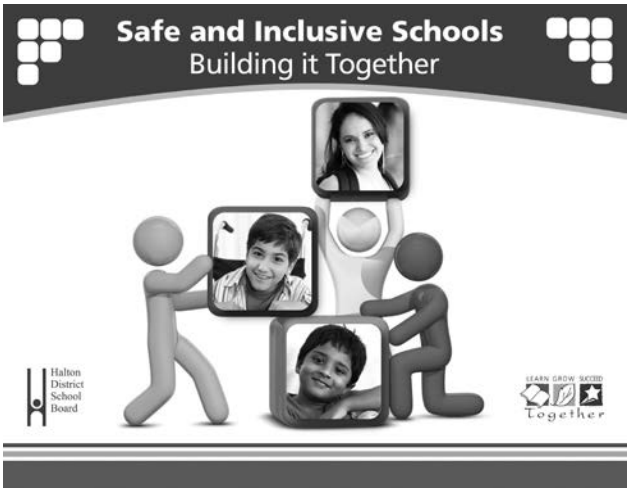
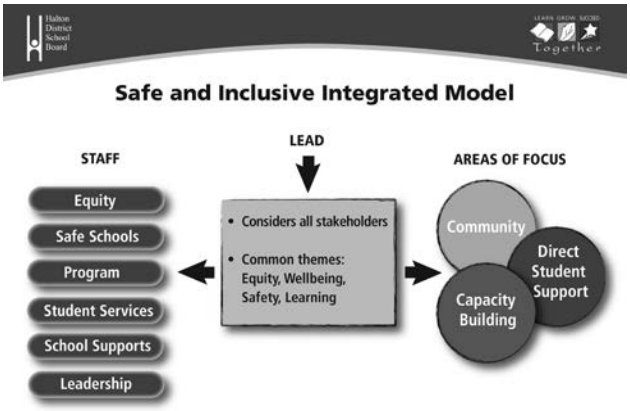


FIGURE 2: SAFE AND INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS – INTEGRATED MODEL



These departments were identified as having direct impact on schools that would lead the cascade of change based on their influence within the system. The corporate departments such as Human Resources and Business Services would follow as the integration progressed. The initial meetings with this group proved to be critical in establishing what the model would and could look like. Naturally all stakeholders questioned what is in it for them. The moral imperative reasoning alone was not enough to have immediate action towards this model. Doing the right thing is often not enough to make change to a structure individuals are comfortable with. Individuals want to see data and outcomes that can be driven by their work. Therefore, it was essential to bring forward the data, resources and the moral reasoning to tell the story of how the strategy could benefit each individual, department and system as a whole. A "Build In" approach was used as opposed to the traditional "Buy In" approach. We usually ask people to come to the table and convince them to "Buy In" to our plan. When we use the "Build In" approach we build it together and stakeholders get

an opportunity to align strategies that meet their own goals while supporting students. In the end, these stakeholders had to define the benefits. A great example was when designing a Board Improvement Plan template the idea of identifying equity principles and supports for vulnerable cohorts; this concept resonated with the Special Education department. The usual practice was to develop a plan and then ask Special Ed. Dept. what can you add without changing our structure or targets. Having the opportunity at the front end to create the structure and strategies gave great support to moving forward and the perspective for other stakeholders to contribute.

To facilitate the dialogue and stay focused on the goals without being deterred by side issues, terms of references were established that centred around the themes of Equity, Safety & Wellbeing and Learning. We discovered like many organizations, there was an overlap in departmental priorities, resources and staff assignments. In order to be strategic regarding our resource allocation and our system goals, we establish three areas of focus: Community, Direct Student Support, Capacity Building. Community refers to identifying the school board community partners that support the learning and wellbeing of our students which allows us then to create greater partnerships to fill in the gaps; direct student support refers to the individuals we currently have and would need to hire to give direct support to students; and capacity building; or the learning and training of our staff to enable them to deliver their duties within a safe and equitable context. In terms of our school staff this meant expanding their understanding of the term *Knowing the Learner*. Adapting Douglas Wilms (Wilms J.D., Friesen S. & Milton P., 2009) work on student engagement we have expanded on the term *knowing the learner* as illustrated in figure 3 to consider: Inclusive Quality Instruction; School Context; Classroom Context and the Family Context; all through our Equity Lens. (D.Wilms 2011 Halton Leadership Conference - Student Engagement: Leadership Priority)

FIGURE 3: SAFE AND INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS - KNOWING THE LEARNER

How do we explicitly address school level challenges was the most concerning area to our trustees who have given the financial and directional support through approvals in board budget and operational plans . The response was to apply a *pyramid of intervention* for student support (see figure 4). As a district we needed to interject our staff into three levels of intervention. Universal, which are strategies that will be given by staff to all students. Targeted, which are strategies of intervention to some students identified whether academically or socially; and finally, personalized, which would be the few students who need prescribed intervention to meet their specific needs. We believed this intervention strategy would facilitate student success and achievement considering whichever equity demographic a student came with.

