A Presence of Obligation: Cyberbehaviour, Policy, and Restorative Practices

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Abstract

Ontario Safe Schools’ policies have undergone major changes over the last 15 years. Zero tolerance policies and practices of the 1990’s have given way to more progressive approaches to school discipline that include restorative practices to keep students safe. In this study, 9 secondary school vice principals, those administrators typically charged with discipline in schools, were asked a series of questions on school policy, cyber behaviour, and restorative practices. Over a 6-week period, using a NING (a private social network) vice principals responded by blogging. The results of the study indicate that secondary school vice principals analyse the problems that affect the safe and caring cultures of their schools and identify remedies to those problems even when issues precede the policy and extend beyond it. Secondary school vice principals in this study use and adapt restorative practices and recognize that while restoring relationships in schools is not always possible, common understandings can still be achieved. Also, while school administrators use relevant Web 2.0 technologies in the work they do in the schools, they express hesitation and wariness when it comes to their personal use or wider professional use.

Keywords: safe school policy, restorative practices, cyber behaviour, vice principals
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1.0 A Shifting Educational Policy Landscape

Technology is changing the nature of community. Some people will recall that in the past, community lay largely in the domain of the family, school, and ostensibly religion. Technology-supported verbal communication occurred on a telephone that used a land line and was quite often situated in a kitchen or other central meeting place where conversations were overheard by others. Nowadays, adolescent communication, aided by technologies like cell phones and the Internet, can take place from any location at any hour of the day or night and without the scrutiny of adult members of the family.

The advent of social media that includes Facebook, Vine, Twitter, Instagram and cell phone correspondence has seen with it a decline of social regulation and with it a social presence (proximal regulation) (Aragon, 2003) as communication devices are no longer in a central shared place but on the person or in the bedroom of the adolescent. Social presence, which Rettie (2003) refers to as judging the other participant’s perception, helps regulate social interaction or social conduct, but this interaction changes in a texting or social media environment.

At the same time, Grossi and dos Santos (2012) find an increase in aggression, bullying, and cyberbullying in adolescents whose online activity has a growing impact in schools. These phenomena are frequently reported in media like newspapers (Fong, 2012) and the Internet. Bill 13 (Legislative Assembly of Ontario, 2012) also responds to these phenomena by requiring schools to address harassment, bullying, and discrimination, even though many of these cyber events occur outside the school day. Bill 13 builds upon previous legislation that considers more progressive and restorative responses in addition to interventions that include suspension and expulsion, and while these interventions must be considered, they must follow an investigation by the schools beforehand.
In the context of this complex policy landscape, this study attempts to answer two questions: 1. How is the process of a shifting, more progressive and restorative Ontario safe schools education policy enacted in the views of secondary school administrators? and 2. What are their experiences with related Web 2.0 technologies, behaviours, and the nature of social presence in their communities?

While studies examining the efficacy of restorative practices have been undertaken (Boulton & Mirsky, 2006; Calhoun & Daniels, 2008) including in the areas of bullying and school culture (Grossi & dos Santos, 2012), little evidence exists about the effectiveness of restorative practices in response to adolescent cyberbullying and aggression. This study considers this gap and attempts to address it. It also attempts to extend current research literature (Leithwood & Azah, 2014; Pollock, 2014) that highlights the impact of safe schools policies on school administrators by considering the perspectives of the vice principals who enact them.

This study involves 9 secondary school vice principals encompassing 3 school boards in Ontario, Canada in both rural and urban schools. Over the course of six weeks, 9 administrators completed an initial brief demographic survey (Appendix A). They then responded to six research questions (Appendix B) interacting with each other in the process on a private social media network “NING”.

This study considers current research on bullying and cyberbullying and its prevalence in schools. It also considers schools as communities through the perspectives of participating vice principals. It examines shifts in safe schools policy in Ontario education that reveal changing disciplinary approaches including the use of restorative practices. In considers the origins of restorative practices as well as the principles and theories connected to them as they apply to
Ontario secondary school practices. Finally, it considers Ontario safe school policy and relevant theories on policy analysis.

The research methodology used in this study is mixed, but essentially qualitative. Data sources are a survey and the NING postings over six weeks. Findings from this study indicate that in this era of increased online outside-of-school communication, vice principals feel a strong sense of obligation to keep students safe which includes but is not limited to the policy imperatives, and extends beyond the locus of the classroom or the school building.

2.0 Review of the Literature

This literature review draws upon a number of considerations that are part of the shifting and evolving nature of specific Ontario safe schools policies that have been developed to respond to emerging issues over the last fifteen years. As such, this literature review considers the following topics: research on the complex issue of cyberbullying and its relation to schools; research on the use and context of restorative interventions in secondary schools; and theories related to policy development and implementation in schools. From this review of the literature, a theoretical framework emerges that supports the collection and analysis of the data from this study.

