Mindfulness in Ontario Education: A Positive Movement

Prepared by: Samantha Stiavnicky

Supervised by: Ray Rogers

July 30, 2017

A Major Paper submitted to the Faculty of Environmental Studies in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Master in Environmental Studies
York University, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

ABSTRACT

Children are most influenced by their family, school, and society. Through exploring the various failings within the Ontario school system (i.e., bullying, substance abuse, anxiety, and depression), it becomes apparent that in a climate of austerity schools are often held responsible for the shortcomings of society as they are asked to do more with less. With the introduction of the Common Sense Revolution, children were expected to learn, develop and grow in these increasingly competitive and less-supportive environments. The Common Sense Revolution can be connected to expanding neoliberalism in what can be described as increasing the transfer of wealth and tax dollars from a shrinking public sector to a deregulated private sector. In this paper I analyze the shortcomings of the neoliberal model of education and explore alternative perspectives. As studies have demonstrated, the positive benefits of mindfulness can make a positive contribution to the Ontario school system.

FOREWORD

The goal of this major paper is to examine the relationship between the personal and intellectual development of children, the influence of family, school and society and how the Common Sense Revolution contributed to the interrupting of these vital networks. This paper examines the CSR initiatives that led to internal pressures (such as class size, standardized and results based testing, and shrinking supports for students), and how they interacted with external influences from programmatic cutbacks, the widening gap between public poverty and private wealth, peer orientation, stressed parent-child relationships, and reduced parental presence and influence. Through focusing on three specific issues that were intensified during this era, I examine bullying, substance use/abuse, and mental health and how these stressed environments later led to a movement of groups who recognized the severity of these special issues. In this paper I explore the developing field of mindfulness and suggest its potential if practiced in the Ontario education system. Through exploring the many relationships between these systems I was able to meet and fulfill a number of my learning objectives within my Plan of Study.

While in the MES program, my research enabled me to gain a deeper understanding of how the Common Sense Revolution and neoliberal capitalist objectives influenced education in Ontario (Learning Objective 1.2, 1.5). I was able to explore the connections between these political changes and draw links between the impact this movement had (and continues to have) on education in Ontario, the ways it increases child vulnerability and influenced family networks, school, and society (Learning Objective 1.4, 2.1, 2.4).

The interdisciplinary nature of this program enabled me to further explore my interest in mindfulness and its emerging involvement in the school system, especially after taking Environment Education and Nature and Society at FES. I completed two incredible field placements within the MES program, a farm internship at Cultivating Opportunities and a teaching position at a holistic private school, Roger White Academy (Learning Strategy 1.1, 1.2, 3.1, 3.2). Both of these experiences challenged and allowed me to make personal connections between mindfulness and the process of learning.

Keywords:

Capitalism, Neoliberalism, Austerity, Education, Virtues, Failings, Curriculum, Compassion and Mindfulness

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Chapter 1: Mike Harris and the Neoliberal Capitalist Agenda

Ontario education experienced dramatic and lasting changes between the 1980s and early 2000s (Anderson and Jaafar, 2002). Perhaps the most notable transformations that took place in the education system were shaped during a period of constant change in political ruling parties and with the linear expansion of common goals for the future of education. While many governments worked towards instilling change in their own way, this paper argues that the most dramatic changes occurred between 1995 - 2000 in Ontario when the Mike Harris government was in power. This chapter traces historical events that prompted an economic climate of austerity and neoliberalism, and subsequent education spending cuts under the Harris government. It also analyzes pertinent reports and the structural reorganization that came to characterize this important time period in Ontario education.

In this chapter, I will argue that the *Common Sense Revolution* was an ideological revolution from the above as the Conservative government generated a crisis in education that heavily impacted school resources, services, teachers, parents and students. This paper locates childhood development in these contexts, focusing specifically on neoliberalism as an organizational force in society, and the ways it has generated significant change in the educational system by forcing public services to function in an austere environment. It will examine the relationships between family and schools and the ways they interact with society generally in terms of how they were affected over the last twenty years as a result of the *Common Sense Revolution*. For the purpose of this paper, I will focus on the changes the Harris government made in the Ontario education system and how the *Common Sense Revolution* placed pressure on and influenced family, society, and school. More specifically, this paper outlines

educational changes and how the Harris government created a culture of standardized testing, competition, and performance-based results which not only shaped and changed school boards but internal environments as well, and how this affected the health and learning environments for students as it relates to issues such as bullying, depression and drug use/abuse. This paper will conclude by discussing ways in which mindfulness literature and practices might help in addressing these issues.

The *Common Sense Revolution,* (hereafter referred to as the CSR) took place between June 1995 and spring of 1998, was said to be, "both an election strategy and a statement of neo-conservative political philosophy," originating from a campaign the Harris government produced (Gidney, 1999 p. 234). This campaign was designed to keep voters fixated on rising taxes, government debt, and a call to reduce the active involvement of big government within their daily lives. The CSR focused on economic recovery and the creation of new jobs, while working towards reducing taxes, regulation and undoing previous layers of bureaucracy set in place by the Liberals and New Democrats over the years (Gidney, 1999). This agenda was specifically designed to cut taxes by as much as 30% over the span of three years and balance the deficit which would encourage "consumer spending and investment, and boost international confidence in the Ontario economy" (Gidney, 1999). Harris believed that the tax cuts would strengthen the economy, expand the job market, and respect people's hard earned money (Toronto Star, 1999). The CSR claimed that by cutting funds from areas the Conservatives believed were 'non-priority,' they could do better for less. However, as a result, this later forced government departments and organizations such as school boards to function in a climate of austerity.

Austerity is defined as "a form of voluntary deflation in which the economy adjusts through the reduction of wages, prices, and public spending to restore competitiveness which is (supposedly) best achieved by cutting the state's budget, debts, and deficits" (Blyth, 2013, p. 1). While many voters in the Etobicoke and Scarborough areas were in support of Harris's changes and tax-cutting initiatives, Bob Rae, former Premier, publically expressed concern with regard to Harris's plan after the Conservative's success on June 9th, 1995. Rae stated that the Harris government would have no choice but to "gut health care and other social services, raise property taxes and 'punish the most vulnerable in society' in order to put a few more dollars in the pockets of [the] elite" (Girard, 1995). Directly attacking Harris, Rae said, "My friends, we are facing a battle to protect and save our services" (Girard, 1995). As Harris' made plans to cut 34.5% in provincial taxes, the public grew concerned, questioning what they would have to give up in order for Harris to achieve such goals, and more importantly, if the CSR would protect services as education and health care (Honderich, 1995).

The rise of Mike Harris resulted in dramatic transformation during a time when classical liberalism began to undergo change and neoliberalism was introduced (Kotz, 2002). According to Kotz, neoliberalism consists of, "a largely unregulated capitalist system (a 'free-market economy') not only [one that] embodies the idea of free individual choice but also achieves optimum economic performance with respect to efficiency, economic growth, technical progress, and distributional justice" (p. 64). With the rise of neoliberalism and the influence of the CSR movement, the future was recalibrated to facilitate the strengthening of the economic growth of the market (Giroux, 2009), as one of the central goals of neoliberalism is to place "citizenship on a

crash diet," focusing on developing a lean state (Sears, 2003, p.1). Sears (2003) suggests that a lean state occurs when the government implements only efficient methods of providing services while at the same time placing employed citizens closer to the market (Sears, 2003). Within this neoliberal rationality, individuals work towards discovering their relationship between others and themselves in more aggressive ways, like competition, self-interest, and individual risk (Giroux, 2009). Working within this ideology, Harris conducted the 'Mike Harris Tax Cut Survey' which polled 500 voters asking them if they would spend, save or invest the money they would save from tax cuts upon his election (Wright, 1995). The results recorded that 36% would invest, 25% would spend and 20% would save, which Harris argued would all contribute to the development of the market, expansion of jobs, and increased demand for goods and services (Wright, 1995). The Harris government knew that by implementing tax cuts, this would leave major systems like education and health care overregulated, as this in turn, would end up benefiting the rich citizens and corporations and perpetuate competition. Or as Lyn McLeod, Liberal leader explained, Harris's campaign "prey[ed] on fears and anxieties and tri[ed] to exploit them" (Toughill, 1995).

1.1 Policy Inheritances from Liberal, NDP, and Federal Governments

Although Harris contributed greatly to the Common Sense reform that revolutionized Ontario, one man alone cannot take all the credit for spearheading such a powerful neoliberal movement. Prior to the rise of the Harris Government, contributions from Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan also added to the structure of the revolution (Ball, 1993). Reagan, President of the United States from 1981 – 1989, supported connecting the educational reform to the needs of big business, while

Thatcher, British Prime Minister from 1979-1990, played an important role in shaping

the 'new educational establishment' as she believed heavily in competition (Ball, 1993).

Reagan was most concerned with building America into a competitive platform and felt

that higher educational funding should be significantly reduced (Calbaugh, 2004). This

resulted in overcrowded classrooms, insufficient funds for textbooks, classroom material

and school repairs (Clabaugh, 2004). Thatcher aimed to establish tight control over

education institutions as she contributed to the creation of an education reform that

operates in a highly competitive environment (Wilby, 2013). Both Thatcher and Reagan

practiced neoliberalism under 'the rule of the market' which required public service

expenditure reductions (especially in education), deregulation and privatization (allowing

wealth to redistribute from the public to private), and finally, ensuring that "no single

monopoly provider gains too much power in the market" (Furlong, 2013, p. 31). While

the Common Sense era was impacted by international policies, a collective effort of

previous governments who supported and contributed policies towards the creation of a

lean state, it is important to mention that Harris implemented most educational reforms

in the case of Ontario's school system.

Under the NDP Government of Ontario, in January 1992, there was a major shift in

Ontario Education. The education minister at the time, Tony Silipo, announced that

education was undergoing reorientation to prepare students for "an ever-changing

world" by transforming education from an industrial to a post-industrial model

(O'Sullivan,1999, p. 318). The common curriculum, developed by the Ontario Education

Minister John Snobelen (Gidney, 1999), was, in part, a blueprint for the changes the

Harris government would later implement. Snobelen falsely spearheaded a crisis in

education as he explained that the system was 'broken' and that it should be rebuilt "with teachers as service providers, students as clients, and parents as consumers" (Brennan, 1995). Snobelen intentionally spoke about the education system in more negative terms to help spearhead a crisis in schools in Ontario (Brennan, 1995). MPP Wildman, New Democrat said that Snobelen's language towards Education was filled with business jargon and is more reflective of his own corporate agenda, than one for the well-being of children and teachers (Brennan, 1995). This curriculum was suggested to strengthen outcome-based learning and specific learning results (Anderson & Jaafar, 2002). Following this announcement, the government later declared that grade 9 would be restructured into studies focusing on "language; the arts; self and society, and mathematics, sciences, and technology" (O'Sullivan, 1999, p. 318). This reform was named the three D's as it 'de-streamed, de-coursed and de-labeled' (Shore, 2008). In order to execute Snobelen's goals, education had to acclimatize to a new culture of competition. This was done through the creation of an audit culture which controlled educational outcomes and maintained high levels of excellence.

1.2 The Rise of Mike Harris

Mike Harris began his campaign a year before he won the election in 1995. With the release of his Blueprint document, he outlined the economic restructuring that Ontario would undergo if he was elected. With this, Harris also created a 1-800 number designed for voters who had questions or concerns regarding his future plans to strengthen and build an appealing platform (Wright, 1995). In his victory speech, Mike Harris told reporters that he is just an 'ordinary guy' and was 'the guy next door' (Wright,1995). Most of all, Harris had a plan during a time when the Rae government

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struggled with the after-effects of a recession that left people unemployed and in debt (Walkom, 1995). At the time, supporters of Harris viewed him as a leader who had strong core beliefs, could successfully implement the CSR, and be different from other politicians, which was exactly what the people wanted (Walkom, 1995).

While the goals and positive attributes of the CSR were outlined clearly, the adversities were not. In his business-like approach to governing, Harris's elimination of the provincial deficit came at a cost that placed a significant amount of pressure on families and society. Upon his election, the CSR blueprint was quickly put into action as the Harris government reduced social services, refocused the welfare system, cut government spending, slashed barriers that impeded job creation, investment and economic prosperity, reduced number of politicians, restructured bureaucracy, reformed Ontario Hydro, weakened labor laws, reduced funding for education and cut Workers' Compensation Board premiums (Toronto Star, 1995). As government spending was reduced, so were many of the services that were offered to help people with child care and welfare. These groups faced less funding and were impacted more severely. Therefore, short-term economic trends, such as the CSR, contributed to the weakening of the family supports in general. Even spending cuts beyond education impacted Ontarian children's experiences in the classroom.

Changes in welfare were especially concerning as many mothers were without childcare options and were forced back into the workforce (Deverell, 1999). According to research conducted by *Browne's Unit for Research on Health and Social Service Utilization*, welfare mothers who were provided with assisted child care had higher positive testing results than those who had no additional help (Deverell, 1999).

Contrastingly, research suggests that "[kids whose families were on] welfare in organized child care or organized recreation showed much less disturbed behavior and more general competence" (Deverell, 1999). Mothers who are under the poverty line, Browne said, are also more likely to display signs of depression and other psychiatric disorders (Deverell, 1999). Through facilitating the decline of union-protected jobs and the increase of low-wage service positions, people were forced to work additional hours to make up for lost pay (Hochschild, 2003). This contributed to individualized pressures as well as those in the family. In addition, David Popenoe concludes that in modern societies today, families are weakening at the foundational level. He further explains that there is a decline in collectivized goals, fewer traditions are kept and respected, a rise in institutional power over families, shrinking in family size and weaknesses in family bonds (As written in Hochschild, 2003). This weakened state of the family creates room for "new, looser norms [to] emerge that weaken it even further" (Hochschild, 2003, p. 164). As a result, this relationship has created an environment where corporate power is paired with and a supporter of capitalism in such a way that the big players in the economy benefit (Kotz, 2002) whereas the commitment to children and their well-being has been weakened.

1.3 The Common Sense Revolution 1995-2000

In 1995, a dramatic restructuring of the Ontario education system was expected to 'revolutionize' the very structure of education itself. The Progressive Conservative (PC) government, led by Harris, implemented *the Common Sense Revolution* in Ontario between the years 1995 and 2000. The CSR was positioned to efficiently address cost saving initiatives in hospitals, communities, and school environments (Basu, 2004). It

focused on communicating the PC action plan to cut taxes, improve health care, balance the budget, create new jobs, propose new funding and improve the quality of education (PC Government of Ontario, 1999). The Harris government soon became a symbol of 'neoliberal societal restructuring' (Keil, 2002). While Harris made plans to attend to issues the recession had produced, Anderson and Jaafar (2002) argue that the CSR made little mention of education, as its focus was to "reduce government bureaucracy and spending, cut taxes, eliminate deficit, and rationalize government services" (p. 14). The overall objective of the CSR was to reduce educational expenditure by as much as $400 million annually while protecting classroom funding. This proposed revolution planned the implementation of standards-based curriculum guidelines, while enforcing standardized testing models as well as eliminating grade 13 (Anderson and Jaafar, 2002). At this time, the Harris government was guided by neoliberal capitalist objectives, which suggested that the importance of profit, especially as the central focus in politics, social progress, and the economy, would create demand for and begin to shape a culture of hierarchy, exclusivity and competition (Feuerverger, 2007). Neoliberalism, often politically directed, is a process of restructuring values to align with economic growth while supporting capitalist production (Keil, 2002). With the economic influence on education, schools were now forced to work with limited resources. As a result, a more aggressive school culture based on austerity was born.

Financial and programmatic cutbacks soon made their way into the many facets of education as the Harris government displayed their loyalty to neoliberal capitalism by aligning their goals with those of economic prosperity. "Provincial Tories pledged to work with the business community and corporate capital interests to restructure and

downsize the education system to ensure school improvement" (Dei and Karumanchery, 1999, p.115). By the late 1990s, Bill 104 was introduced and the many school boards and cities that once made up the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto were amalgamated into what is known today as the Toronto District School Board (Levin, 2010). Later, principals and vice principals were excluded from teachers unions as a result of supporting teachers during the Provincial Teachers Walk-Out (Levin, 2010). If schools did not have a designated number of students, some schools would share the same principal (Basu, 2004). These changes resulted in an uproar. Despite promises to provide every Ontario student with a publicly funded, safe learning environment and high-quality education (PC Government of Ontario, 1999), these changes put a constraint on achieving such goals.

Austerity acts as a disciplinary measure as it reduces the resources of the school environment, places limitations on the community and adds power in the hands of elite. Its key purpose is to divide superiors and inferiors and rework the system in the favor of elite by reorganizing the system to select those who will be most effective in adhering to neoliberal objectives. Neoliberalism, similar to austerity, works towards narrowing the limits of citizenship through minimizing alternatives to meeting individual needs, and forces individuals to respond only to those with higher power (Sears, 2003). In order to effectively do so, neoliberalism created the illusion of collectivizing students, by preparing children for an individualized system (Sears, 2003). Austerity works in a similar way, as it reduces outside supports and contributes to individualizing schools while placing limitations on community within the school system. Austerity not only changes the basic structural workings of the academic system but appears to be a key

player in contributing to placing restrictions on schools and students. Furthermore, these changes created highly disciplined environments as targeted funding was identified through the eyes of the government, typically favoring technology over alternative approaches in education. This disciplinary culture is made evident in the creation of Bill 160.