FIGURE 4: SAFE AND INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS APPROACH - PYRAMID OF INTERVENTIONS AND INTEGRATED MODEL

ACCOUNTABILITY AND MONITORING

Organizations are routinely challenged with the monitoring of their policies, priorities and goals. In order to monitor what *"we say we wanted to do,"* a matrix of organization was developed as illustrated in figure 5 and described below. This organizational matrix covers the school system from direct student support to senior staff and trustees. Our Safe and Inclusive Teams are individuals that have direct contact with staff that give direct support to students; examples are teachers, educational assistants, social workers, special education resource personnel, settlement workers, etc. The Integrated Working Group are our managers and system principals that supervise our teams and implement our Operational Plan. They modify and monitor our metrics and goals over the course of 1-2 years, adjusting to the needs of our teams. This is a critically important group, simply because they bridge the vision of the Board and senior staff with what is actually happening in our schools and departments. The Equity and Inclusive Education Advisory Committee holds membership of Trustees,

staff and community organizations and community members seeking equitable practices for students. This group provides the balance of pressure and support in implementing our Equity Plan. In some cases, recommendations can go directly to the board table paving the way for a more expedient implementation. Finally, the coordinating committee involving the Director of Education and superintendents monitor the long-term direction and deliver key messages to the organization emphasizing our values and expectations of achievement for all students.

FIGURE 5: SAFE AND INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS - ORGANIZATIONAL MATRIX

Our Safe and Inclusive Schools structure has given us a common language and structure to address the challenges HDSB faces in supporting vulnerable students. Our common nomenclature around Ability, Faith, First Nations, Metis, Inuit; Gender; Race/Culture; Sexual Orientation/Gender Identity and Socio-Economic Status is allowing us to have critical conversations. When we say equity in HDSB it is an inclusive word that strives to meet the needs of all.

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SCHOOL COMMUNITY PROGRAMS FOR VULNERABLE BOYS

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ABSTRACT In this article the authors describe the findings of a school-university collaborative multiple-case study of school community programs for vulnerable boys in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB). The purpose of the study was to identify what kinds of programs exist to address gender gaps in academic achievement, which school communities those programs are housed in, and learn more about their effectiveness for the purpose of developing an evidence base. The following key questions guided the research:

- What programs exist in TDSB school communities to facilitate school engagement of vulnerable boys? What organizational and instructional practices are utilized in these interventions?

- What are participating administrators', teachers' and students' assessment of these programs? Do they think they are effective? Why or why not?

The authors worked with the TDSB Research and Information Services department to identify five middle schools that had a high number of male students who were vulnerable to disengaging from school. Over a six-month period the authors gathered information on programs designed to address the gender gap in academic achievement in

those school communities. They identified a total of 13 programs, the majority of which were *Boys to Men* programs focused on mentoring. Five themes on program successes emerged from the individual interviews with the student participants, administrative staff, program facilitators and teachers: *1)* Experiential learning and exposure to new environments, *2)* Critical thinking and citizenship development, *3)* Mentorship, *4)* Building friendships, *5)* Creating safe and democratic space. One of the limitations student participants identified was the need for more activities, especially those that provide the opportunity to travel beyond the schooling community. We interpret this as a call for the programs to place more of an emphasis on building social capital and suggest they do this by strengthening partnerships with families/caregivers, other schools, community members, organizations & businesses. In conclusion we discuss how the results of our study provide some evidence of the effectiveness of school community programs to foster school engagement of vulnerable boys, but there is room for these programs to promote more academic engagement through greater teacher-program collaboration.

RESUME Dans cet article, les auteurs décrivent les résultats d'une étude collaborative école-université portant sur des cas multiples de programmes scolaires communautaires pour les garçons vulnérables au sein du Toronto District School Board (TDSB). Les objectifs étaient d'identifier les types de programmes existants ayant pour objectif de combler les écarts entre les sexes en matière de succès scolaire, les communautés pédagogiques dans lesquelles ces programmes se retrouvent et les facteurs d'efficacité de ces programmes, dans le but de créer une base de connaissances sur le sujet. Notre recherche était basée sur les questions suivantes :

- Quels sont les programmes des communautés scolaires du TDSB qui encouragent l'engagement scolaire chez les garçons vulnérables ? Quelles sont les pratiques organisationnelles et pédagogiques utilisées lors de ces interventions ?

- Comment les administrateurs, les professeurs et les élèves évaluent-ils ces programmes ? Est-ce qu'ils estiment qu'ils sont efficaces ? Pourquoi ou pourquoi pas ?

Les auteurs ont travaillé avec le département de recherche et d'information du TDSB pour identifier cinq écoles intermédiaires qui comprenaient un grand nombre d'élèves vulnérables au décrochage scolaire (les élèves à risque de décrocher). Pendant une période de six mois, les auteurs ont recueilli de l'information sur les programmes qui visent à combler l'écart entre les sexes en matière de réussite scolaire au sein de ces communautés scolaires. Ils ont identifié un total de 13 programmes, dont une majorité de programmes intitulés *Boys to Men*, axés sur le mentorat. Cinq thèmes reliés à la réussite de ces programmes ont émergé des entretiens individuels avec les élèves, le personnel administratif, les coordonnateurs de programme et les professeurs : *1)* l'apprentissage par l'expérience et l'exposition à de nouveaux milieux, *2)* la pensée critique et le développement de la citoyenneté, *3)* le mentorat, *4)* la création d'amitiés, *5)* la création d'espaces démocratiques et sécuritaires. Une des lacunes mentionnées par les participants était le manque d'activités, surtout celles qui offrent la chance d'aller au-delà du milieu scolaire. Nous interprétons cette lacune comme un appel pour améliorer les programmes afin qu'ils soient davantage axés sur le développement d'un capital social, notamment en renforçant les partenariats entre les familles, les autres écoles, et les différents acteurs—clés au sein de la communauté. En conclusion, l'article revient sur les résultats de notre étude qui démontrent que les programmes scolaires communautaires favorisent efficacement l'engagement des écoles envers les garçons vulnérables mais que ces programmes pourraient accroitre l'engagement académique des élèves par une meilleure collaboration professeur-programme.

BACKGROUND AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Analyses of TDSB administrative data show that particular groups of boys are vulnerable to dropping out or leaving school early (Ansief et al., 2010). The Gender Education Strategy (GES) committee of the TDSB was established in November 2009 to address the gender gap in academic achievement and school engagement through research and program analysis[1]. A Research Subcommittee of the GES was formed, which included authors McCready, James and San Vicente, to provide an evidence base for programmatic reforms recommended by the GES. The specific purpose of the Research Subcommittee of GES was to assess and conduct research on the range of school community programs and interventions that have been implemented to address the gender gap in academic achievement. According to the Glossary of Education Reform (http://edglossary.org/) the term *school community*, when used by educators, typically refers to the various individuals, groups, businesses, and institutions that are invested in the welfare and vitality of a public school

and its community — i.e., the neighborhoods and municipalities served by the school.

The term may encompass the school administrators, teachers, and staff members who work in a school; the students who attend the school and their parents and families; and local residents and organizations that have a stake in the school's success, such as school-board members, businesses, organizations, and cultural institutions; and related organizations and groups such as parent-teacher associations, charitable foundations, and volunteer school-improvement committees (to name just a few). Through this research the authors hope to contribute to an evidence-base of effective programs and interventions designed to address the gender gap in academic achievement in urban school communities, in particular, as relatively little research currently exists on this topic.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

We defined vulnerable boys as boys who are at-risk of dropping out of school due to academic underachievement. This study considers vulnerability to be a product of social inequality and sociocultural processes, which determine a particular group's marginalization or inclusion in academic and extracurricular programs and services (Noguera, 2008; Cutter, Boruff & Shirley, 2003). Although vulnerable children and youth exist across every socio-economic strata (SES) of our society, those in the lowest SES range and from low-income neighbourhoods are more likely to be defined as vulnerable (HELP, 2011). Theories of *structural and cultural* risk also conceptualize vulnerability as a product of the environment rather than individual characteristics. Theories of structural risk posit that certain structural conditions – namely de-industrialization in urban areas, racial discrimination in the labour market, tracking and other forms of inequality in schools – make students vulnerable to dropping out or being "pushed out" of school (Dei, 1997). Theories of cultural risk argue that boys adopt attitudes and beliefs linked to being socialized in or coping with challenging conditions in low income, disadvantaged communities that increase their proclivity to delinquency and academic failure (Noguera, 2008).

METHODOLOGY

A multiple-case-study approach was used to assess the effectiveness of school-based interventions for vulnerable populations of boys in five TDSB school communities. Case studies emphasize detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions and their relationships (Merriam, 1988). The following key questions guided the research:

- What interventions exist in TDSB school communities to facilitate school engagement of vulnerable boys? What organizational and instructional practices are utilized in these interventions?