Bill 160: The Education Quality Improvement Act

The creation of Bill 160 was first introduced by John Snobelen on the 22nd of September, later approved in December 1st of 1997 (Gidney, 1999). Bill 160 was set in place as a measure of governmental control and as a means of pushing Ontario education into the global marketplace. "Bill 160 is an example of the massive grasp for centralized power by the state as it concentrates its authority over public education in the hands of a few cabinet ministers and government advisors" (Dei & Karumanchery,1999, p. 116). Bill 160 gave the government complete control over the funding of education, while also placing strict parameters around classroom and non-classroom funding (Anderson and Jaafar, 2003). Despite promises to protect Ontario classrooms, budget cuts, teachers, substitutes, assistants, classroom supplies and materials, library use, and guidance councilors were all affected (Anderson and Jaafar, 2003). This bill directly impacted school funding, classroom expenditure, and teacher working conditions, (Anderson and Jaafar, 2003) while enforcing strict rules for teachers, students, and school faculty to abide by. The Conservative government felt that with these changes, teachers would spend more quality time with students, working towards achieving neoliberal capitalist objectives. Many high school teachers felt that added workloads would not only lessen preparation time and increase teaching

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demands but would impact the amount of quality time students spend with teachers or in groups (Anderson and Jaafar, 2003). During this time, the system already underwent dramatic changes as Bill 104 (introduced prior to Bill 160) reduced local districts from 140 to 70, and placed taxation powers for secondary schooling now 100% in the hands of the provincial government (Levin, 2010). With stricter parameters on what schools could and could not do, and the marketization of education, the education system was forced to adhere to a more competitive and aggressive approach.

1.4 Neoliberal Restructuring

"The popular refrain of the Conservative government's 'common sense revolution' is that ' the system does not work, it needs fixing,' or 'the government is broke, and it alone cannot do everything" (Dei and Karumanchery, 1999, p. 118). This belief does not support examining the full problem with education or greater society and further suggests this responsibility can be placed upon others. "Restructuring was driven by a perceived need to improve the efficiency of the public sector while cutting costs and the need to increase educational standards, improve outcomes, and ensure accountability" (Taylor, 2001, p. 4). These were the goals of the CSR in order to remain globally competitive in a society that views knowledge as a commodity. Through the CSR restructuring the community gained responsibilities that the government no longer wanted, shifting any liability from the government and placing it onto the community, parents, and schools (Dei and Karumanchery, 1999). At this time, educational outcomes were heavily focused on learning as a personal development process, as the CSR was focused on building workers for a certain type of future.

The direction education took at this time was rather more complex than

acquiring knowledge, as focus and efforts were spent on prioritizing knowledge in ways that properly accounted for future economic, technological and social changes (Gidney, 1999). This is evident in the policy document, *Blueprint: Mike Harris' Plan to Keep Ontario on the Right Track*, when it states "...We have to make sure that our education system gives students the skills and knowledge they will need to lead fulfilling lives and to compete and win in a global economy" (PC Government of Ontario, 1999, p. 38). While education should be a consideration for the future, this curriculum was heavily based on preparing students for the industrialized workplace. Perhaps one of the largest issues at this time was how the Harris government's objectives were based on preparation for the future, when in actuality they were preparing children for the past.

Despite the various promises of the CSR (i.e., job creation, tax reduction, economic recovery), its main objective was to deliver a plan of action to the people, especially one that kept the Harris government in a constant place of dominance (Gidney, 1999). The Harris government made promises to "do better for less" by decreasing the size of the government and increasing the power of the CSR movement. Harris's projections suggested that cost saving initiatives would save Ontario taxpayers nearly $400 million dollars (Gidney, 1999). As a result, a new curriculum model introduced by Harris was suggested to keep Ontario competitive in a knowledge-based economy while also remaining economically responsible within the parameters of austerity (Basu, 2004).

The government also dismantled many years of hard work done by those involved in the various equity initiatives. Prior to the Conservative's plans to rearranging curriculum guidelines and values, multiculturalism was a part of the curriculum. At the

time, there was a heavy focus on developmental strategies to implement antiracism, ethno-cultural and gender equity policy into the Ontario curriculum (Anderson and Jaafar, 2002). As different political parties did not disturb the general trends of neoliberalism, the Harris government dismantled progressive curriculum in the area of equity. While the efforts of the Conservative government are well known, these changes were fueled by previous and other levels of government, not the Harris government alone. Through striving to make improvements, their changes included balancing the fiscal budget, as well as refocusing classroom resources and goals of student achievement (Gidney, 1999). The Common Curriculum in its final version in 1995 under the Harris government, took into consideration the importance of global competition as learning objectives for grade 3, 6, 9 and 10 took global influences into account (O'Sullivan, 1999, p). In the final revisions, all reference to implementing social justice, peace and environmental studies were removed (O' Sullivan, 1999).

The *Charter of Education Rights and Responsibilities* that Harris outlines in his Blueprint, suggests that "We must respect the rights of everyone involved in the education system – students, teachers and parents – and help those involved in classroom learning work together for the highest quality education possible" (PC Government of Ontario, 1999, p. 38). Clearly, this quote is contradictory to what Harris's actions actually reflect as the PC government further explains (on the same page), that "we have to make sure that our education system gives students the skills and knowledge they will need to lead fulfilling lives and to compete and win in a competitive global economy" (PC Government of Ontario, 1999, p. 38). Despite these long-term goals, the CSR implemented changes that created challenges for teachers, students,

and parents as it implemented less preparation time for teachers (despite pressures to work with children), reduced parent-community involvement and added to student stress. These are only some of the changes driven by result-producing outcomes (specifically those that generate grades and numbers). In a results-based education system, this places stress upon the end result, rather than focusing on the process.

For the Love of Learning – Report of the Royal Commission on Learning

Most of the changes that took place in 1995-2000 were based on a report, *For the Love of Learning*, (RCL) which was articulated as a political strategy to engage the public in creating the future of Ontario Education. This report, prepared by the Royal Commission of Learning in 1993, envisioned four things "new school and community alliances for the education and development of children and youth; early childhood education; the professionalization and continuing development of teachers; and the use of new information technologies in education" (Anderson and Jaafar, 2002, p. 11). This included specific learning based outcomes for grades and the removal of grade 13. High school grading streams were reconstructed into two areas, applied and academic; and community service requirements were to become mandatory (Anderson and Jaafar, 2002). With these changes, public supports were removed and fewer people had control. However, perhaps one of the most significant changes within the curriculum was the introduction of provincial standardized testing.

Standardized Testing

Although education is a provincial matter in Canada, the Council of Ministers of Education is a powerful influence on education across the country. In the early 1990s the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (hereafter referred to as CMEC)

introduced standardized testing to Canada. In order to successfully implement such measures, the federal government needed full control, leaving school board districts with little power. The first standards-based initiative created by CMEC was called the Student Achievement Indicators Program (SAIP) (Sherman, 2012). Barlow and Robertson (1994) explain that the desire for standards-based testing is driven by powers that are much greater than governments themselves. Organizations like "the Business Council on National Issues (BCNI), the Conference Board of Canada, the Canadian Manufacturers' Association and the Canadian Chamber of Commerce" (Barlow & Robertson, 1994, p. 117) were said to lobby the Federal government into increasing funding for the CMEC. Sherman (2012), Barlow and Robertson (2012) suggest that these standards are designed by those who can benefit from and want something from the students who write them. Ultimately, the creation of standardized testing was used to profit from children's futures, benefitting corporate Canada as it helps locate resources with the greatest efficiency (Sherman, 2012).

The goal of standardization, specific to testing, is to rank learners. The belief of the standardized testing based reform movement was that through enforcing a one-size-fits-all model of testing, students would be categorized based on where they fit best according to the job market needs (Sherman, 2012). The focus was not on the interests of education, but those of the economic and capitalist objectives (Sherman, 2012). According to the Harris Government, standardized testing allowed for parents to gain a better picture of their child's progress while at the same time other schools were able to view results and compare one school to the next (PC Government of Ontario, 1999). This may have suggested that with a heavy focus on competition (locally and globally)

rather than on quality education, children will succeed. With the restructuring, the CSR placed efforts on identifying which students have or have not learnt skills, instead of ensuring that all students were equally prepared (Sears, 2003). This focus was built on the idea that higher and more complicated methods of individual measurement, as well as regular competition, would result in students working harder and achieving higher grades (Sears, 2003). This corporate model built on the foundation of winners and losers has since infiltrated educational institutions, leaving Canada adapting to individualism and a culture of competition (Barlow and Robertson, 1994). This means that skills like critical thinking, natural curiosity, and independent learning were no longer as important, enabling 'progress' to become a very narrow reading of a child's true capabilities.

In Chapter one I have argued that changes made in the Ontario education system have been collective efforts towards creating a neoliberal capitalist model directly benefitting economic development and the corporate agenda. As goals towards global competition and global interdependence guide efforts towards competition, standardization and performance-based results, other important skills like independent-learning and critical thought are often forgotten. Furthermore, as the education system undergoes budget cuts and various structural changes, Ontario schools are stuck in a neoliberal model ruled by those investing in the future of the economy rather than the the true education of children.

Chapter 2: Internal and External Impacts of the CSR

Chapter one outlined how the *Common Sense Revolution* was an ideological revolution from the above as it cut taxes and balanced the provincial budget by using neoliberalism as an organizational force. This, in turn, gave rise to a crisis in education, heavily impacting the availability of school resources, educational services, after-school programs, and the creation of new models like standardization and performance-based testing. Within this new ideological framework, the CSR dismantled existing policies designed to promote equity (Pinto, 2013) and gave rise to competitive platforms as a response to diminishing resources that subsequently impaired family relationships, weakened school learning environments, and introduced external pressures. As a result of this political reform, the school system saw increased cases of bullying, substance use/abuse, depression, and anxiety in children. These failings are not new or unique to the Ontario school system. However, influence from media and technologies have developed new platforms in which these problems are manifested. In this chapter, I argue that there is a correlation between internal pressures (such as class size, competition, standardization) that resulted from the education reform and the exacerbation of external issues (such as stress, bullying, alcohol use, and mental health). These relationships appear to be rooted in the PC government's actions to recalibrate Ontario's Education system and invest in a competitive global economy (PC Government of Ontario, 1999).

Specifically, this chapter aims to illustrate linkages between the Harris government's CSR and failings of the school system, as well as negative external societal pressures that impact students and families in Ontario. It is argued that these aforementioned forces negatively affected children in the Ontario school system and

remnants of this political era linger and infringe upon optimal school environments and outcomes in Ontario. Through changes in school environments, class size, competitiveness, and standardized curriculum and testing models, Ontario experienced significant social reform. Problems such as bullying, substance use/abuse, and mental health arose simultaneously with budget cuts linked to austerity, further rendering the school system increasingly vulnerable and unable to respond to these problems. While the CSR platform was built on promises to solve Ontario's economic struggles, through reducing taxes, government size and encouraging job development (Pinto, 2013), efforts from the Minister of Education played a very important role in simultaneous changes in education that negatively affected student performance (Clemens, Palacios, Loyer, & Fathers, 2014).

On September 12, 1995, John Snobelen, the Minister of Education and Training, revealed in a closed meeting that the education system was failing and for change to occur, a crisis had to be invented (MacLellan, 2007). His exaggerated and misled claims indicated that the province was bankrupt and lacking proper support for recovery (Kastrur, 1996). This strategy to create a crisis played an important role in scaring citizens into accepting extreme government actions that would otherwise be considered unacceptable (Walkom, 1995), and later, enabled Harris's policy changes in the areas of environment, health care, social welfare, public sector, and the education system to take place.

Inventing a 'crisis in education' was an important decision on behalf of Snobelen and Harris to properly execute their plans to prepare citizens for previously unthinkable government actions (Walkom, 1995). Despite the PC's educational objectives of

"building a strong, fully funded public education system that helps our children succeed in the real world" and one where each student deserves the right to a publicly funded school system, a safe learning environment, and high-quality education (PC Government of Ontario, 1999, p. 39), this newly developed curriculum policy was intertwined with neoliberal goals of power, race and knowledge (Pinto, 2013) as its creation may have been developed based on benefiting specific groups of learners. The introduction of a demanding curriculum, with provincial standardized testing (in math, science and literature for grade 3,6 and 9), report cards, increased teaching time, the supposed limiting of class size and significant contributions made to funding education (for schools, text books, equipment) was quickly implemented by the government (PC Government of Ontario, 1999). Pinto (2013) argues that despite what the government said it was doing, it actually "maintained dominant structures, inequities, and power arrangements perpetuating the oppression of marginalized groups" (p. 2). These changes focused on developing a market, privatizing public services and goods, establishing competitive platforms and, redirecting the role of citizens to that of consumers (Pinto, 2013). This political reform favoring the market over the needs of the citizens spearheaded a revolution that would soon sweep Ontario for years to come.

2.1 School Environments

When assessing the space, resources and proper funding children need to learn, develop and grow, school environments play an important role in encouraging personal well-being, health, and achievement outcomes (NAHT, 2014). The relationship between education and health suggest that students with better health are more likely to succeed academically (NAHT, 2014). Positive social and emotional

supports, enrollment in active programs, and a well established positive environment and culture in school contributes to child well-being and readiness to learn (NAHT, 2014). This balance between educational environments and student well-being is an important consideration when examining the education system under the PC government.

In the1990s, Canadian polls revealed that 40% of parents were displeased with Ontario education and given the chance, one-third of parents would transfer their children to a private school board if they could (National Children's Alliance, 2006). Private school enrollment increased to 15%, compared to the 1% increase in the public system between the years 1995 and 2000 (Hanvey, 2006). During this time school resources shrank, leaving children and educators relying on funding for basic needs like text books, computers, and programs (ESL) and services (special education or library) that was previously provided (National Children's Alliance, 2006). People for Education reported schools independently raising $41.5 million dollars in 2004/2005 to fund classroom supplies (Carpenter, Weber and Schugurensky, 2012). Decreases in health, culture, arts and sex education as well as extra-curricular activities like physical education also left proper educational requirements unmet (National Children's Alliance, 2006). These changes suggest that the neoliberal influences on the education system not only increased child vulnerability but contributed to youth stress levels as well. As time and resources are valuable assets in a learning environment, they can become scarce when the process of learning is maximized at the least possible cost (Ehrenberg, Brewer, Gamoran and Willms, 2001). Despite the various reforms that have been tried in education, such as student testing, assessment models, changes in school financing

and curricular models persist as threats to 'the nation's economic dominance and prosperity' (Ehrenberg, Brewer, Gamoran, & Willms, 2001, p. 2). Therefore, it becomes increasingly important to recognize political impacts on individuals living in communities where they are enforced (Carpenter, Weber and Schugurensky, 2012).

Class Size

Targeted funding and changes in government policy contributed greatly to classroom sizes in Ontario schools. As the PC government failed to limit average class size at 25 students in primary and 22 in secondary schools (PC Government of Ontario, 1999) teaching jobs became increasingly more unstable as many layoffs contributed to creating larger classrooms (Carpenter, Weber and Schugurensky, 2012). Some classes had as many as 35 to 44 students along with a vast scope of learning capabilities and behavioral challenges (Carpenter, Weber and Schugurensky, 2012). The figure below titled, '*Kindergarten to Grade 8 Classes With 26 Students or More'* displays the changes in Ontario class size from 1997 to 2007 as reported by People for Education.
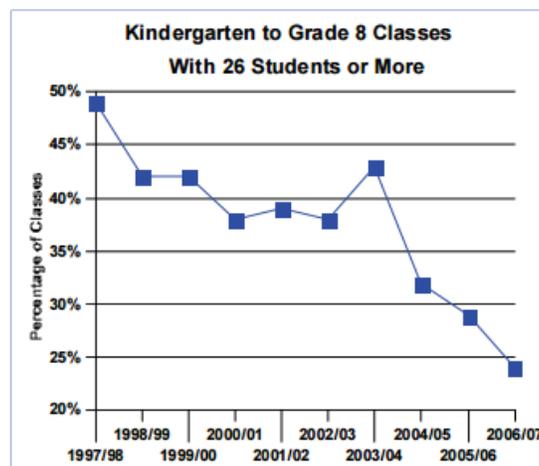
Despite the promises of Bill 160 to protect classroom funding, even years after the CSR schools continue to struggle to limit class size. In 2006 Ontario introduced targeted funding to reduce class size as displayed by the data declining from 43% to 32% in

1999 to 2001(People for Education, 2007). As late as 2006 additional policy changes urged schools to meet new criteria requirements limiting 20 students or less for 90% of classrooms in the school (People for Education, 2007). As a result of capping class size and working under budget limitations, split grades increased especially in areas like Toronto, Peel, Halton and York Region where populations continued to rise (People for Education, 2007). This is relevant because with the rise of split grades, comes added requirements to meet the demands for children (People for Education, 2007). In a time when basic needs aren't being met, the resources needed for split grades increase the vulnerability of children and the school.

Failure to keep classes small only contributed to increased teaching stress, young teachers being laid off, and difficulty producing and teaching new and unique classes (Carpenter, Weber and Schugurensky, 2012). Some scholars, such as Ehrenberg, Brewer, Gamoran and Willms (2001), recognize the importance of this and assert that classroom size has the potential to affect peer-to-peer interactions, noise and disruptive behavior, social engagement levels, individualized teacher-student time, and lesson plan effectiveness. Some believe that small classes create space for stronger teacher-student relationships, parent-teacher communication and higher achievement levels (Ehrenberg, Brewer, Gamoran and Willms, 2001). The CSR's failure to recognize factors (like class size) that contribute to healthy learning environments is displayed in other pressures and stresses that weakened classroom environments.

Standardized testing in Schools

The year 1997 marked an important time for educators as schools saw a new Ontario Curriculum that mandated a standardized model of testing. This standardized

environment required students to participate in a new learning climate where "each school and student could be measured by globally recognized standards" (Carpenter, Weber and Schugurensky, 2012). Standardization was known to increase the gap between educational quality of underprivileged and privileged children as it created inequalities between different groups of learners (McNeil, 2000). Teachers who were instructed to 'work to the test', in turn, were excluded from practicing alternative methods of learning and were forced to spend more time on meeting certain expectations as the strained relationship between principals and teachers was dependent on meeting those outcomes (Carpenter, Weber and Schugurensky, 2012).

Education Quality and Accountability Office, (furthermore refered to as EQAO), established in 1996, introduced a standardized testing model, a version of which, is still conducted in Ontario Education today. This EQAO (2004) testing model stipulates this program will benefit students and place the, "values the well-being of learners above all interests" (As written in Kearns, 2011, p 113). With educational trends moving towards a sophisticated curriculum model, unfortunately, very few resources were there to support the outcomes of this new reform (National Children's Alliance, 2006). This is outlined in a study that focused on the impact of standardized testing on students and failure of the literacy test.

A study, "*High-Stakes Standardizes Testing and Marginalized Youth: An Examination of the Impact on Those Who Fail*" (2011) examined the impact of these testing models as students were interviewed and provided a series of questions about the literacy test, their school, community and personal interests (Kearns, 2011). Interviewees stated that EQAO has, "attested to degradation, shame, humiliation, self-

doubt, and issues of self-esteem as a result of test failure" (Kearns, 2011, p. 123). Te Riele (2006) declares that students, many of whom are considered at risk (i.e., race, gender, ethnicity, or language), sometimes feel they aren't good enough or don't belong in certain schools (As written in Kearns, 2011). Young people who feel overcome with pressure can attack their sense of security and self-esteem, leading to a series of emotional problems including confidence issues, anxiety, depression and social dysfunction (Giroux, 2010).

"Views from the blackboard: neoliberal education reforms and the practice of teaching in Ontario, Canada" (2009) discusses case studies where teachers were asked how they felt about classroom policy changes over the last 20 years. Interviews reveal that educators believe that standardization limits learner possibilities, reduces value in lesson delivery, contributes to the erosion of educator sense of self, dismantles opportunities and creative lessen delivery. Most of all, "educators no longer have the power to work with learners [as] they see fit, to control their own classrooms and programmes or to teach as they want" (Carpenter, Weber and Schugurensky, 2012). Efforts to promote academic excellence between schools in surrounding areas has also given rise to peer competition where students are less engaged, contributing to early leavers over time (Chan, 2003). As teachers invest time preparing students for standardized tests like EQAO, there is growing debate around how well these models accurately capture a child's learning abilities (Ferguson, 2015). There is speculation that this neoliberal frame was designed for the privileged from the start (Pinto, 2013). In order to address these issues, family and peer conflicts must be taken into considerations when designing future education policy.

Family Relationships in the Age of Austerity

Parent-child relationships do not exist in a vacuum, as they respond and are shaped by the socio-political and economic structure of society. Childhood has rearranged itself from a traditional context as children are increasingly drawn to and fulfilled by peer orientated relationships, rather than those with their parents (Mate, 2013). Prior to the nuclear family model, multi-generational family members remained positive influences for the well-being and development of children (Bengtson, 2001). The relationships between grandparents, aunts, and uncles have also displayed supportive roles to children as they grow and transition into adulthood (Bengtson, 2001). Yet, as the nuclear family, also a creation of capitalism, suffers the loss of multi-generational families, it was now being hollowed out by the CSR.

Despite studies suggesting that children are most influenced by their families during the earlier years of their lives, peer orientation has increasingly impacted children's decisions (Kowalski, Limber, & Agaston, 2012). As the gap between adults and youth continues to grow, parents are feeling less empowered to guide children towards reaching achievements and fulfilling their potential (Mate, 2013). As parents are no longer receiving the same level of support from culture or society to properly establish healthy relationships with their children, children might be more prone to mimicking and practicing negative behaviors that are taught as acceptable through the eyes of political society. Mate (2013) suggests that, without significant parental guidance, and the dominant guidance from other peers, children have become less inclined to adapt, mature, and learn from personal experiences than they once did (Mate, 2013). As a result, as children deviate from family value systems, they become

increasingly at risk of feeling alienated or developing negative habits such as alcohol and drug use, and violent behaviors (Mate, 2013).

CSR and Economic Interruptions to the Family System

Shifting economic and employment trends have also contributed to additional pressures on the family (Dishion & McMahon, 1998). Cost saving initiatives during the CSR required adults to work longer hours, fill temporary positions (contract and seasonal), or fill additional positions to make up for potential lost pay (Hanvey, 2006). Efforts to push the working lower class into a more demanding work schedule contributed to the added stresses of the entire family structure. Children felt the impacts of this austere climate directly as services like daycare, after-school and extra-curricular programs declined. The PC action plan cut significant services while disregarding research that demonstrated positive results for those consistently involved in after-school and extra-curricular programs. These programs can increase and strengthen the emotional and physical health of children later in life and encourage the practice of values that maintain healthy relationships, independence, and self-sufficiency (After School: The time of a child's life, 2011). Without these positive school environments and programs in place, children might be at risk for increased cases of mental health problems. Since school connectedness is important for youth to establish a sense of belonging and involvement (Hanvey, 2006), efforts to remove these positive supports have contributed to the reduction of positive social environments for children to interact with their peers and adults.

Parental Absence

Cuts to government funding that once provided public services greatly impacted

families that depended on their availability. By reforming welfare and childcare programs, the government collected significantly less from the wealthy and had less money to spend on those who relied on these services most, widening the gap between private wealth and public poverty. Instead of distributing wealth and caring for the well-being and needs of all children, parents, and teachers, the CSR facilitated the growth that meets the specific demands of capitalism.

Just as the increase of mothers in the workforce created significant change over the last 30 years (Hanvey, 2006), the rise of dual-earners also contributed to parental absence, and in less supervision for children and youth. With parents at work longer periods of time, a decrease in supervision after school hours has giving rise to the latch-key child phenomenon (After School: The time of a child's life, 2011). A latch-key child is a child who "spends some amount of time, before or after school, without supervision or an adult or an older adolescent" (Holaday, Turner-Henson & Swan, 1994).

Latch-key children are believed to experience feelings of loneliness, worry and fear while unsupervised at home (After School: The time of a child's life, 2011). This phenomenon has taken off as a result of increasing problems around single parent work requirements, divorce, and economic changes as these children are often without supervision between the extended hours after a school day (Venter & Rambau, 2011). Latch-key children are susceptible and may face concerns including "injury, victimization, poor nutrition and a lack of physical exercise and social engagement associated with excessive television viewing and unmonitored internet use" (After School: The time of a child's life, 2011, p. 2). These children are at increased risk, as unsupervised environments can become areas where children engage in dangerous or

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risky behaviors (Casper & Smith, 2004; Venter & Rambau, 2011). Furthermore, Mertens et al. (2003) asserts that children without supervision in after-school hours are "more likely to abuse alcohol, tobacco, marijuana or other drugs" (As written in Venter & Rambau, 2011, p. 348). Young children raised in disadvantaged or poverty-rich neighborhoods may lead to increasingly problematic cases (Venter & Rambau, 2011) as they are impressionable if exposed to crime, violence, or substance use and drugs. Students in wealthy areas are also at risk of drug and alcohol experimentation as the absence of parents in any environment can pose risk (Nierenberg, 2017). Adolescents who attend well-respected schools in wealthy areas may, in fact, be more vulnerable to substance use than those in poverty-rich areas (Nierenberg, 2017).

These problems of decreased parental supervision, parental stress, weakened parent-child relationships, hollowing out of the family, peer orientation and the latch-key child phenomenon are all important when considering the ramifications of the CSR. According to Mate's (2010) work on peer culture, the latch-key trend may be an important contributor to peers gaining higher dependability on one another. In this space, peer pressure, older siblings, and media are all influential factors that may contribute to young people participating in high risk behavior such as sexual or substance experimentation (Venter & Rambau, 2011).

Peer Pressure & Peer Orientation

Peer pressure and peer orientation, themes evident throughout this chapter, are also associated with bullying, mental health, and alcohol and drug use. As strains on parent-child relationships become evident, peer group interactions and value systems become powerful factors when influencing habits and increasing child vulnerability. This

is evident as students in elementary and high-school are looking up to peers for guidance, role modeling and instruction instead of the adult figures in their lives (Mate, 2010). This peer culture has reduced effective parenting, dissolved natural authority structures, and restructured societal expectations (Mate, 2010). Instead of parents guiding the development of children, media and society have influenced young children and their value systems. Mate (2010) explains that when adults become unavailable to children, young people may become oriented with their peers, as children cannot both be oriented to parents and children at the same time. Orientation, the need to become familiar with one's surroundings and acquire some form of attachment has provided space for children to become the dominant influences on peer growth and development (Mate, 2010). The danger of 'peer orientation', a term used by Mate (2010), is demonstrated in how youth subcultures have the potential to not only validate norms within that subculture and the larger societal attitudes towards alcohol (Leary, 2012), but also disrupt the order of childhood development (Mate, 2010).

In order to understand how peer culture is established, it is crucial to first examine the culture within which children communicate. In a bullying environment, deviation from the norm is often punished as the victim faces rejection, exclusion or disapproval (Hamarus & Kaikkonen, 2008). Defining what it means to deviate from the norm plays an important role in shaping the community as individuals are separated into 'us' and 'them' depending on their ability to follow or disregard expectations (Hamarus & Kaikkonen, 2008). This environment establishes a peer culture of young people who are loyal and require the need for power or status, imbue fear, and create a submissive environment where supporters follow accepted values in hopes of avoiding being

targeted (Hamarus & Kaikkonen, 2008). Peer orientation plays an important role when contributing to certain behaviors youth adhere to (Sullivan, 2006). Troubled youth may also contribute to the moods and anxieties of their peers especially when children are focused on impressing and being a part of a certain peer culture as bonding with deviant peers can be a predictor for early substance and drug use (Sullivan, 2006).

The relationship between alcohol consumption and having a good time is acknowledged in society through the eyes of children (Mosher, 1985). Peer pressure is one of the leading influences in underage drinking today (Gallup, 2004). Drinking and smoking may appear desirable and might be misunderstood as symbolic practices of adults or those entering adulthood (North & Orange, 1980). As the frontal lobe of the brain (involved in attention, concentration and impulsiveness) continues to mature, changes during puberty can negatively effect the development of the brain (Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, 2014). As young people develop, they naturally seek out independence, new challenges and even risky behavior (NIH, 2017). Changes during puberty cause chemical and hormonal changes in the brain that increase the desire to partake in risky behavior (Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, 2014). While peer orientation can provide young individuals with positive opportunities to learn, they can also interrupt natural learning cycles by reinforcing and imitating negative behavior (Statistics Canada, 2004). This same opportunity can present itself in family environments that use drugs or alcohol without hesitation (Statistics Canada, 2004). In an environment where social drinking is normalized, heavy drinking might be understood as an acceptable social norm (The Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care). In the context of peer acceptance, these norms play a very important role

in shaping the youth culture and gender roles. In addition to peer relationships and pressure, the adolescent is also exploring gender relationships and roles.

Youth Gender Roles

Adolescence is a time of self discovery as young people migrate to new groups that challenge their personal value systems. This process influences individual opinions, values, and interests (Sadler, 2011) not only from other peers but those reflected within society. Many young people become overwhelmed with the responsibilities and expectations of adolescents, and some may turn to different coping mechanisms including alcohol as a means of anti-anxiety medication (Forrest, 1997). "Gender intensification" is a term used to describe the increased pressures youth face to adhere to gender roles, and has given rise to stress, anxiety, and depression (Priess, Lindberg, & Shibley Hyde, 2009). These same pressures are placed on LGBTQ communities. In cases where youth are feeling these pressures, alcohol is often used with the expectation that it will provide connectivity to others and may contribute to locating a sense of self and belonging (Forrest, 1997). Gender differences place expectations on how females and males are expected to act and attain group acceptance (Forrest, 1997). As youth participate in underage drinking, they might strive to fit into specific categories and enhance personal sexual identity.

While there are pressures on young adults to act masculine or feminine and to conform to societal expectations and norms, capitalist society is a major influence when providing messages to youth and displaying certain gender roles, stereotypes and personality types. Drinking is one way that young people might adhere to the idea that masculine qualities are enhanced within males and feminine attributes are heightened

in females (Forrest, 1997). As stipulations set in place for gender stereotypes, specifically around female or male gender roles can become very narrow, children may turn to alcohol to cope with these stresses because content that can influence children to act in unfamiliar situations for example, in romantic situations, is especially impactful (Strasburger, Jordan & Donnerstein, 2009). Children are highly impressionable and prone to imitation, so gender roles are influenced not only by family and peers. Images and advertisements also influence how adolescents come to understand gender roles. These influences are explored in greater detail below.

Marketing

50 years of research on old media such as television and magazines is consistent with research on new media such as the internet, social networking websites, and cell phones. Children and young adolescents with exposure to media can be impacted by, "virtually every health concern that practitioners and parents have about young people, including aggressive behavior, risky sexual behavior, substance abuse and disordered eating" (Strasburger, Jordan & Donnerstein, 2009, p. 757). Advertisements play an important role in shaping self-image expectations and goals (Hogan & Strashburger, 2008) and can increase child vulnerability and susceptibility to following societal norms. In the case of youth, young females who read beauty magazines are more likely to have unhealthy body images as they are taught to constantly evaluate their personal appearance (Hogan & Strashburger, 2008), which can introduce childhood obesity and eating disorders. While marketing and advertising companies are not initial causes of these problems, they can be significant contributors (Strasburger, Jordan & Donnerstein, 2009). Media also contributes to displaced time

allotted to school work or sleep and can persuade unhealthy behaviors and beliefs (Strasburger, Jordan & Donnerstein, 2009).

Alcohol marketing is a significant influence on youth. In 1997, the Canadian Federal Government made adjustments to the approval process of alcohol advertisement guidelines. Prior to this, there was a pre-clearance system set in place to screen and assure that all alcohol advertisements met the Canadian Radio-television Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) guidelines (Heipel-Fortin et al. 21). At this time, all alcohol advertisements were only approved through CRTC's mandatory screening program and released contingent upon meeting the CRTC Code for Broadcast Advertising of Alcoholic Beverages (Heipel-Fortin & Hons, 2007). In 1997 the mandatory pre-clearance system was abolished as efforts to manage these responsibilities fell into the hands of the provinces, broadcasters, and the alcohol industry to enforce such guidelines on a voluntary basis (Heipel-Fortin & Hons, 2007). Through overriding government guidelines, industry regulations and non-specific rules allow for alcoholic beverages to be advertised and made appealing to younger audiences (Heipel-Fortin & Hons, 2007). This same issue in corporate take-overs is evident in the CSR as schools partnered with global companies like Coke, Pepsi, IBM and Apple. Teaching in strained environments has left schools with little options for funds. As a result, the very same corporations that are profiting off of and contributing to neoliberalism that caused the crisis in education were also supplying schools with funding (and placing schools in a vulnerable place as they support the expansion of these companies).

As school's lost funding, they were forced to find alternative financial support.

Unfortunately, for many schools this meant establishing new relationships between corporations. These corporate partnerships granted funding in exchange for product endorsement (Carpenter, Weber, Schugurensky, 2012). School cafeterias also were governed under the private sector as Coke and Pepsi products became staples in many schools possibly influencing healthy eating choices of children. Advertising these brands to children may make them susceptible to brand loyalty later in life, furthering the successes of these markets. Companies sponsoring events, clubs, vending machines, buses, or providing coupons and free samples to children (Nestle, 2000) may also make it more difficult for children to eat healthy in schools. These 'competitive foods' known to teach children and youth to crave foods high in sugar, fat and sodium levels silence health advocates and school food service directors that work hard to promote healthy options.

Furthermore, the marketing industry has deliberately been exposing young minds to values and ideas that may lead to alcohol consumption, unhealthy eating habits, and misconstrued ideas about body image and gender stereotypes. With little consideration for future impacts and advertisement exposure, the marketing industry contributes to teaching young minds what a 'normal' part of life is, and openly invite children's curiosity around all sorts of topics (e.g. sexual relationships, alcohol use, appearance, body image, and personal value). Just as neoliberal capitalism uses education as a pathway to strengthening economic needs, marketing is a tool used to build a future market. In an austere climate where schools are forced to seek out alternative funding sources, it becomes clear that the solution to improving Ontario schools lies within a changed funding formula, not changing the school into the same system responsible for its

disaster (Saltman, 2000).

Factors Influencing Youth Mental Illness

Mental health is often understood as multi-factorial as young people are under the influence of social, environmental, and cultural factors (Patel, Flisher, Hetrick, & McGorry, 2007). Various cases of mental illness suggest reoccurring themes to be, struggle for independence, puberty, mood swings, unexpected or unexplained pains, extreme sensitivity to feedback, social isolation and withdrawal (Smith, Barston, Jaffe, Flores Dumke, & Segal, 2008). While there are various reasons why young adults are struggling with depression and anxiety, important considerations should be made around family upbringing and community environment as family conflict, poor family discipline and management, death in the family, bullying, academic difficulties and failure, improper learning environment and support, exposure to violence and aggression, discrimination and marginalization are significant factors to consider (Patel, Flisher, Hetrick, & McGorry, 2007).

When understanding mental health, it is important to identify the parent-child relationship and the significance early childhood upbringing plays in the psychological development of youth. Mate (2010) explains that childhood depression and anxiety are not simply the result of stress in a child's life, but that of parental and environmental stress, too. Children living in overly strained environments as result become oversaturated with pressures. When considering economic changes during the CSR, adults were placed in stressful positions as supporting individual and family needs became increasingly complicated. By reworking the welfare system, the Harris government contributed to parent-childhood stress, the reduction of programs and

services (daycare, afterschool programs), the hollowing out of the family and dissolving of parenting. Therefore, mental illness and increased levels of stress are not restricted to personal experiences, but include parental stress, economic worry, anxiety, depression, and other events that fail to recognize childhood emotional needs. With the growing 'absence of social networks,' Mate (2010) argues that natural attachment that would otherwise be an essential part of human life has been disturbed and facilitates the growth of stressful and negative environments which may be linked to drug use and emotional shutdown of adolescents in later life (Mate, 2010). Due to stressful parenting environments, these attachment relationships are disturbed early on in a child's life (Mate, 2010).