- What are participating administrators', teachers' and students' assessment of these interventions? Do they think they are effective? Why or why not?

SITES

Middle school communities serve as sites for the present study. The Research Subcommittee worked with the TDSB Research and Information Services department to identify middle schools that had a high number of male students who were vulnerable to disengaging from school. Five middle schools in the TDSB were chosen for the study and the boys' programs that they offer. Data for this report was collected over a six-month period. A table of school communities included in the study appears below:

PROGRAM SUCCESSES

Five themes on program successes emerged from the individual interviews with the administrative staff, program facilitators and teachers as well as from the group interviews with the boys in terms of the ways school community programs respond to the needs of vulnerable boys: *1)* Experiential learning and exposure to new environments, *2)* Critical thinking and citizenship development, *3)* Mentorship, *4)* Building friendships, *5)* Creating safe and democratic space.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING AND NEW ENVIRONMENTS

The administrators and facilitators of the boys' programs in the schooling-community spoke about how getting boys to try new things and learn in different ways was helpful in getting them to realize their different capacities (which are often presented as very limited by members of their own communities). These new experiences help the boys develop a critical framework in which to assess their present situations, evaluate their needs and make the necessary decisions to push them into directions that they feel will secure them the success that they desire. The act of navigating communities outside of their own has been a positive experience in which the boys have been able to negotiate different identities. Such negotiation alters both self and others' perceptions of them in very positive ways.

School	Community	Programs for Vulnerable Boys
Elm Tree	North York (Jane & Eglington)	Hands Up, Smash the Glass Ceiling and Always Stop and Think Before You Proceed
Spruce Glen	North York (Jane & Finch)	Boys to Men
Algonquin	North York (Dufferin & Lawrence)	Boys to Men, Real Talk
Osprey	North York (Black Creek & Lawrence)	Boys to Men, Boys Reading Club, Strong Man
Helmer	Scarborough (Danforth & Eglington	Boys Reading Club, The Boys Group, Overnight Camping Experience

CRITICAL THINKING

Some administrators identified citizenship development (within and outside the context of school) as a successful aspect of their program. According to one administrator, citizenship development involves the cultivation of self-awareness, self-understanding, self-control and social skills. She explained how her schools' program encourages the boys to see that when they make good choices, the outcomes reflect those decisions. Noting how the school is situated within a "priority neighbourhood", this administrator emphasized the importance of teaching the boys critical thinking and positive decision-making; at her school, the importance of positive decision-making is reflected in the production of critical memoirs, in which the boys employ role play as a means to engage with their thoughts and feelings. Adult volunteers share their own pieces of writing, and then together the group discusses what decisions can be made in that context and how the boys can navigate toward the positive ones.

MENTORSHIP

Many of the program facilitators we spoke with viewed themselves as mentors whose primary purpose was to engage boys in meaningful exchanges and dialogue that built on their own experiences growing up in challenging circumstances. Several facilitators felt this type of ongoing mentorship encouraged change and growth among the boys because it modelled how the boys could overcome certain obstacles associated with the environments they are growing up in. Kevin, the facilitator of *Real Talk*, articulated the complexity of the mentorships, suggesting that youth, particularly boys, are confronted by both positive and negative contexts in which to be mentored. Like Kevin, Ryan, the founder of *Strong Man*, also observes the difficult situations the boys grow up in and envisions mentorship through the camaraderie of the boys. Ryan notes how many of the boys who participate in this program have not had positive mentors in their lives; the decisions these boys make are guided largely by prevailing stigmas and pressures both within their communities and embedded structurally in institutions such as schools, the police, the justice system and the media. He argues that *Strong Man* provides a counter-narrative to the deleterious constructions that are imposed and enacted on these boys daily.

BUILDING FRIENDSHIPS

When we interviewed the boys, they expressed a desire to develop more positive friendships with their peers. These relationships, they felt, would also help strengthen their communication and interpersonal skills. Peer support, communication and positive relationships within the school were recognized by the boys as successful methods of engagement. One student, Tev, explained how the program has helped him *"be more open with people"* and has taught him *"how to talk to anyone, no matter who they are"*. In building positive peer relationships, the boys begin to assume a greater level of accountability and ownership over their own futures. Additionally, by learning to communicate more, they learn to integrate themselves into a wider network of perspectives and opportunities.