As the Harris government assisted in the removal of important relationships that support child and adult relationships, attachment becomes less appreciated in society, and the relationships children require to develop become increasingly uncommon (Mate, 2010). Thus, scholars like Patel et al (2007) suggests that young people exposed to environments where attachment might not be valued, for example, mental disorders in the family, broken families, substance abuse, violence, and child abuse are therefore also at high risk for developing mental disorders. Young adolescents who are exposed to environments that include any of these risk factors may find themselves overwhelmed, stressed or without a strategy to overcome or cope with the situation. Students may find themselves in situations of conflict, including risky behaviors and seeking out various forms of escapism such as drugs, alcohol or sexual activity (Ortiz, 2003). In areas where these significant parenting relationships have become less prevalent, nothing has replaced the loss of these vital connections, allowing children's

instinctual guide to find some form of attachment through others who relate to them (Mate, 2010). As the peer culture has silenced and dissolved areas of the parental structure, protective factors that prevent young adolescents from dealing with such adversities are increasingly important. This becomes necessarily when children are challenged by emotional up rises and unbalances that they are not familiar with.

2.2 Bullying in an Era of Austerity

Bullying is an aggressive and intentional behavior that commonly involves an imbalance of social power. Bullying can take on many forms and does not appear in a vacuum. The social environment can exacerbate bullying. Verbal, physical and cyber behaviors apparent in young people today are displayed in the constant hierarchical battles in the name of status and social capital in youth and adults (Kowalski, Limber, & Agaston, 2012).

During the *Common Sense Revolution,* the Harris government arguably displayed bully-like behavior in its efforts to streamline the education system. The government's cuts to special education, guidance programs, and environmental education, resulted in fewer programs for children under the age of 16 (Heirein, 1999). The CSR also stifled arts programs in the curriculum as the revised version condensed the options that once allowed art, drama, music, physical education, and environmental education, thus reducing standards to only needing one of these courses for graduation (Carpenter, Weber & Schugurensky, 2012). Through reducing student support programs and largely ignoring children with learning challenges and difficulties, Harris separated students into different categories by not treating all of Ontarian learners equally.

Initiatives such as the new more standardized curriculum introduced in schools across the province instilled the same capitalist values in the education system as Harris attempted to introduce in other areas such as health, welfare and, business. This division of 'us and them' is evident in what Mate (2013) describes as the relationship between children and adults. The following segment highlights how the Harris government not only influenced the bully culture, but also, in part, perpetuated capitalist objectives, competition and violence among adolescents, while at the same time placed added pressures on parents and withdrew important resources from the educational system.

With the rise of the Harris government, studies suggest that since 1995 bullying incidents saw an increase. According to the Toronto Police, there were 1,448 reported incidents of violence in Toronto schools in 1998, compared to the 897 in 1990 (Harvey, 1999). This means from 1990 to 1998 there was a 162 percent increase in bullying cases. While bullying is rooted heavily in parental and cultural influences, Walter Freel of Toronto District School Board says that educational and programmatic cutbacks, resulted in significantly fewer social workers, psychologists, and teachers being available to children (Harvey, 1999). Additionally, Freel mentions that significant changes in funding have resulted in a decline of teachers available to supervise on yard duty. This may also be an important factor for youth increased bullying as it also removed dominant adult figures.

Prior to the era of budget cuts and downsizing, Toronto was recognized as a city with a high quality of life where neighborhoods prospered and shared a strong local democracy. Ontario governments that once communicated more effectively with citizens

provided social services and recognized other needs of people (Cohen & Kennedy, 2001) were suddenly transformed into a more top-down approach to governing. With increased reporting of bullying during the Harris government there was also an increase in special interest groups that worked towards keeping school environments safe. Some of these not-for-profit groups include People for Education and Canadian Safe School Network.

Canadian Safe School Network (CSSN) emerged in 1997 as a not-for-profit organization to help address the bullying situation in Canada. CSSN suggests that while many educators and parents understand bullying as an ongoing concern in Canada, the issue of school safety is developing into a larger problem (The Canadian Safe School Network). Stuart Auty, spokesperson for CSSN, stated that an increasing number of students (from kindergarten to high school) no longer felt safe in school environments as cases of violence, aggression and the involvement of gang members were on the rise (Harvey, 1999). People for Education (P4E) also emerged during the Harris era. P4E (2017) conducts independent research, assists in formulating educational policy suggestions, and works to connect education and society. With teachers only hearing of about 4 percent of bullying incidents (Harvey, 1999) and over half of children bullied in Canada never reporting it (Facts on Bullying and Harassment, 1999-2016), there was great concern for creating a comprehensive safety plan to address these issues of violence and bullying and implement them into the curriculum effectively (Harvey, 1999).

The relationship between environment and health is critical as classroom environments and positive relationships play an important role in the well-being of a child. Unfortunately, many of these programs were not viewed as cost-effective to the

PC government plan, furthering their impact on youth. Years after the CSR, the legacy continues as new existing digital platforms have transformed bullying. This has become an increasing problem in environments where social media has become a dominant form of communication.

Social media and various digital platforms have broadened the bully environment where anonymous and hurtful exchanges can now take place. Cyber bullying, also known as electronic bullying or online social cruelty, is "defined as bullying through email, instant messaging (IM), in a chat room, on a website, on an online gaming site, or through digital messages or images sent to a cellular phone" (Kowalski, Limber, & Agaston, 2012, p. 2). Cyber bullying allows bullying to discreetly take place at any point during the day, creating an environment where bullies are more difficult to trace and confront. Digital bullying presents unique challenges when compared to traditional bullying. With these new and emerging online social media platforms, the digital realm is reshaping the way people communicate and develop relationships, contributing to the lack of adult supervision and altered school environments. Electronic bullying is far reaching, particularly as messages are accessible globally and immediately (Klein, 2012).

With recent technological advancements, individuals can participate in online web browsing and social media almost anywhere. This technological medium has suggested to most children (through social media and dating websites) that social media aids in the development of connections and friendships. These platforms marketed towards increasing connectivity, can, easily lead to the dividing, rather than uniting (Keen, 2013). While online bullying is a relatively new platform, it can lead to

similar problems from more traditional forms of bullying, such as eating disorders, illness, aggression, depression, violence, substance abuse or suicide (Klein, 2012). The negative effects that arise from cyber bullying are connected to the rise of social media, which not only affects children but also individuals in society across the age spectrum.

Austerity program can also be explained in the context of the bully culture. Similar to competitive platforms created through the CSR, online platforms may act as platforms for comparison and weighing personal needs against others. The link between social media and bullying appear mirror a similar relationship existing between private capital and public poverty evident in the CSR. The PC's efforts to balance provincial debt and implement the CSR impacted many students, parents, and teachers, who depended on government services and funding. If school institutions are mirrors of society, and school value systems are inconsistent (Barlow & Robertson, 1994), then there is little surprise that young people accept these behaviors that encourage personal gain and promote and perpetuate the bully culture. As the province might be seen as a parental figure for society as a whole, the reduction of these CSR supports might be similar to the reduction of adult interference on online platforms where bullying takes place. Just as cuts to extracurricular activities and special education left children with learning disorders or academic challenges not considered or worthy of the newly-improved Tory educational agenda (Heirein, 1999), these cuts reorganized the system to work around the guidelines of the market while increasing the gap between rich and poor (Stone, Pillay, Hill, & Singh, 2015). This hierarchy is evident in the bully environment which reaffirms 'us' and 'them'. Creating social divisions between different people assumes that the 'business model' is most valuable and that inequality is a

justifiable measure for capitalism achieving and meeting business-oriented goals of government (Stone, Pillay, Hill, & Singh, 2015). These changes have since placed additional pressures on students, teachers, parents and families who were learning, working and living in this austere environment. The Harris government used various tactics to strengthen their platform and shift blame as they contributed to a bully society.

Harris's bully-like behaviors towards school faculty also publically displayed his disrespect for teachers in advertisements broadcasted on television (Heirein, 1999). This issue was brought to attention in the Toronto Star in 1999 when advertisements normalized the disrespectful behavior students displayed towards teachers (Aben, 1999). These PC advertisements framed teachers in a negative light, making suggestive comments that teachers are not doing what is best for students and are poor role models for education (Aben, 1999). She states, "Maybe, if the Ontario government stopped browbeating our teachers and started showing them some respect, our children would follow suit," (Aben, 1999, A23). As children began disrespecting teachers, Harris stated that he wanted more respect in school environments and considered implementing a zero-tolerance policy for school violence (Davy, 1999). If the Harris government was displaying disrespectful, violent and bully-like behaviors towards the education system, it is not difficult to imagine that his example led children to follow suit.

The adult role in the bullying epidemic

Today, bullying exists virtually everywhere. While many believe that bullying takes place amongst younger children, the impact of external value systems taught and practiced by adults should also be a factor when considering the behavior of young individuals. Young people exposed to adults practicing bully-like behavior might mimic

and practice these actions themselves. This becomes problematic as some students begin to understand and act out the power of these bully-behaviours and use them to their benefit. These lessons learned through observation later permeate into social circles in school grounds (Klein, 2012) where they are practiced. Harber (2007), anti-bullying expert suggests that bullies are often driven by social status, not insecurities (Whitson, 2014). Harber (2007) explains that children are learning the value of status and power and that these lessons, emanate from society, and are being practiced by some adults, and indirectly or directly absorbed by children.

As children are exposed to different types of behavior within society, and mirror behaviors motivated by power, status, and social acceptance, there is no surprise they act according to what they see and understand as acceptable behavior. Any indication that bullying behavior is tolerable and accepted, teaches children it is common behavior. In cases where children use this behavior to gain social status, attention, and power, they understand this as acceptable (Whitson, 2014). The Harris government also reinforcing competition, application of knowledge and standardized answers (Barlow & Robertson, 1994), impacted classroom environments and took away from positive learning environments as schools were still expected to teach and practice cooperation, creativity and the love of learning.

Despite various anti-bullying programs in Ontario education, schools are overwhelmed as they are forced to work towards solving issues much beyond their capabilities. These external pressures placed on schools (to develop solutions and produce results) are actually symptoms of and reflections of larger society. "Intervention studies have shown that the levels of bullying can be reduced, but not eradicated from

schools. This may be because bullying behavior has its origins in parenting as well as in

the school environment" (Smith & Myron-Wilson, 1998, p. 405). Many failings become

evident in school environments because children spend most of their time there.

Therefore, the problems stemming from traditional anti-bullying programs and other

various mitigation strategies might be that these programs are often propagated on

claiming that the bully culture is filled with those who are poorly behaved, violent, social

outcast and insecure, and might fail to acknowledge other external influences. While

this culture may include these subcultures, the bullying culture is also practiced and

learned from society and those who mirror such values.

Bully influences: Society and Family

As aggression becomes increasingly evident in school environments, it becomes

important to consider the societal and familial influences that may also be influencing

these behaviors. 200 students in an American study conducted by Schwartz, Dodge,

Pettit and Bates in 1997 found that family role models who displayed aggression or

violence often taught young people to understand and accept aggressive behaviors as

an accepted means of working towards and reaching personal goals (As written in

Klein, 2012). Aggressive exclusion, present in the adolescent bully culture, is another

theme in neoliberal capitalism. Young adolescents understand and practice exclusivity

derived from various media channels that broadcast the importance of appearance,

clothing and brand loyalty (Goldman, 2012). Most children quickly understand that those

who don't fit into the western culture are either made fun of or desperately try to fit in.

Children who are influenced by social norms also might adhere to youth gender roles,

which can instigate violent and bully behaviors. Exposure to violence and aggression

may also teach children who don't know how to explain their anger to express it. Therefore, by practicing negative actions and emotions associated with aggression, society discourages children from using social and emotional skills which may lead children to feel isolated and lost (Goldman, 2012). Regardless if these beliefs are the goals of children or not, these behaviors are reinforced in the self-serving environment capitalism creates (Barlow & Robertson, 1994).

From a very young age, children are implicitly taught that personal accumulation of wealth will measure their overall importance in society. This culture, set in place by capitalist objectives, rewards those who adhere to these dominant values as those who don't meet these status markers are often bullied (Klein, 2012). While young people may be unaware that these values have become prominent in their lives, the bully culture reaffirms these learned values through children's communication and behavior. This, therefore, perpetuates the bully culture by reinforcing competition and the loser-winner mentality. These platforms invite narcissist behaviors and glorify competition, a common theme in neoliberal capitalism.

During the *Common Sense Revolution*, the Harris government invented a crisis in education to enable education and business to work hand in hand. These changes, outlined in chapter one, describe how the Harris government segregated different groups of people and restructured important relationships in the education system. These changes were evident as students became anxious, overworked and in constant competition with others while in the race to meet their parent's expectations, academic goals, and work towards a successful future. Furthermore, if bullying is a result of capitalist-like behaviors for personal advantage, this generates inequality, and creates

an environment where students are acting with a heightened sense of opportunity over those who are disadvantaged or different. As a result, these behaviors have kept, and continue to keep, schools locked in a neoliberal model as media, technology, volatile peer relationships and other outside influences often display values that divide different groups of children within the school system. As bullying behaviors sever relationships between those who practice the democratic principles of equity, and builds a hierarchical community that practices elitism and belittlement (Klein, 2012), this culture has created demand for alternatives to properly address these issues with groups like Canadian Safe School Network and People for Education who characterized this problem in this way. Therefore, it can be said that there are enough harmful activities that children partake in to warrant concern and build special interest groups in light of this evidence. These harmful activities are now explored further.

2.3 Alcohol

One of the potentially harmful activities that young people can turn to is the unregulated consumption of alcohol. Alcohol is the most commonly used substance among Canadian youth today (Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, 2008), and can have negative impacts on students. Youth alcohol consumption is one of the many concerns in society as it can impact school performance, create social problems among friends, family and school faculty, and may lead to high-risk behavior (O'Malley & Johnston & Bachman, 1998). In 2007 the *Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care* gathered findings based on youth drinking practices among 36 public health units in the province of Ontario. This research found that, "25% of people in Ontario age[d] 12-19 years reported consuming at least five or more drinks on at least one occasion in

the previous 12 months," (Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, 2008). The report *Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration* states that youth who practice alcohol consumption prior to the age of 15 increase their likelihood of developing alcohol dependence or addiction later in life (Pasch, Komro, Perry, Hearst, & Farbakhsh, 2007). This research suggests that young adolescent brains are at greater risk than those of mature adults, and while most side effects of substance abuse occur later in life, early onset drinking can lead to problems and the development of poor life habits as an adult (Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, 2008). While there are various factors that contribute to teen substance abuse (i.e., peer pressure, family life, anxiety, and depression), an overregulated school system that places importance on skills rather than judgment and value cannot compete with a deregulated marketing industry.

Some professionals believe that the rise of heavy drinking among youth is due to the decline in traditional attitudes and values within society (North & Orange, 1980). During the CSR, the programmatic and budget cutbacks that the Harris government implemented placed additional pressures on students, parents, and teachers and broadened the gap between children and their parents. The PC government cut valuable programs (such as afterschool programs) that not only kept children safe and supervised after school hours but also promoted healthy development (After School: The time of a child's life, 2011). When constructive relationships between adults and children are present, lower rates of substance abuse and violence, and more positive connections to school and improved academic performance occur (After School: The time of a child's life, 2011). Therefore, a case can be made that the CSR failed to

facilitate the well-being and the personal development of children.

With rising concern for adolescent stress (Mate, 2010), it becomes necessary to acknowledge that eliminating programs and services that support child well-being, may cause young people to turn to negative habits to cope with these added pressures. Alcohol is one of the substances that children might discover in times of stress. Just as some heavy drinkers become addicted to the way alcohol temporarily helps them cope with stress and anxiety, young people may believe alcohol intake will increase self-esteem, enhance levels of power and help cope with gender-related issues around masculinity, femininity and LGBTQ (Forrest, 1997).

While many parents may reinforce these norms, youth culture itself seems to have a normalizing effect on teens and young adults. Forrest (1997) claims that, "Alcohol abuse synergizes depression, impairs judgment, facilitates confusion and irrational thinking, and thus contributes to all forms of self-destructive behavior, including suicide" (p. 23). This can also lead to the curiosity about other substances, impaired work performance at school, as well as negative friend and family relationships, violence, and aggression (Jones, 2001). In a peer culture that might reinforce these behaviors youth are most susceptible to generational values. Young people who participate in occasional to heavy binge drinking may lack the proper knowledge regarding alcohol portion control and personal body limitations. Some children are unfamiliar with the side effects of inebriation, and the various ways alcohol can impair judgment (Sadler, 2011). As substance abuse is a major contributor to adolescent depression, suicidal behavior (Jones, 2001), violence (Sadler, 2011) and is, "implicated in date rape, sexual harassment, racial disturbances, drop outs, overdose

deaths from alcohol and poisoning" (Gallup, 2004, p. 13) alcohol consumption becomes increasingly dangerous.

Alcohol and family

Families are important contributors to the well-being, health, and development of young children (Hanvey, 2006), therefore positive family relationships are vital to the successful functioning of Ontario's school system. Effective parenting is a positive protector against the negative influences of poverty, high-risk neighborhoods, and an important role in the "emotional, behavioural, social and learning outcomes of children" (Hanvey, 2006, p. 9). Effective parenting is necessary for all children, but implications for some young people may be more destructive because of their limited access to other supports. In environments where parental measures are challenged (through increasing work-life stress, for example) relationships between adults and youth can become impaired, furthering the impact on children's decisions and development later in life (Hanvey, 2006). The quality of the parent-child relationship is based on the foundation of the parent's ability to motivate, manage behavior and supervise, as this is crucial to the social development and overall well-being of the child (Dishion & McMahon, 1998). Therefore, Patterson (1986), Patterson & Dishion (1988) advocate that the importance of monitoring young people's activities is necessary when establishing and maintaining positive child-parent relationships (as written in Dishion & McMahon, 1998) as limited supervision has given rise to new issues.

The reshaping of important family relationships has distanced parents and children, creating more space for adolescents to engage in various activities. Research by Dishion and Loebler (1985) found that parallels (both directly and indirectly) were

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drawn between parental monitoring and adolescent substance and drug use (Dishion & McMahon, 1998). With little supervision in the homes of children, youth can engage in high risk behavior and experiment with different substances without adult interference. For children who might come to understand alcohol as a temporary fix to extinguish internal feelings, thoughts and stressful situations (Forrest, 1997), parental advisory is especially important. "Research on parenting practices has revealed parental monitoring to be relevant to the safety of young children (Peterson, Ewigman, & Kivlahan, 1993, p. 934), and the development of childhood antisocial behaviour (Patterson & Stouthame-Loeber, 1984) and substance use (Dishion, Li, Spracklen, Brown & Haas, in press; Dishion, Loeber, 1985; Steinberg, 1986)" (As written in Dishion & McMahon, 1998, p. 61). Other important considerations could be made around children with alcoholic parents, divorce, family conflict, sibling competition, parental history of alcohol abuse, or a death in the family (Forrest, 1997). Exposure to parental or multigenerational substance abuse may also lead to children understanding substance intake as acceptable and normal behavior (Sadler, 2011). All of these factors have the potential to contribute to childhood stress. As stated earlier, children facing less supervision become increasingly impressionable, as a result, the gap between parents and children and the space created in between school hours and parents' work hours have since given way to the latch-key child (Hanvey, 2006). As parents remain preoccupied with making ends meet financially, some youth now look up to their peers for guidance rather than parents and adult figures (Mate, 2010).

Marketing has been proven to be an effective strategy to develop brand awareness and build a market. By making alcohol available, affordable, and promoting

new and exciting beverages, the alcohol industry exploits the alcohol market, making these beverages to appear to be no different than soft drinks (Mosher, 1985). Youth targeting is evident through celebrity and sport figure endorsement, youth-oriented radio advertising, and lighter, sweeter beverages (Mosher, 1985). The World Health Organization (WHO) states that alcohol advertisements, "...[have] been found to promote and reinforce perceptions of drinking as positive, glamorous and relatively risk free...[as] exposure to repeated high levels of alcohol promotion inculcates pro-drinking attitudes and increases the likelihood of heavier drinking" (Heipel-Fortin & Hons, 2007, p. 20). With this conduct practiced in wider social settings and at home, children come to recognize alcohol consumption as acceptable (Leary, 2012) and may learn false information or engage in experimentation. Media and societal norms place pressure upon youth and adults as they give the impression that participating in the party culture that alcohol consumption promotes might increase individual social standing (Forrest, 1997). Through displaying which brands establish high socio-economic standing, particular lifestyles, and attitudes the advertising industry can create the illusion of a particular image that appears desirable (Jones & Donovan, 2001). With these values reinforced in advertisements, this can lead to children imitating these behaviors (Wallace, 2008) perpetuating the false comfort in this culture and continuing it throughout generations.

When it comes to the initiation and encouragement of addictive behaviors, society plays an important role (Leary, 2012). Similar to neoliberal capitalism in the education system, an overregulated school system that places importance on skills rather than judgment and value cannot compete with a deregulated marketing industry.

Alcohol remains the most abused drug for students in elementary and high school (Sadler, 2011) as the likelihood of underage drinking increases over time with the influence and demand from the external environment. With the pressures of the CSR adults were forced to work longer hours and experienced pressures as the hollowing out of the family and latch-key child phenomenon become increasingly problematic. The widening gap between after-school hours and the lack of parental supervision has provided space for young children and adolescents to partake in risky behavior without parental monitoring. Furthermore, scholars suggest that these changes create space for students to partake in drugs and unsafe activities that may impair well-being and personal development.

2.4 Mental Illness in an Era of Austerity

Currently, approximately 1.2 million Canadian children are affected by mental health disorders (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2016). While this data on children is startling, the consequences for adults affected, as well as the societal and economic pressures on health services are also unsettling. "...500,000 Canadians, in any given week, are unable to work due to mental health problems or illness" (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2016). In Canada, mental illness has become such a large problem that it nearly cost the country 51 billion dollars in every year (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 2012). However, mental illness is not limited to anxiety and depression and includes symptoms of other various disorders, like obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), Hyperactivity disorder (ADD), and eating disorders (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2015). Mental illnesses are serious conditions that can impact many areas of a person's life. When the root cause of mental illness is left

undefined, it can lead to long-term problems in school and at home where teens can make negative choices that may lead to drug use and abuse, violence or suicide (Smith, Barston, Jaffe, Flores, Dumke, & Segal, 2007).

Through conducting research on mental health, various important factors need to be considered. As the importance of parental involvement and supervision was highlighted in the context of bullying and substance use/abuse, weakening parent-child relationships are also considered. What hasn't been thoroughly discussed yet, though, is the emotional impact of these cost saving initiatives on children and parents and how these actions have contributed to the loss of attachment in society. In the context of mental health, there are parallels to be drawn when considering some of these factors. In this chapter, I will highlight how changes during the CSR led to an increase of stress and how despite the failure of the Harris government's alleged commitments (to reduce class size and contribute to classroom funding), their efforts imposed additional pressures on children, parents, and educators. Thus, stress, family relations, and competition during the time of Harris's political ruling become areas of interest when examining mental illness during this period of time, and for the future.

Stress

Stress is a change that helps the mind and body adapt or cope with a challenge while pushing our brains to search for problem-solving solutions (Santee, 2013). While stress can help overcome and manage change, problems arise when children and adults are unable to deal with their stress. Shanker (2013) indicates that children are often overwhelmed with the presence and abundance of stressors in their lives and don't know how to properly deal with them. Excessive noise, visual stimulants,

unhealthy foods, or lack of sleep and exercise are some pressures in childhood that can place the child's well-being and mental state at risk (Shanker, 2013). As the implementation of the CSR initiatives (i.e., new curriculum, competitiveness, standardized testing and control of class size) led to internal pressures on the education system, these same pressures interacted with external stresses from programmatic cutbacks and the expanding gap between social incomes. As working families and parent-child relationships saw increased levels of stress, and many children were unfamiliar with stress management, cases of mental health intensified during and beyond the Harris government era. Those children who were hurt by or lost the natural protection of their parents (due to work, parental stress) often shut down emotionally and display outward expressions of their deeper behaviors in drug use, self-harm, and the violent, disturbing and extreme sport contents (Mate, 2010). With fewer support systems in place to help children deal with academic and family stress, Shanker (2013) and Mate (2010) agree that a society focused on resolving and treating symptoms of mental health should not be treated from the angle of behavioral problems and diagnosis but rather should be examined through challenges in personal relationships and attachment.

Depression & Anxiety

The Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services states that nearly 70% of mental illness challenges begin in early childhood or young adolescence (Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2016). The *World Health Organization* predicts that by 2020 mental health problems among young people will become one of the most prevalent causes of mortality, morbidity, and disability worldwide (As written in Maras,

et al., 2015). Leitch (2007) suggests that children and youth are experiencing increasing levels of stress. As explained above, children are heavily connected to their environment and are dependent on this space for personal development. More Canadian children are displaying signs of mental distress as a result of bullying, anxiety, low confidence, and insecurity (Leitch, 2007). Throughout this transition, youth may experience various ways of coping and understanding these changes. Hagwood and De Leo, 2008 & Lemstra et al., 2008 state that mental health, specifically anxiety and depression are strong predictors for challenges youth face including academic and behavioural problems, low self-esteem, alcohol and drug abuse and suicide (As written in Maras, Flament, Murray, Buchholz, Henderson, Obeid, and Goldfield, 2015).

Anxiety

The most common case of mental illness among young adults is anxiety (Leitch, 2007). Common factors that can increase levels of anxiety typically include family life, school, and neighborhood environments. Anxiety can exist on varying levels, short-term impacts of school anxiety in a child's life include absence from school, poor academic performance, social isolation, and possible increase of stress, whereas, long-term impacts of school anxiety in a child's life include "chronic anxiety or the development of an anxiety disorder, chronic underachievement in school, low self-esteem, and difficulties in achieving a satisfying personal and professional adulthood" (Mayer Peters, 2008, p. 6). Research conducted by *the Mental Health Commission of Canada* states that 70% of adults struggling with mental health or illness confirm that symptoms began in their childhood years (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2016). Even at a very young age high-stress level environments can develop anxiety disorders in children

(Offord Centre for Child Studies, 2007).

A study conducted post 9/11 suggests that even during pregnancy children can be impacted by stress. The *Transgenerational Effects of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in Babies of Mothers Exposed to the World Trade Center Attacks during Pregnancy* study conducted research on the relationship between mothers directly exposed to the collapse of the twin towers on September 11, 2001 (Yehuda, Mulherin Engel, Brand, Seckl, Marcus, & Berkowitz, 2005). This data found that by measuring cortisol levels (a stress hormone) in mothers, the effects of material PTSD can be observed in varying cortisol levels of offspring (Yehuda, Mulherin Engel, Brand, Seckl, Marcus, & Berkowitz, 2005). This information highlights the significance of parental stress and the overall impact stressful environments play even on in utero children (Yehuda, Mulherin Engel, Brand, Seckl, Marcus, & Berkowitz, 2005). In extreme cases, transgenerational effects of trauma have heavily impacted postnatal influences and parents who experienced trauma in life (Yehuda, Mulherin Engel, Brand, Seckl, Marcus, & Berkowitz, 2005) as children whose mothers developed PTSD have displayed signs of distress as early as two years after being born (Costandi, 2010). Research in the area also suggests that fathers who are affected by PTSD can pass down anxiety, depression or substance abuse to their children (Costandi, 2010). This research is important, especially when comparing the CSR environment and how extreme stressful parenting environments can impact children even before they are born.

Highlighted in an article published in the Toronto Star in 1995 titled 'Children face biggest loses when budgets are cut back' display how children were impacted by budget cuts in unemployment insurance and social welfare (Crane, 1995). Families

without finances to purchase basic necessities like clothing, and food increased stress and anger in children and adults, especially with significantly reduced support from non-profit groups, communal supports, and counseling for children and youth (Crane, 1995). In cases such as these, children may learn to respond to anxiety and stress based on the response their parent's display (Offord Centre for Child Studies, 2007). If parenting environments are stressed, this could become problematic depending on the approach and the way the parent copes and leads by example. When considering external factors that influence childhood stress, children who are prone to addiction, behavior and learning difficulties are increasingly at risk (Mate, 2010). As coping mechanisms become important when considering mental health and future generational stress utilizing existing research becomes increasingly necessary. Mate's (2010) research on mental health and stressed parenting environments draws connections between the cognitive development of children and optimal environments.

Mate (2010) believes there are 9 important functions of the brain that need to be supported for optimal child development. The prefrontal cortex, a part of the brain in charge of cognitive development is linked to regulating the body, communicating with others, responding to fear, providing insight, situational flexibility, balancing emotions, providing empathy, intuition, and mortality (Mate, 2010). As the prefrontal cortex is developed through the impact of different environments, these circuits depend on supportive environments to strengthen the stress, intentional and emotional functioning (Mate, 2010). He states that at least 7 of these functions are supported and developed through caring, nurturing and positive parenting (Mate, 2010).

This research suggests that when adults are provided a healthy and positive

environment, they themselves will display the values of these environments when raising their children. Studies have found that emotional and behavioral disorders in youth are less prominent in supportive and accepting environments when children feel a sense of connectivity and experience low-risk conflict (Patel, Flisher, Hetrick, & McGorry, 2007). Above all, parents who create space for individual thought and behavioral stimulation during the early years of a child's life appear to be one of the most important factors (Patel, Flisher, Hetrick, & McGorry, 2007). Children who are overloaded with homework may face limitations on relaxation and creative expression. Whether this be by playing games, spending time with family or after school programs and activities, each of these positive outlets are important for optimal childhood development and growth (Mayer Peters, 2008). Therefore, children who are increasingly stressed and parents who are no longer able to provide the proper environment for children become gradually more susceptible to addiction, behavioral problems and learning difficulties as these proper conditions children require become less available (Mate, 2010). Children in these environments might gravitate towards peers that also share similar mindsets. For independent and group needs, the importance of building positive and accepting environments and providing proper resources and supports. This is especially true in more extreme cases such as depression.

Depression

Depression is defined by the *National Institute of Mental Health* as, "...a common but serious mood disorder." It causes severe symptoms that affect how you feel, think, and handle daily activities, such as sleeping, eating, or working" (National Institute of

Mental Health, 2016). Generally, noticeable symptoms between males or females with depression may include feelings of worthlessness, helplessness, emptiness, and pessimism, low interest in activities and hobbies, low energy levels, higher levels of distraction, difficulty making decisions, unstable sleeping patterns, unbalanced appetite, headaches, digestive problems, pains or suicidal thoughts and attempts (National Institute of Mental Health, 2016). Depression is prevalent in 2-4% of youth and 4-8% of adolescents (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2016) and research suggests that the global increasing rates of depression and mental illness are impacting youth at younger ages than usual (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2016). Due to this, more young children are being diagnosed with depression. In more severe cases, individuals may turn to suicide, which, in Canada, accounts for nearly 4000 suicides every year, nearly 11 every single day (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 2012).

With the growing number of children diagnosed with mental health and behavioral issues, some parents respond to mental health with quick fixes. As adults are parenting in stressful environments, and they themselves are overwhelmed, they might not be able to address problems as they would in non-stressful environments. As society has become more accepting of medicating children when they don't learn or behave properly (Mate, 2010) quick fixes to deeply rooted problems become normalized. This suggests that as anxiety and depression stem from larger environments, there cannot be one remedy for alleviating the emotional up-rise of a problem that has built for years. Unfortunately, despite growing research in this area, problems continue to persist in schools and have left special interest groups searching for answers.

People for Education (P4E) and the Canadian Safe Schools Network (CSSN) are two independent special interest groups that have fought for and pointed out the presence of failings within the school system. Founded during the time of the Harris Government, P4E began in 1996 while CSSN emerged in 1997. These groups set out to address the issues in schools (bullying, substance use/abuse, mental health) as P4E is committed to expanding the definition of 'success' in school and the ways it is measured (People for Education, 2017), and CSSN is designed to help establish safe schools, specifically to aid in the reduction of youth violence and bullying. Together, these groups work towards equality and safety as they recognize ongoing concerns in the province and country. CSSN recognized the ongoing issue of inequality and unsafe environments as violence persists as an ongoing issue in Ontario with youth weapon offenses and assault (doubling over the last decade), and the vast reaching impacts of social media which have since provided alternative environments for youth bullying and harassment to take place. CSSN advocates for safe environments and asserts that the importance of the participation of the community is key when addressing these ongoing issues. P4E is focusing on considerations in areas of health, creativity, citizenship, social-emotional skills, and quality learning environments. They believe that "young people need a broad set of foundational skills to succeed" (People for Education, 2007). P4E view social, emotional and cognitive processes of equal importance, and advocate for healthy learning environments to help students succeed as they enforce the importance of good physical and mental health, creativity, problem-solving skills, and critical thinking. CSSN and P4E are some of the groups that have since emerged as a result of acknowleding and recognizing current issues in Ontario education.

Conclusion

The complex relationship between a child's family life, upbringing, and school are important factors that ultimately influence family relations, peer orientation, and social norms. It becomes evident that many children struggle to effectively cope with feeling overwhelmed, stressed and anxious and may fall victims of bullying or take to negative habits like alcohol and drug use. In this chapter, I have argued that the education system is currently struggling to address major failings within the lives of children and youth. As the influences of the CSR have become evident in strained parent-child relationships, the hollowing out of the family, latch-key children and stressful parenting environments, these aforementioned pressures (bullying, substance abuse, and mental health), are displayed in the ways that the PC government contributed to student vulnerability. In order to effectively address these failings in society and in the school system, the solution cannot be a responsibility within the education system alone, but must be a collective effort from the family, school, and society. Ultimately, this history is important to capture and analyze, because the future of education policy in Ontario must recognize these multi-pronged issues that co-exist on levels of political, societal, educational and familial levels in order to best support students in the future. As the PC government of Ontario was committed to "raising student achievement, closing achievement gaps, and increasing the public's confidence in public education" as a result, it introduced various policies to help achieve these goals (Winton & Pollock, 2016). These changes are displayed in the Liberals efforts to undoing the CSR.

Chapter 3: Undoing CSR - Liberal Repercussions of the crisis in Education

The *Common Sense Revolution* created a disciplinary culture placing strict

limitations on certain groups of people and public services as it "attacked social

assistance recipients, savaged affordable housing programs, starved public education,

turned over large chunks of the public service to private business, and dramatically

reduced our capacity to pay for public services" (Mackenzie, 2015, p. 14). The Harris

government also introduced a variety of new 'social villains' as it targeted poor people,

panhandlers, and mothers on welfare (Mackenzie, 2015). While some scholars claim

that this restructuring was driven by the need to improve the effectiveness of the public

sector, cutting costs and increasing educational standards and outcomes (Taylor, 2001)

only made students, parents, families, and employers more vulnerable. Now, nearly 20

years after the CSR, Ontario Elementary and Secondary schools remain under financial

constraint (Mackenzie, 2015), especially as the funding formula has "not been

fundamentally changed, nor even reviewed since the conservatives left office"

(Mackenzie, 2015, p. 14). This, in turn, poses the question, for whom are these

outcomes benefitting? (Taylor, 2001).

As cases of bullying, substance use/abuse, depression and anxiety resulted from

internal problems (of the school system) that the CSR intensified (such as curricular

changes, increases in class size, competitiveness, and standardized testing), the

Liberals were forced to acknowledge this and provide change. In their efforts to undo

the CSR, the Character Development Initiative, a program to help develop moral fiber

and value systems, was implemented into Ontario schools. This program was designed

to alter the current state of education and re-introduce the very same things the CSR

had eliminated. As the CSR spearheaded a movement for special interest groups and

NGO's, the changed school system unmistakably needed a call for change. Organizations like P4E recognized the importance of relationships between economic issues and health care, which later led to raised concerns for the well-being of young people, increased health care and a need for school health programs (Ferguson & Power, 2014). Despite efforts of the Liberals to problematize the policy changes of the CSR, this chapter later reveals that while the CDI could provide a positive foundation for progress, it appears to mirror common goals of neoliberalism as it teaches under one dominant structure of values. Furthermore, as competitive environments perpetuate economic goals and development, a changed revolution that supports child well-being, equity and caring environments, schools remain strained as they continues to search for a new solution.