SAFE AND DEMOCRATIC SPACE

The boys' desire to build positive relationships with their peers is consistent with their desire and recognition that the

school is a safe space. Tev explained this in relation to the school staff and their role in regulating these peer relationships:

> *"When I come down here, they can actually work it out and they make it safe between us. So when I come down here and they talk to us, we don't have to get into a fight again. They make it so that we are friends and nothing else happens, and it is safer to talk to other people".*

Tev's insights underscore the importance of building positive peer relationships as a vehicle to positive decision-making and sustained engagement.

PROGRAM LIMITATIONS

Despite the many successes of the programs, the boys we spoke with communicated a desire to do more activities, as well as a desire to have more opportunities for travelling outside the schooling community. We interpret this as a call for the programs to place more of an emphasis on building *social capital*. Social capital is defined by Bourdieu as:

"The aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition" (Bourdieu 1986, p. 248).

Moreover, drawing on the work of Coleman (1990), van Kemenade explains how *"social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that would be unattainable in its absence"* (van Kemenade, 2002, p.5). Often described as the glue that hold societies together, social capital has been *"vaunted as the next big idea in social policy"* (McKenzie, 2002, p.280). Lochner (1990) suggests that collective efficacy, participation in voluntary organizations, social trust/reciprocity and social integration for mutual benefit are the main theoretical strands within theories of social capital.

IMPLICATIONS

Putting more emphasis on building social capital involves strengthening partnerships with families/caregivers, other schools, community members, organizations & businesses.

STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS WITH FAMILIES/CAREGIVERS

The family, because it provides economic and social welfare for its members, has been identified as "the first building block in the generation of social capital for the larger society" (The World Bank, referenced in van Kemenade, 2002, p.12). Administrators, program facilitators and teachers we spoke with all stressed the need for greater parental involvement – particularly the involvement of male figures. Revising school-community programs in ways that encourage such connections would help the boys build social capital through strengthened relationships — such as those relationships between the boys and their caregivers, as well as the caregivers and the schooling community. Engaging parents in the school community could also bring opportunities for parents to network, providing each other with resources and support. It is important to consider, however, that the caregivers of vulnerable students are often vulnerable themselves, partly due to a lack of cultural capital (Hanafin & Lynch, 2002). Therefore, engaging the caregivers of all students (rather than solely focusing on the families of vulnerable boys) might be a stronger approach. More economically privileged parents and caregivers often possess higher levels of social capital and are therefore in positions where they can help parents of vulnerable boys leverage opportunities to travel outside their current schooling community or learn new skills (which were aspects the boys really valued, but wanted to see more of in the current programs).

STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS WITH OTHER SCHOOLS, ORGANIZATIONS & BUSINESSES

Colletta and Cullen (2000) write about the structural dimensions of social capital (such as the institutions, networks, precedents, behaviours, rules and roles), explaining how these components function to bond individuals in groups to one another as well as integrate groups with different levels of power and influence – a process, they argue, which leads to social inclusion. If school community programs for vulnerable boys were to partner with other high schools, colleges and universities, organizations and businesses students would have more opportunities to establish larger social networks. These kinds of networks can be quite powerful, possibly influencing the boys' future decisions and outcomes in relation to post-secondary education and the labour market. Furthermore, Putnam (1995) argues that "in dense networks of social interaction, incentives for opportunism are reduced. (p.67)". Possessing higher levels of social capital, therefore, might help boys overcome structural barriers they are face.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The majority of school community programs in our study focused on changing the boys' attitudes and behaviours, with an emphasis on character development and social skills. According to Collette and Cullen (2000), cognitive social

capital "describes the values, attitudes and beliefs that produce cooperative behaviour". Critical thinking, reflection, positive-decision making, character development and the creation of democratic space were key components in many of the boys' programs, and found to be quite successful in facilitating school engagement among the boys. However, very few of the existing programs linked these outcomes to *academic engagement* – with the exceptions being the *Boys Reading Club* as well as some of the sports teams, where participation is contingent upon good academic standing. As stated earlier, teacher and school collaboration might be effective approaches to bridging this gap. The programs could improve academic engagement if more teachers participated and shared the responsibilities of the programs. Moreover, if the existing programs were revised to engage and work collaboratively with other schools in the community (particularly secondary schools), a more extensive academic support system could be realized.

NOTE

[1] Originally called the "Boys Education Strategy".

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RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER READING/RESOURCES

Failing Boys! Beyond Crisis, Moral Panic and Limiting Stereotypes:
www.cea-ace.ca/education-canada/article/failing-boys-beyond-crisis-moral-panic-and-limiting-stereotypes

Boosting the Life Chances of Young Men of Color:
www.mdrc.org/publication/boosting-life-chances-young-men-color

Boys to Men Empowerment Program:
www.facebook.com/boystomenempowerment