While there are many factors that may contribute to bullying, alcohol use/abuse, anxiety and depression, austerity has deeply impacted the schools' ability to educate, teachers' ability to teach, and the students' ability to learn. As chapter two outlined the educational reform and its impact on class size, student competition, and standardized and results-based testing, it becomes evident that the Conservative restructuring of the curriculum to ensure focus (on science, language, math, and technology) was influenced by a structure based on global competition and interdependence (O'Sullivan, 1999). These market-driven reform policies enacted into curricula and education policy have created consequences for students and teachers (Dei & Karumanchery, 1999) as they focus heavily on competition. While the CSR worked towards maintaining global competitiveness, it also simultaneously worked towards commodifying education (Dei & Karumanchery, 1999). Ultimately, these changes in schools worked towards teaching

and preparing children for the world of work at an earlier age (Sears, 2003) focusing primarily on benefiting the future of the economy, not the student.

Many educational policies directed by neoliberal capitalism spearheaded changes and concerns with privatization, marketization, and performance-based results (Basu, 2004). Suggested cost-effective initiatives have also dramatically shifted away from considerations of equity, and instead, on big business and capitalism (Dei & Karumanchery, 1999). These jurisdictions that adopt policies that favor the market over citizens may contribute to unjustness and contribute to inequalities (Pinto, 2013). These market-driven reform policies often ignore consequences for those within the education system including students, teachers and school administrators (Dei & Karumanchery, 1999). As education becomes affiliated with the focus of economic prosperity, changes have impacted young people's schooling. This is displayed in a Toronto Star/CTV La Press Poll (1999) as voters were asked what impact a PC victory might have on health-care, education and the gap between rich and poor. La Press Poll (1999) results displayed that people felt that there would be a negative impact on health-care and education and that the gap between the rich and the poor would increase.

In 2002 Ontario Educational objectives changed after Mike Harris stepped down as Ontario's Progressive Conservative leader on October 16th 2001(Keil, 2002). Despite the promises Harris made to increase the number of teachers in classrooms, protect environmental initiatives, and provide higher education to all young people, the public began to see that fewer teachers were available to schools, environmental funding decreased (as land was bought out by corporations), and the cost of secondary education tuition nearly doubled (McMurtry, 2001). Throughout his time as Premier,

Harris became a symbol for "neoliberal societal restructuring" (Keil, 2002, p. 597). This was evident in PC efforts to establish targeted funding and frame the government and unions as part of the problem, all while they constructed a platform that supported the privatization of public services. After the Walkerton E. coli outbreak (resulting from cutting funding for building and repairing water treatment systems) in May of 2000 that killed 7 people and left hundreds sick, Harris stepped down (Mackenzie, 2015). The CSR had demonstrated that despite promises to increase jobs for young people, improve education, and create a cleaner and safer province, (PC Government of Ontario, 1999) it did not care about all people, only a select few. Harris's party lost legitimacy, which weakened his platform especially in the race to override McGunity's votes (McMurtry, 2001). As a result, Harris's platform crumbled as his foundation was built and dependent on false promises (McMurtry, 2001). Despite his efforts, many of the new conditions Harris implemented built resistance and created fissures for social change to take place (Keil, 2002).

At this time, many voters recognized that Ontario required a "policy renewal" to begin undoing the changes of the CSR. With their integrity and honesty, the Liberals understood that Ontario could not afford any more tax cuts and should invest money into education, health care, and the environment (Diebel, 2003). As a result, this led to the Liberals winning their platform based on promises to provide a more compassionate government that put people first (Urquhart, 1999). With the help of academic scholars Kenneth Leithwood, Micheal Fullan, and Nancy Watson (Anserson &Ben Jafaar, 2007), the Liberals displayed academic interest when defining existing problems and identifying possible solutions in the education system (As written in Sattler, 2012). The

Liberals began by investing $1.6 billion dollars in education in 2006 and restoring the

power imbalance with elected trustees in the Hamilton, Ottawa and Toronto District

School Board (Sattler, 2012). Additionally, they made revisions to EQAO testing and

lifted unwanted weight from students, parents, teachers, and schools by displaying a

more leadership type role (Sattler, 2012). Ultimately, the Liberals defeated the

Conservatives on a platform that reinforced the importance and need to end the current

crisis in education as they recognized that they were now very important players in

repairing the damaging work the Conservatives had left behind. With the development

of the *Character Development Initiative*, the Liberals focused their efforts on ending the

crisis in education and creating change.

Why Character Development now?

In his efforts to begin undoing the CSR, McGuinty's Liberals invested an

additional $2 million dollars into Ontario Education urging the importance of

implementing respect, honesty, fairness and other core community-building values into

the curriculum (Gillespie, 2006). The *Character Development Initiative* (hereafter known

as CDI) was implemented into the 2007/2008 school year as a way of creating a

balance between creating successful students and active citizens (Gillespie, 2006). The

CDI was developed as a result of the actions the CSR took to remove supports and

resources. After this reform, these same things that the CSR removed became

externalized in schools, family relationships and in society. As a result, these failings

have since been recognized by special interest groups and NGO's and then made into a

movement. This is recognized by the Liberals in a quote, "At its heart, education is

about developing well-rounded citizens who will help build a strong, caring and

compassionate society" McGuinty said at an Educational Symposium (Gillespie, 2006, A4). This program initially was implemented to educate children on the importance of values (Winton, 2012) and contribute to academic success (Gillespie, 2006). The growth of Ontario's CDI was positioned around the idea that locating common good in Ontario's value system would contribute to reduced absenteeism and negative behavior and an increase in academic success (Gillespie, 2006). The CDI was built on key beliefs and principles that outline the importance of sharing the responsibility of character development with parents, family as well as schools and community members, as it suggests that student engagement in the initiative will contribute to the transformation of these learning environments and the way student and faculty communicate within them (Finding Common Ground, 2009). As the need for change was strong, the CDI aimed to begin reintroducing the very same things that the Harris government had destroyed.

What is character?

Character development, a process of self-discovery and moral development, has existed for some time. While character can be understood as a virtuous individual who possesses certain traits that are organized in a specific way (Davis, 2003), Berkowitz & Bier (2004) also suggest character is multifaceted. Character can be a complex arrangement of psychological characteristics, depending on which values guide each individual (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004). When an individual's moral compass is guided by negative traits this presents some complexities when defining character. While there are various factors that influence character development, character traits are much more than building blocks but are foundations upon how character is expressed (Davis,

2003).

What is character development/education?

According to *Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Schools, K-12,* the Ontario Ministry of Education states that,

> ...Character development is the deliberate effort to nurture the universal attributes upon which schools and communities find consensus. These attributes provide a standard for behaviour against which we hold ourselves accountable. They permeate all that happens in schools. The bind us together across lines that often divide us in society. They form the basis for our relationships and of responsible citizenship. They are the foundation for excellence and equity in education, and for our vision of learning cultures and school communities that are respectful, safe, caring and inclusive (Finding Common Ground, 2008, 3).

Character education attempts to work towards strengthening the development of character and was originally created with young people in mind (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004). Character development is built on, "excellence in education, communities that are vibrant and caring, and students who will think critically, feel deeply and act wisely" (Finding Common Ground, 2008, p. 4). With the introduction of the CDI, these efforts were set in place to change the learning environment. As the overall outline of the character development is a positive movement, building excellence in education, strengthening communities and teaching compassion and critical thinking were not easy goals to integrate into a system that values neoliberal capitalism.

Challenges Implementing Character Development

McGuinty funded the CDI project despite school boards struggling with affordable programs, cutbacks made to librarians and ESL teachers and, students with learning challenges who were unable to receive the support and resources they needed (Gillespie, 2006). "Until we address those needs that are real and that would affect character and development and literacy levels, we have a problem," said Education

Critic (Gillespie, 2006, A4). How can character development begin to teach children about fairness and responsibility when these are existing issues in the education system? (Gillespie, 2006). How is character development supposed to undo a problem when that same problem it is fighting against the current solution? Stephanie Minor, a middle-school teacher shares her concern in the Toronto Star suggesting that while there is great importance of modeling community values, it must first be practiced in society before teaching it in schools (Minor, 2003). If teachers model these values they will impact children on a much greater scale than those who don't (Minor, 2003). Unfortunately, without teachers and students able to actively model and participate in these value systems, this has led to other scholars critiquing the CDI and its overall effectiveness.

Despite the claims of character education, it has been suggested to demonstrate a shallow research base (Winton, 2008). While the CDI emphasizes the importance of character improvement, some academics state that the program appears to concentrate on student behavior modification. Davis (2003) explains that instead of the implementation of values and the development of strong character, the CDI is based on learning submissive behavior.

While there are many different approaches to character development, Winton (2010) explains that Ontario typically follows the traditionalist approach. Teaching under the traditional approach includes "(a) direct instruction of values, (b) rewarding behaviours taken to represent selected values, (c) conscious adult modeling of desired behaviour, and (d) the use of literature to identify heroes who demonstrate good character" (Winton, 2012, p. 222). When character development was implemented into

Ontario schools in the late 1990's its main concern was to address and improve academic success, employment skills, civilized behaviors and social relationships (Winton, 2010). Therefore, Winton (2008) asserts that a traditionalist approach to developing a universal value system suggests that there is one superior system of values to be followed, overriding other possible systems. Under this traditionalist approach, this method of teaching character reinforces the neoliberal capitalist agenda through supporting and benefiting one method and according to Kohn, 1997; Purpel, 1997, is said to perpetuate the dominant structures through accrediting stigmatizations around substance use, teen pregnancy, poverty, unemployment and crime while ignoring influences of economy and society (As written in Winton, 2010). Winton (2008) asserts that through the traditionalist approach, lessons in the CDI teaches that conformity is desirable and how "It focuses on *individuals* leaving political, economic, and cultural institutions unchallenged (Purpel 1997) and perpetuates the status quo" (Winton, 2008, p. 305). Ultimately, it teaches that there is one best system of values and suggests that those who disagree with these values are "underdeveloped or ignorant" (Winton, 2010, p. 222). If this is true, then there is no difference from preparing young individuals for serving economic needs with or without character development, as they both reinforce the same capitalist value systems.

The Ministry of Education states and acknowledges the importance of democracy in the CDI as it asserts the importance of respecting each other, each individuals diverse backgrounds, and the right of each student to learn about interconnectedness and ways communities are built (Ministry of Education, 2008). Unfortunately, by practicing the importance of values and character in the current neoliberal model the

education system has found itself stuck in the Harris era. For this reason, Character

Education is sometimes considered training because "simple character education

explicitly emphasizes habit, ritual, ceremonies, strict discipline, and other means of

instilling character trait that (more or less) bypass reason" (Davis, 2003, p. 38). In short,

training implies that the needs are beyond those of the students' while educating strives

to care for the child's needs first (Davis, 2003). Ultimately, the strength of character

development programs may be determined by their consistency, understanding of

human values, and program duration as character development that rarely focuses on

teaching, practicing and modeling personable behavior may never develop onto a way

of life. While "character is (by definition) an enduring feature of the person, a settled

disposition, something that must exist over more than a small part of one's life to exist at

all" (Davis, 2003, p. 39), character development must be a long-term, rather than short-

term process (Davis, 2003, Winton, 2008) as it must showcase knowledge and

experiences that children have participated in, in order for children to recognize the

value in strength of character modeled in themselves and others.

Weaknesses of the Character Development Initiative

Despite the efforts of the CDI, as well as other programs set in place (which

cannot be mentioned within the span of this paper) scholars believe that the CDI does

not effectively respond to the current failings within the education system and the larger

issues within society today. While the CDI was set in place to nurture and practice

universal values that schools and communities consider important (Ministry of

Education, 2008) these teachings are interrupted by reinforcing capitalist value systems

that the CSR policy reform installed. In its attempt to aid in the process of self-discovery

and moral development for young people, some research on the overall effectiveness of character-education programs recommend the underlying objective of the CDI is to modify student behaviour (Winton, 2008) and learn how to respond to authority figures (Davis, 2003). While the CDI suggested that character education is an effective way for school to work towards strengthening the character of students, scholars suggest that minimal research has been done on the effectiveness of the CDI and the changes it hopes to create (Winton, 2008). Research suggests that while many school-based intervention programs aim to improve and strengthen social and emotional capabilities, many are limited and lack important research. This eventually gave way for a new Liberal party to take McGuinty's place and continue repairing these important curricular changes.

Ontario Education under Kathleen Wynne's Liberal Party

Kathleen Wynne, previously the Minister of Education under McGuinty, began her platform under the premise that she would be governing from a more 'activist centre'. As Wynne's platform was built on strengthening Ontario's schools in the areas of child care, equity, school infrastructure, well-being, and development of community hubs, her alternative approach was positive but remained unclear. Years after the Harris government, political parties have had the opportunity to begin undoing the CSR yet, so far "no subsequent government has been able to muster up the political will to reserve key policies or to undo the damage done" (Mackenzie, 2015, p. 14). While McGuinty and Wynne have implemented positive changes in the province, it appears as though the neoliberal ideology continues to be the fuel driving their work. This is demonstrated in a letter Wynne wrote to Liz Sandals;

"Growing the economy and helping to create good jobs are fundamental to building more opportunity and security, now and in the future. That critical priority is supported by strategic investments in the talent and skills of our people, from childhood to retirement "(Wynne, 2013).

Wynne's Mandate letter outlines the importance of skills-based learning as a tool to prepare children as they lead in the global economy while serving and benefiting business and ultimately, fueling the economic growth of Ontario (Park, 2015). She suggests placing significance on developing partnerships with 'businesses, communities and people' will increase economic growth while making "a positive impact on the lives of every Ontarian" (Wynne, 2013). As balancing the budget persists as an ongoing political objective, Wynne writes that the Liberals will invest wisely in program spending initiatives "that strengthen Ontario's competitive advantage, create jobs and provide vital public services to our families" (Wynne, 2015). She explains that by continuing standardized testing this will ensure accountability in Ontario's school system (Wynne, 2015). Despite suggestions to ensure equity, provide all children equal opportunity, and promote well-being, a system that practices standardized testing (which only perpetuates competitiveness between children) cannot achieve an inclusive and accepting school climate (Wynne, 2013). Just as Character Development is said to improve academic achievement, it also addresses concerns around competition in a global economy (Winton2008). Despite plans for successful mitigation strategies to undo the CSR, a reoccurring pattern persists as many of Harris's changes remain unchanged.

Education has major implications for economic prosperity (Robinson, 2015). Despite goals towards cost-effectiveness and efficiency "the 'official' agenda for educational change shifts focus from equity considerations in schooling to those of

capital, market forces, and big businesses" (Dei & Karumanchery, 1999, p. 111). In the

last 25 years alone, business has undergone a huge transformation with the

development of technology (Robinson, 2015). The Harris government aligned with such

goals. Despite the creation of the CDI as a response to acknowledging existing issues

within the system, it appears that education policy continues to revolve around similar

neoliberal values. Given the limitations of current approaches used in school

environments, it becomes necessary to further examine character development in order

for this model to be used and developed for potential alternative approaches. In order to

work towards repairing the system "the integration of school, family, and community

partnerships needs school structure to adopt a more cooperative and collaborative

learning model" (Dei & Karumanchery, 1999, p. 127). Scholars like Berkowitz and Grych

(2000) suggest that teachers who recognize the needs of children may be able to

effectively respond and foster the development of moral reasoning, consciousness, and

self-esteem. To create lasting and impactful change not only in the lives of students but

on a larger platform as well, the educator must create change beyond the classroom.

Not only this but, parents, families, communities, and children must also continuously

work with other members of the community, to create and strengthen learning

environments, and surrounding areas as well (Fullan, 1993). However, in a climate of

austerity teachers are not provided enough time to care for each individual child, further

impairing their ability to be a good teacher and respond to needs of the child (or their

own). The learning environment is contingent upon the symbiotic relationship between

the family, school, and society. Similar to an ecosystem, all key players must equally

contribute to maintaining some form of balance. To achieve such stability and

strengthen relationships between the important players in a child's life, each must work together. Through efforts to establish a more cohesive relationship between schools and communities, certain special interest groups emerged as a result of recognizing these failings in the school system and working towards creating alternative policy.

Despite the Liberals efforts to address some of these problematic areas, I have argued that the Character Development Initiative continues to reflect the goals of neoliberalism as it perpetuates the status quo, reinforces conformity and behavior modification. With the transition from classic liberalism to neoliberalism, the focus of education again aligned with market goals through the promotion of privatization, standardized testing, career-focused education, and competition (Pinto, 2013). As neo-conservativism and neo-liberalism merge together, the priority of the market is placed on a pedestal and citizens are then treated as consumers (Pinto, 2013). As a result, by awarding increased power to private markets (Pinto, 2013) this dissolves initial commitments to young learners (Giroux, 2009). As schools continue to teach values that are inconsistent with the values education practices, competition and standardization persist. Education is a system, it functions and responds according to the harmonization of its many different parts. With little significant changes to develop alternatives within the traditional education system, schools remain stuck in a neoliberal model. While many question the restructuring requirements and need to increase educational standards, one might suggest why efforts weren't placed on improving educational outcomes instead. Until the reorganization of the education system occurs, a need for a more effective change persists.

Chapter 4: Mindfulness in Education

Some scholars assert that bullying, alcohol abuse and mental illness (e.g. depression and anxiety) can impact youth school performance, create social problems among friends and family, lead youth to make negative choices and engage in high risk behaviors, violence or suicide (O'Malley & Johnston & Bachman, 1998; Smith, Barston, Jaffe, Flores, Dumke, & Segal, 2007). Outlined in chapter two, these three main potential failings for youth are discussed as it is apparent that these complex relationships between a child's family life, upbringing, society, and school are important factors that ultimately influence family relations, peer orientation and social norms for young people. Recognizing these issues, the Character Development Initiative (CDI) was set in place to assist with the many pressures that the CSR influenced in the school system. Unfortunately, core values of neoliberalism like competition, standardized learning, and performance-based results remained consistent, even throughout the Liberals efforts to undo the CSR. These efforts made by the CDI to introduce, encourage and develop young people's value systems failed as the very school system itself did not model and practice these same values it taught. As current efforts to reduce changes have kept school systems stuck in a neoliberal model, there is no denying that the education system is in need of alternative methods and interventions, in order to address reoccurring problems that the CSR helped to create. In an education system that focuses on the needs of the system instead of the needs of each child, change becomes difficult. In this chapter, I will argue that research and current studies on the practice of mindfulness have displayed positive results for adults, and may also be an important tool in facilitating positive learning environments, for example, to assist

children into developing coping mechanisms to help deal with pressures and stress, while contributing to relationship development among youth. As schools in Ontario are increasingly searching for ways to encourage healthy learning environments and promote well-being, mindfulness research proves to be a positive practice and holds potential for youth in a classroom setting. Through a series of studies, I will demonstrate how mindfulness is being used in schools today, and how science suggests it could be an effective practice both now and in the future for youth.

Why mindfulness now?

The CSR and other major educational reforms in Ontario have placed great importance on the acquisition of knowledge with the interest of incorporating young people into the global economy (Broderick & Metz, 2009). Under the dominant culture of neoliberal capitalism, educational institutions function under objectives that require individuals to adhere to the capitalist structure, placing them in the roles of workers and consumers (Weisbaum, 2014). This reform of rapid social change has directly contributed to the standardization, performance-based testing, increase of class-size, competitive environments and reduction of resources and programs in schools (Broderick & Metz, 2009). As a result, these environments have created internal and external pressures in schools, at home, and in society. Chapter two outlined ways that internal and external failings have impacted students, and placed additional pressure on learning and parenting environments. Now, in a climate of austerity, schools have become institutional mirrors of society and are being condemned for societal shortcomings, not those of solely the schools themselves (Barlow & Robertson, 1994). As these problems persist, it becomes apparent that schools may place the importance

of other needs ahead of those of the social and emotional well-being of young people (Weisbaum, 2014). In this weakened environment, students, teachers and parents may experience what is known as 'mindlessness.'

Mindlessness

Oftentimes, instead of being present in the current moment, the mind travels from a place of the past or an expectation in the future. This means that individuals are functioning from a place of mindless repetition without learning new patterns (Napoli, Kretch, & Holley, 2005). This way of thinking can cause young adolescents to feel trapped in specific habits and may prevent alternative ways of seeing and understanding the world around them (Napoli, Kretch, & Holley, 2005). Mindlessness can be considered a process that involves the "screening out" of personal experiences, as it can place limitations on a child's ability to integrate new material with old and make sense of what they learn. One may argue the presence of mindlessness in the education system while following political objectives of the CSR. As standardization and results-based learning is encouraged under a neoliberal model, this may inhibit learning from a personal perspective, as it displays the importance of one dominant model for educating under one common goal, and at times without critical reflection on the part of students.

When an individual is out of alignment (with themselves, their environment or community) he or she may engage in negative habits which, in turn, may lead to feeling disconnected from themselves, their environment or community. In an environment where many young individuals are increasingly prone to substance use, violence, isolation, and lack of direction (Mate, 2010), it is important that children are provided the

right environment to prevent these habits from worsening or developing in the first place. In stressed parenting environments, peer orientation challenges parent-child relationships as children look up to their peers sometimes more than adult figures. The question persists, why are students out of alignment and what is contributing to this mindless environment? Research displays that supportive learning environments can exist if children receive "parental involvement in school life, homework etc; mentoring programs; supportive, positive school environments; learning supports and recreational programs in school" (Hanvey, 2006, p. 12). Therefore, a case can be made that the CDI has not facilitated changed learning environments and may not effectively contribute to positive learning environments as class size, competition, and standardized testing persist. Furthermore, it is important for children to learn in environments that encourage development and exercise these areas of the brain that facilitate experiential-based learning.

Cognitive Development

Cognitive development is a very important part of an individual's capacity to understand their environment. When young people use experience as a form of understanding and learning, it enhances levels of creativity, flexibility, and right-brain activity (Napoli, Kretch, & Holley, 2005). When children and adults turn away from mindlessness and focus on mindful actions and thoughts, this may lead to cognitive development. This is because each environment facilitates development. Mindfulness training is especially important now because according to Fisher (2006); Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor (2010), "[it] can reduce stress and improve self-confidence, relationships with others, attention, optimism, and self-esteem" (As written in Rempel,

2012, p. 203). Mindfulness can also increase a student's ability to learn and understand material (Olsen, 2014). With the use of electronic mediums in and outside of school environments, technology has not only changed learning and teaching as a practice, but also has the ability to reshape and redefine the role of the teacher (Dallaire, 2011). As schools prepare children for an ever-changing future, mindfulness may be beneficial for cognitive development and stress reduction for youth.

4.1 What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is rooted within Buddhist culture and is often practiced through meditation (Hooker & Fodor, 2008). This practice focuses on the calming of the individual or as Thich Nhat Hanh says, bringing the mind and breath back to the body. Mindfulness is defined as, "paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgementally" (Roemer, Williston, Rollins, 2015, p. 52). Mindfulness is the process of using the active mind to attain awareness, as the mind is constantly reminded not to wander into the past or future, but to remain in the present moment (Hooker & Fodor, 2008). For example, in practice, mindfulness involves, "attending to the external environment such as sights, sounds, and smells, as well as to the internal bodily sensations, thoughts and feelings" (Hooker & Fodor, 2008, p. 77). It is the space between thoughts that act as a reminder for mindfulness and provide space for enhanced understanding. When in a mindful state, the mind should not be concerned with right or wrong, good or bad, or to what level of importance something might hold (Hooker & Fodor, 2008). When attentive to mindfulness we become conscious of the physical, emotional and spiritual self (which, could be considered the natural state of the human being). In this state, the individual is not repressive of emotions but rather,

accepting and non-attaching to each moment.

Why do we need mindfulness?

Today, children and young adults are challenged by a variety of social and psychological stressors, such as competition and the constant stream of media content (Black, Belzer, Semple & Galla, 2015). These competitive environments, which are especially evident in schools, have created stressful environments for young vulnerable people. Despite the efforts to address current issues in schools, the challenges of the CDI (and various interventions) persist as it functions in a stressful environment. In the search for an alternative that not only teaches but practices consistency in its value system, mindfulness has been considered one alternative that may have the potential to increase prosocial, social-emotional development and resilience in young individuals (Black, Belzer, Semple, & Galla, 2015). In an education system where children are overly stressed, not receiving proper support (in areas for ESL and children with learning disabilities) (National Children's Alliance, 2006) and are overwhelmed, mindfulness proves to be a positive way of introducing children how to deal and manage their stress.

In 2014, Dr. Norman Bethune Collegiate Institute, (part of the Toronto District School Board) introduced mindfulness to 200 grade 9 students (Lunau, 2014). The principal stated that this mindfulness program grew out of concern from students' responses to a survey that indicated their concerns of having high personal expectations, and low concern for overall well-being (Lunau, 2014). As children are facing pressures to perform and compete academically, programs that create a foundation for child well-being become increasingly important (Dove & Costello, 2017),

especially when considering preventative measures in areas of mental health, abuse and addiction and aggression. This program led by Bethune faculty was a six-week workshop that took place over two months and focused on body scans, breathing, and emotional acceptance. The purpose of this practice was to guide young adolescents into emotional acceptance using teachings that focused on becoming aware of negative emotions (like anger and anxiety). At the end of the workshop, Bethune's administrator concluded that the children were responsive to the mindfulness program and that it was an overall positive experience for the school (Lunau, 2014). Semple, Reid, & Reid (2005) claim that perhaps mindfulness practices like these are appealing to young people because of their personalized nature. When children are able to participate and take charge of their personal growth and development (Remptel, 2012, p. 203), they may take it more seriously and recognize patterns and habits within themselves.

Scientific research on mindfulness suggests that it is a powerful practice that allows individuals to become more actively involved in their personal healing while altering their relationship to suffering in the process. Black's chart, *'Mindfulness Research Publications by Year 1980-2013'* (2014, p.7) illustrates that mindfulness research is growing exponentially. Not only could mindful practice potentially improve the personal well-being of students and teachers, but it could also act as a cost-saving initiative for the healthcare and education system as well. Unfortunately, despite the failings that have been acknowledged in schools across Ontario and discussed in this paper, mindfulness research is not yet fully utilized. This information suggests that, while the literature and evidence is increasingly more available and persuasive, Ontario's education system has not yet taken advantage of this scientific research and

ancient Buddhist practice.

Despite the various pressures and stresses young individuals face, oftentimes children are not taught how to deal with or respond to stressful and overwhelming situations. While long-term youth mindfulness practice is a relatively new field, many scholars and mindful leaders (i.e., Jon Kabat-Zinn, Thich Nhat Hanh, Jiddu Krishnamurti and Pema Chodron) believe mindfulness to be an effective way to address current challenges that people experience. Mindfulness may be an effective tool for teaching youth how to positively cope with stress and create acceptance within their own life. Mindfulness works towards training internal and external patterns of thought through increasing the awareness of certain habits, slowing them down and providing alternative or more productive ways of responding to everyday situations (Weng, 2016). Scientists who work in this area assert that, when in a state of increased consciousness, habitual cycles can be slowed as mindful practice has the ability to alter the way individuals think and the way their minds act. Mindfulness could be a revolutionary practice for young people who struggle with bullying, alcohol abuse, anxiety, and depression, as it could provide alternatives to negative habits, escapism, and promote more compassionate, understanding and accepting thoughts and actions. Current research on youth and mindful practice is in its early stages, as this growing field continues to develop.

Mindfulness: A Growing Practice

Currently, "mindfulness is being used to treat many physical and psychological problems, including stress, anxiety, depression, borderline personality disorder, chronic pain, addiction, and eating disorders" (Hooker & Fodor, 2008, p. 78). At the same time, Shonkoff, Boyce & McEwen (2009) state that there has been a strong need to support

and nurture children's health and well-being as well as aiding in the development of the mind while building resilience (As written in Greenburg & Harris, 2012). As there is emerging research that supports teaching mindfulness to children, scholars continue to examine the long-term impacts of the practice (Knowles, Goodman, Semple, 2015).

Recently, there has been a surplus of mindfulness-based research around meditation, yoga, and attention training to support personal well-being (Greenburg & Harris, 2012). While mindful practice and long-term effects on youth are still a relatively new field of research, Black, Milam & Sussman (2009) state that there are more than 800 studies on mindfulness with adult subjects (As written in Olsen, 2014) which may possess similar results in children. As mindfulness research becomes more prevalent, a greater focus on young adolescents in school will likely emerge.
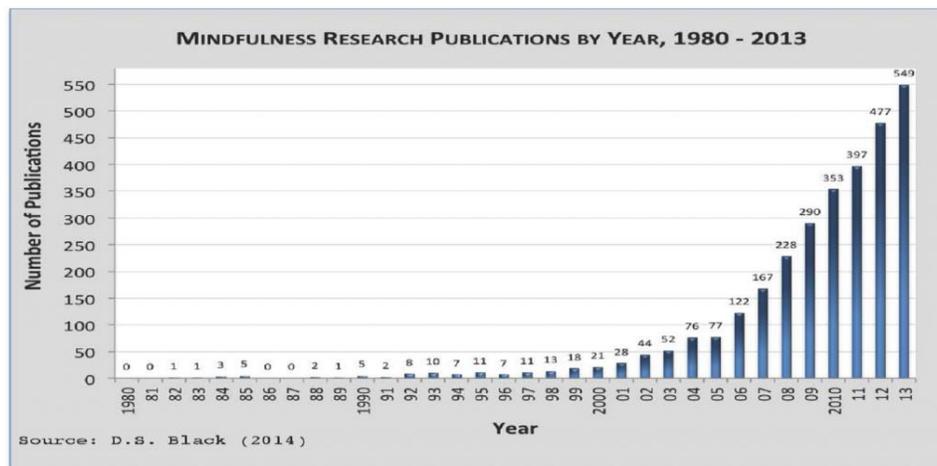
Research conducted by Black (2014) in his article *"Mindfulness-Based Interventions: An Antidote to Suffering in the Context of Substance Use, Misuse, and Addiction"* examines the relationship between mindful practice and substance use intervention. In his article he makes reference to research conducted by Jon Kabat-Zinn which mentions how Kabat-Zinn contributed to innovative alternatives to stress reduction, later developing Mindful Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) clinics. Through

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Kabat-Zinn's research, Black highlights how participants in the MBSR's eight-week long program were taught to differentiate between true experience and thoughts of discomfort while recognizing how each experience is 'workable' (Black, 2014). Black highlights the importance of this program and how mindfulness is shown to improve individuals' awareness in differentiating between personal capabilities and acceptance of all life experiences (Black, 2014). By doing so, individuals become directly engaged in personal healing, relief, and the recovery process. Black supports the belief that mindfulness can be used as a low-cost, practical approach, where participants are active members of their own personal healing as they begin to understand suffering on a personal and universal scale (Black, 2014). In the context of substance use (to be further discussed in this chapter), Black's research on mindfulness may be an effective practice to help individuals establish a sense of personal control while altering their perceptions and understanding of suffering. Therefore, this knowledge is significant in challenging future areas of medical research, as it creates distance from modern perspectives around what it means to 'cure' and instead confronts individuals to seek acceptance through responding to their initial and internal difficulties (Black, 2014). Black (2014) agrees that while mindfulness has shared various successes, there remain gaps in the areas of school-based substance use prevention programs and data collected on youth.

Current research (as displayed in the chart above) clearly presents mindfulness as a popular study and growing body of knowledge. Black (2014) explains that the 21st century marks the most notable peak in mindfulness research ever recorded. In 2010 alone, there were more than 350 scholarly articles published on the topic of mindfulness

(Black, 2014), which nearly doubled three years later in 2013. In earlier years, Black

conducted research investigating mindfulness and its effectiveness on youth and young

people in his article '*Sitting-meditation Interventions Among Youth: A Review of*

Treatment Efficiency.' In this review, Black explains the health-related effects of sitting

meditation on young children aged 6 to 18 (Black, 2009). After reviewing 16 studies on

mindfulness with youth he found that, sitting meditation was an effective treatment for

"physiologic, psychosocial, and behavioral problems among children and adolescents"

(Black, 2009, p. 538).

    In other research, Arias, Steinberg, Banga & Trestman (2006) and Kabat-Zinn

(2003), claim mindful-based research with adults has displayed clear benefits in health

promotion, pain alleviation, and the reduction of anxiety and depression (As written in

Greenburg & Harris, 2012). Furthermore, despite the gaps in research on the long-term

impacts of practicing mindfulness education in children, Davidson et al (2003) suggests

that basic research has demonstrated that the organization and action of neural circuitry

is associated with how the body responds to stress (As written in Greenburg & Harris,

2012, p. 161). If this information is basic knowledge, then there is little surprise as to

why mindful practices have since been adopted as a tool for children and young

adolescents as a tool to help cope with stresses, challenges, and difficulties.

Furthermore, there is great need to examine the impacts of mindfulness in the areas of

personal well-being, enhancement of moods, and self-regulation (Black, 2009).

4.2 Mindfulness Science

    Researchers assert that mindful practice can transfer skills (i.e., emotional,

cognitive, biological etc.) and alter levels of stress, anxiety and depressive symptoms

as well as the way people communicate with one another (Weng, 2016). Science has

proven that each activity creates a response from the brain (Weng, 2016). Each

thought, sensation or feeling is the direct result of a series of signals delivered to

neurons (one of the types of brain cells) (Wardle & Weinhardt, 2013). When practicing

mindfulness, the act of being mindful allows for the brain to work on acceptance and

understanding while avoiding resistance throughout daily life experiences (Weng, 2016).

In fact, meditation has the capacity to alter the structure and function of the brain

altogether (Davidson & Lutz, 2008). This is evident when examining mindfulness and

the limbic system.

Perhaps one of the most studied areas of the brain in relation to mindfulness is

the limbic system. The limbic system is primarily composed of different parts that control

emotional response and memory (Wardle & Weinhardt, 2013). One important area

related to this study is the amygdalae. The amygdalae are two small masses located on

either sides of the brain designed to obtain and transmit information to other structures

of the brain (Wardle & Weinhardt, 2012). The amygdalae are very important parts of the

brain when responding and understanding environments (especially if stressed or

anxious) as it triggers the fight, flight or freeze reaction (Wardle & Weinhardt, 2013).

According to Davidson (1998), Davidson and Irwin (1999) and Lapate et al., (2012) the

function of the amygdalae are impaired when an individual suffers from disorder or

recalls emotional events (As written in Desbordes, Negi, Pace, Wallace & Schwartz,

2012). These disorders include those outlined in chapter two of this paper (i.e., anxiety

and depression) as well as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). While the

amygdalae are involved in stress regulation, they also utilize the brain's memory to

guide emotional understanding and learning (Wardle & Weinhardt, 2013). This area of the brain may benefit from mindfulness as it works to reverse emotional responses and develop new habits. In the chart below, I have created a similar cycle to that of Weng (2010) which I use to explain the cycle of suffering with mindful practice.
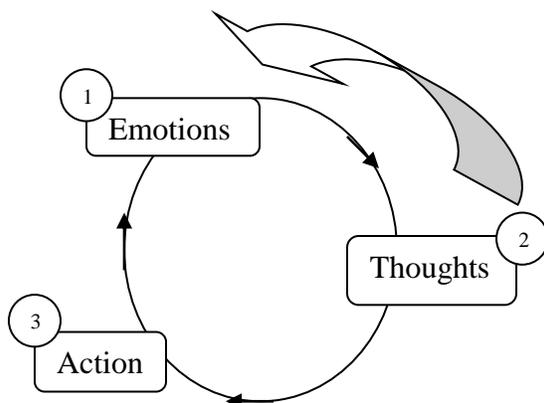
According to Weng (2010), the three main components of suffering are emotion, thought, and action. Mindfulness has the ability to guide the part of the brain controlled by emotion towards accepting feelings and experiences (Weng, 2010). Instead of reacting to an experience, Weng suggests that mindfulness works toward re-training the brain to respond to a situation with a constructive and more positive response.

This data was displayed in a study at the University of Wisconcsin-Madison where the brains of Tibetan Buddhist monks were studied at the Waiseman Laboratory for Brain Imaging and Behavior. Findings from this and other similar studies have demonstrated that long-term meditation (over tens of thousands of hours) has the ability to alter not only the structure but the function of the brain itself (Davidson & Lutz, 2008). Davidson, Lutz (2008) and Weng (2016) suggest that neuroplasticity is an important process to consider when people meditate or engage in mindful practice. Neuroplasticity is "the brain's ability to reorganize itself by forming new neural connections throughout

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life. Neuroplasticity allows the neurons (nerve cells) in the brain to compensate for injury and disease and to adjust their activities in response to new situations or to changes in their environment" (www.medicinenet.com). Essentially, neuroplasticity suggests that through repeated life experiences, the brain is continuously shaped over time (Shapiro, 2014). Weng (2016), Davison & Lutz (2008) believe that meditation or mindful training is no different than other skills acquired by an individual and that each experience, meditation included, can result in "plastic" changes in the brain (Davison & Lutz, 2008). In Davidson & Lutz's (2008) research, functional magnetic imaging (fMRI) which uses magnetic energy to measure brain function was used to measure the iron in the blood. Weng (2008) states that the greater the blood flow to a region in the brain, the greater the brain activity. Therefore, blood in the brain that has a high percentage of oxygen has a different magnetic property than regular blood (Weng, 2008). This is measured through fMRI wherein grey and white matter displayed in different areas of the brain. While a decrease in grey matter in certain areas of the brain is a result of PTSD, depression, and anxiety, imaging of long-term mediators displayed a thickening of grey matter material (Brown, 2013). Monk's who practiced meditation frequently displayed results indicating less activation of the amygdala when exposed to emotional sounds than those who rarely practiced mindfulness (Davidson & Lutz, 2008). This finding suggests that when practiced regularly, meditation may result in a quieter and more peaceful mindset where being attentive requires reduced effort (Rubia, 2009).

Mindfulness and family, school and society

Children are largely influenced by their family, school and society. These mediums play a very important role in shaping the value systems and character of each

child. With young people experiencing high levels of stress, it becomes important to examine why aggression, violence, anxiety, competition, and behavioral changes (Napoli, Kretch, & Holley, 2005) are becoming more evident and how they might be influenced by these factors. Scholar and author Gabor Mate (2010) outlines the importance of supportive parenting environments and the impact that healthy relationships have on the development of the prefrontal cortex (as written in Chapter 2). This area of the brain, the pre-frontal cortex, supports many functions including how people communicate with others, how we understand others, balance our emotions, provide insight, and empathy (Mate, 2016). These functions are not only supported by nurturing parent-child relationships, but also through the practice of mindfulness (Mate, 2016). The pre-frontal cortex develops under the impact of its environment and strengthens when exercised in a proper setting (Mate, 2016).

As external social problems and stress-related health issues leave many children with stomach disorders, headaches, and asthma, schools are now required to work towards addressing some of these issues relating to adolescent stress (Napoli, Kretch, & Holley, 2005). Stress management and coping mechanisms are especially important for children who are living in violent areas, aggressive households or poverty rich suburbs (Napoli, Kretch, & Holley, 2005), as children are vulnerable when exposed to these environments and may mimic behaviors. Stress management is especially important, Eccles (1999) suggests, during times of early adolescence, as ages 9 – 12 are the most dramatic years where major changes (e.g. physical, social, emotional) occur (As written in Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010). Given the prevalence of negative emotional symptoms in young people, it is necessary that long-term considerations are

in place to provide support that fosters well-being (Dove & Costello, 2017). Children

who are taught stress reduction and relaxation techniques work towards preventing

stress (or mental illness) from carrying over to adulthood (Napoli, Kretch, & Holley,

2005). This is summarized in a lecture when Mate explained the importance of youth

developing 'adaptive mechanisms' that would assist them with early stress in onset and

adaptive situations. He suggests that if these mechanisms are established they will

improve health, communication, relationships, learning, the ability to adapt (Mate,

2016). These coping mechanisms are not only preventative and protective measures

but necessary tools for youth experiencing peer pressures, competitiveness and

educational stresses (standardized testing) evident in the failings highlighted in the

following segment.

4.3 Mindfulness for Bullying/Cyber bullying

Mindfulness studies have demonstrated positive results towards the

effectiveness of mindfulness. Flores (2013); Roser & Pinela (2014) explain that

mindfulness and compassion may be an effective method for bully mitigation strategies.

Flores (2013) asserts that mindfulness acts as an anchor that strengthens the mind to

work towards more constructive and positive reactions instead of reacting to everyday

situations, including unpleasant mindful states. As chapter two highlights, bullying can

lead to eating disorders, aggression, depression, violence, substance abuse and suicide

(Klein, 2012) and it becomes increasingly important to explore methods that may

increase compassion and empathy in the lives of youth which could further impact peer

pressure and peer orientation. In an article called "*Mindfulness and compassion training

in adolescents: A developmental contemplative science perspective"* Roser and Pinela

(2014) explore mindfulness and compassion as a possible method for schools to support positive youth development and help prevent difficult social-emotional experiences.

Mindfulness programs focusing on compassion and loving-kindness aim to work towards creating an environment that adolescents need, and one that aids in positive development (Roser & Pinela, 2014). When practicing mindfulness, triggers that would otherwise set off aggressive behaviors, instead create space for the observation of emotions and acceptance (Flores, 2013). When individuals understand themselves better, are connecting with who they are, and become familiar with thoughts and emotions associated with non-judgementally, they can also be used towards understanding their peers (Gonynor, 2016).

> More mindful youth may be less inclined to bullying because they are more likely to see the positive and strengths in others, rather than the deficits. More mindful youth have also been shown to be more self-regulated and better able to control their impulses, which may contribute to more mindful reactions to being bullied rather than reacting aggressively (Gonynor, 2016, p. 5).

Germer & Neff (2013) explain that mindfulness increases balance and clarity as it encourages the mind to accept and acknowledge emotions that might otherwise be ignored (As written in Gonynor, 2016). Mindfulness and compassion practiced with adults have displayed changes in attention, emotional regulation, mental clarity, and increased individual understanding (Roser & Pinela, 2014). If practicing adults are able to achieve these results, considerations should be made around how loving-kindness and compassion meditation would impact children if these same adults (practicing mindfulness) taught these values to youth. Creating the right kind of environment for these values to flourish begins with developing parent-child attachment relationships so

that children have proper supports (instead of their peers) to look up to as they grow (Mate, 2010). If "a child shapes the behavior of his or her parents and, in turn, the parents shape the behavior of their child", then the parent-child relationship plays an important role in children's development (Singh, Lancioni, Winton, Singh, Curtis, Wahler & McAleavey, 2007, p. 750). Self-compassion is an important tool that allows students to recognize the universality of emotions (Gonyor, 2016). As mindfulness and mindful-based practices encourage empathy, creativity, positive relationships, compassionate environments and self-development (Rempel, 2012), mindfulness may improve overall emotional regulation towards friends, parents, teachers and personal well-being reducing belittlement and elitism, and instead, focus on equity and compassion. These values are important when communicating with others and caring for ourselves.

4.4 Mindfulness for Mental Illness

Mental health issues have been recognized as a major concern by educators, clinicians and researchers due to the prevalence and persistence of various psychological health conditions among children and young people (Loeber et al, 1993). Shapiro et al., (2008) believes that children struggling with mental illness are sometimes susceptible to increased distraction, impaired ability to focus, and weak organizational skills (As written in Rempel, 2012). Research suggests that early interventions to strengthen social and emotional skills may prevent future mental health conditions from emerging in the lives of youth (Schonert-Reichl & Stewart Lawlor, 2010). Recently, researchers have been using Mindful-based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), a form of mindful-based techniques derived from MBSR (Rempel, 2012). This is demonstrated in the study '*Minding the Mind: The Effects and Potential of a School-Based Meditation*

Programme for Mental Health Promotion'.

In 2006 a mental health promoting meditation program was introduced into 31 Catholic schools in Queensland, Australia involving over 10,000 students aged 5 -18 (Campion & Rocco, 2009). Interested in the effects of the initial program, an evaluation was conducted in 2007 between August and September at the three participating schools. With nearly 1000 students in the study, a select 54 students (7-12 years), 19 teachers and 7 parents were interviewed (Campion &Rocco, 2009). Three different schools took part in this study, each practicing meditation. School A practiced meditation daily (15 minutes), school B practiced meditation weekly, and school C practiced meditation three times a week (Campion & Rocco, 2009). The results were based on gathering information about the changes that occurred while practicing mindfulness (at varying levels) in schools A, B, and C, overall result of program, and effects of mindfulness (i.e., calming and relaxation, emotional regulation, stress management, concentration, socio-emotion, well-being, and classroom behaviour) (Campion & Rocco, 2009). Student-based results displayed significant states of increased relaxation and calmness, improved concentration, and positive improvements towards control of anger and stress reduction (Campion & Rocco, 2009). Teachers reported (on behalf of effects of meditation program on students) there was a significant increase in relaxation and calming, calming, and 37% of teachers suggest relaxation, anger control, and stress reduction also improved (Campion & Rocco, 2009).

As children are struggling with anxiety or depression at younger ages than usual it becomes increasingly important to work towards change (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2016). If children knew how to apply mindfulness to their lives, they could

utilize these skills throughout their childhood and adult years. Individuals who are taught

proper deep meditation breathing techniques allow for the amygdalae to be calmed,

increasing the ability for individuals to make rational decisions (Tran, 2013). Cooney,

Joormann, Eugene, Dennis and Gotlib (2010) suggest this practice may also display

positive findings when examining the cortical midline structures (CMS) of the brain, as

research displays "depressed subjects have increased neural activity during rumination

in the CMS, amygdale, and other regions"(As written in Marchand, 2012, p. 2).

Mindfulness may also be beneficial for slowing down and intervening depressive or

anxious thoughts as Coffman et al, (2006) and Teasdale et al. (1995) claim mindful

interventions decrease pondering (As written in Zoogman, Goldberg, Hoyt, and Miller,

2015). If mindfulness was used as a tool to help young people experiencing feelings of

hopelessness, worthlessness or emptiness, low energy levels, trouble concentrating, or

suicidal thoughts (National Institute of Mental Health, 2016) and those struggling with

anxiety and depression, it could create space for positive experiential self-reflection,

awareness to personal feelings, thoughts and body sensations, and engagement to

personal experiences (Zoogman, Goldberg, Hoyt, and Miller, 2015). In cases where

addictive or negative habits are taken up, this may also provide positive results.

4.5 Mindfulness for Substance Abuse/Use

Himelstein (2015) believes that despite negative reputations, young substance

users use drugs and alcohol as a tool or coping mechanism to meet challenging

realities in their personal lives. Himelstein (2012) and Black (2014) believe that as

mindful practices have displayed positive results for pain patients in the past

(Himelstein, 2012) perhaps they could also benefit substance abusers. Most

importantly, mindfulness could provide an alternative tool, instead of alcohol or drugs, for youth to cope with self-management and relapse. These results are displayed in the works of Himelstein.

In 2011, Himelstein conducted a survey examining mindfulness-based substance abuse treatments for incarcerated youth (Himelstein, 2011). The study was based on an 8-week mindfulness-based intervention that examined 60 incarcerated youth who struggled with substances. This research aimed to further explore and measure adolescent impulsiveness, drug risk levels, and self-regulation strategies. The intervention focused on teaching mindfulness, breathing exercises, hatha yoga, body scan meditation, drug education, and group discussion (Himelstein, 2011). The results displayed that of the 80% who completed the study (12 students dropped the intervention due to release) experienced a decrease in impulsive behaviors, and increase in drug risk and no difference in self-regulation (Himelstein, 2012). Participants also concluded the program to be a positive experience full of rich learning content (Himelstein, 2012). "This study supports previous research (e.g., Biegal et al., 2009; Bowen et al., 2009; Himelstein et al., in press) demonstrating that mindfulness-based interventions are feasible treatments for adolescent and substance using populations" (Himelstein, 2011, p. 7).

As Forrest (1997) explained in chapter two, alcohol abuse "synergizes depression, impairs judgment, facilitates confusion and irrational thinking, and thus contributes to all forms of self-destructive behaviour, including suicide" (p. 23). He further asserts that alcohol dependence provides escapism and temporarily helps young people cope with stress and anxiety (Forrest, 1997). If this is the case, mindfulness may

be an effective and positive measure of supplying young people with methods of dealing with stress and working towards acceptance. Mindfulness allows for individuals to become heavily invested in their personal well-being and become actively involved in their healing process, altering their relationship to suffering (Black, 2014). This is especially important when considering the addictive qualities of substance abuse, as mindfulness helps teach the mind not to react or seek comfort in cravings but work towards achieving acceptance (Black, 2014).

Mindfulness as a Tool

Mindfulness provides an alternative way of viewing and understanding how each environment impacts the development of the mind. When observed, these experiences contribute to the development of happier and healthier individuals (Willard, 2015). Mindfulness is built on the foundation that by making conscious decisions to respond rather than react, the individual has the potential to create positive outcomes. Some scholars suggest that students who practice mindfulness are provided a deeper sense of self-acceptance, self-regulation, empathy, compassion and a more balanced behavior in school (Gonynor, 2016). Not only does mindful practice contribute to the well-being (which directly impacts the environment and interactions one shares with others), but it aids in relaxation, lowers stress levels and re-grounds children to an environment in which they feel safe. This, in turn, contributes to positive peer relations and communication with others (Gonynor, 2016).

Mindfulness Programs

There are new and emerging mindfulness programs for children and young adolescents that work towards stress reduction, mood regulation, and teachings

in acceptance, compassion, and non-judgement. Some of the most popular mindfulness programs include MindUP, The Mindfulness in Schools Project (.b), InnerKids, Center for Mindful Learning, Mindful Schools and A Still Quiet Place, to name a few. There are also a variety of apps available that allow individuals to begin or strengthen their practice. These programs include: Headspace, Stop, Breathe and Think, Smiling Mind, and Take a break. A variety of mindfulness programs operate in different parts of British Columbia and Ontario. Some schools have even begun using meditation in the place of behavior mediation. Robert W. Coleman, an Elementary school in Baltimore began using the 'Mindful Moment Room' instead of detention as a means of calming the student with breathing exercises and providing a safe space where needs can be met (Bloom, 2016). The school reported that since the creation of the Mindful Moment room there have been no suspensions (Bloom, 2016).

When considering potential programs or workshops that TDSB might undertake to introduce the practice of mindfulness into its curriculum, there are various approaches. Through my own experience working at a holistic private school (that practices mindfulness), core teachings focus on the significance of virtues. While many character development programs educate through teachings of values (which might be culture specific), I believe education based on virtues (universal values respected by all cultures and faiths), work to create a foundation for mindfulness. The value of teaching virtues (like compassion, empathy, forgivingness, patience, loyalty etc...) and then practicing mindfulness may provide a deeper understanding when an individual connects to his/her environment. The combination of teaching virtues and mindfulness establishes a foundation for mindfulness programs to effectively take place. This is

because, as Paul Loranger explains, while science can quantifiably explain the state of our environment, it cannot explain the qualitative connectedness an individual feels for or appreciates when in this setting (People for Education, 2007). In essence, when we do not make time to connect, appreciate and make inquiries about our environment, we cannot expect to understand and appreciate it. Utilizing mindfulness and teachings of virtues may provide a strong framework that could be integrated into curricula. If educators and students practice, discuss, and self-evaluate these virtues in their lives while taking 5-10 minutes a day to focus on breathing, change could result. Mindfulness presents an opportunity to connect with these environments and may, in turn, transform the very environment itself.

Conclusion

Social-emotional well-being remains a significant challenge for educators and parents as the Ontario education system fails to focus on certain needs of the child. In a school system stuck in a neoliberal model that often places economic growth ahead of the well-being and needs of children, the goals of education become blurred. Under the Conservative ruling of the Harris government, political changes created a movement for special interest groups and NGO's, which helped to give rise to the growing popularity of mindfulness. The very things that the CSR cut from the education system became evident in the external environments, giving rise to alternative programs, initiatives, and mindfulness movement. The CSR gave rise to a call for change as it needed the very same things the CSR had extinguished from the education system. As mindfulness offers Ontario educators an opportunity to expand the narrowing of what neoliberalism has done, it could potentially have great impacts on children and young adolescents

throughout their school years and the rest of their lives. Unfortunately, despite the cost-effectiveness of mindfulness and the abundance of science that exists, Ontario schools have not yet effectively utilized this research.

In this paper I have argued that while the education system appears to be locked in a neoliberal model, mindfulness research has shown to be an effective alternative practice that aids in resiliency, fosters positive relationships, reduces and addresses mental illness, including depression, anxiety, PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), addiction and chronic pain. Research shows that the practice of mindfulness proves to be an effective way to teach stress reduction, provide coping mechanisms and reduce symptoms of mental illness later in life. While there are many struggles in an austere environment, mindfulness is a cost-effective, free, universal practice that can be used at any time. Practicing mindfulness invites authenticity as it creates space for human connection, unity, and positive behavior (Himelstein, 2013). Above all, for structures to change, there must be change in what people do and what they feel (Hochschild, 2003). As Hochschild (2003) says, "for structures come with- and also 'are' – emotional cultures. A change in structure requires a change in emotional culture [too]" (p. 203). If mindfulness was utilized by teachers, parents, and students, it could potentially help individuals to feel more connected to themselves, their communities and their environments. Furthermore, while past solutions to improve and strengthen the education system have involved much thought and planning, ironically, the solution may lie within thinking less and practicing the art of doing nothing.

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