2.1 Bullying and Cyberbullying

This section of the literature review examines the current field of research that includes bullying and the more recent phenomenon of cyberbullying, the role of schools as communities in relation to these phenomena, and the changing nature of responses to these incidents historically, from punitive to restorative measures.

While there is a growing contention that bullying, cyberbullying, and online aggression affect adolescent populations, it is a “relatively new and emerging field of research” (Cassidy,
Faucher & Jackson, 2013, p. 576). Current research literature (Boulton & Mirsky, 2006; Calhoun & Daniels, 2008; Grossi & dos Santos, 2012; Hasenstab, 2012; Mark & Ratliffe, 2011) would indicate cyberbullying is an international phenomenon. Because adolescents are legally required to be in school each day, and because policy continues to influence every aspect of education (Levin, 2008) it is clear that schools bear some responsibility for responding to bullying and online aggression (Boulton & Mirsky, 2006; Calhoun & Daniels, 2008; Grossi & dos Santos, 2012; Hasenstab, 2012; Mark & Ratliffe, 2011).

Non-punitive interventions that increase individual responsibility in students and increase empathy are presented as desirable (Boulton & Mirsky, 2006; Calhoun & Daniels, 2008; Grossi & dos Santos, 2012; Hasenstab, 2012; Cassidy et al., 2013) and reflect changes in government policy and practice (Team, SSA, 2006) that parallel the growth of Information and Communications Technology and new understandings of the inequities of punitive practices in schools (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2007). Given this prevalence and the school’s expected mandate to intervene, restorative practices, a means of repairing harm done to others, have the potential to effectively respond to bullying and cyberbullying. Restorative practices can also be considered as a response to online aggression.

2.1.1 Prevalence of bullying.

Bullying and cyberbullying are prevalent social phenomena that affect adolescents. Given the global access of young people to technology that includes the Internet, social media, and cell phones, each of which can establish instantaneous and anonymous communication, this level of online aggression is perceived to be increasing (Calhoun & Daniels, 2008) although this increase is not necessarily reflected in all research (Cassidy et al., 2013, p. 576). Mark and Ratliffe (2011) establish that 33% of female students and 20% of male students in Hawaiian middle
schools have experienced bullying (p. 99). That number grows to 80% in Grossi and dos Santos study of Brazilian schools (2012). Using a nation-wide focus, Hasenstab contends that over 160,000 students in the United States miss school every day because of issues of bullying and cyberbullying (2012). Even when bullying is not explicitly named in research that examines harm done in schools to students by students, (Boulter & Mirsky, 2006; Calhoun & Daniels, 2008), “harmful behavior” continues to be a serious problem in schools (Calhoun & Daniels, 2008). Research would indicate that bullying and cyberbullying are prevalent social phenomena affecting students. In summary, multiple researchers indicate that bullying and cyberbullying are prevalent social phenomena.

2.1.2 School as community.

The role of schools with respect to bullying and cyberbullying is multi-faceted. For example, because adolescents are legally required to be in school each day, it is both understood and expected that schools bear some responsibility for responding to bullying and online aggression (Boulton & Mirsky, 2006; Calhoun & Daniels, 2008; Grossi & dos Santos, 2012; Hasenstab, 2012; Mark & Ratliffe, 2011).

Schools themselves provide the conditions for and access to data collection (Boulton & Mirsky, 2006; Calhoun & Daniels, 2008; Grossi & dos Santos, 2012; Hasenstab, 2012; Mark & Ratliffe, 2011) as they offer a repository of policy actors including vice principals. School legislation and policy are often identified as the means to respond to bullying and cyberbullying and other aggressive acts that students commit (Boulton & Mirsky, 2006; Calhoun & Daniels, 2008; Grossi & dos Santos, 2012; Hasenstab, 2012; Mark & Ratliffe, 2011).

A positive school culture is necessary to respond to bullying, cyberbullying and other aggressive actions of students according to Boulton and Mirsky who argue that these events
impact adolescents so negatively that a counter-cultural response, exclusively the school’s, is required (2006, p. 89). The same school-based counter-cultural response, identified as a culture of peace, is also the expectation of Grossi and dos Santos (2012).

Finally, as “few systems have the power to influence a child with the intensity of the peer group within the school setting” (Hasenstab, 2012) school administration is also perceived to be key in establishing a safe school culture. From monitoring through data collections, to policy responses, to school culture involvement, to parent engagement, schools are considered to be situated to respond to bullying and online aggression.

**2.1.3 Shifts in disciplinary approaches.**

If more recent policy is an indication, non-punitive interventions that increase individual responsibility and decrease exclusion are becoming desirable. Some researchers contend that traditional, punitive measures are no longer effective given the kind of social, political, and economic pressures students face (Boulton & Mirsky, 2006; Calhoun & Daniels, 2008, Hasenstab, 2012). These social and political expectations, embedded in school policy and legislation, have shifted from those of *zero tolerance* to those that are restorative (Grossi & dos Santos, 2012, p. 134).

Face-to-face accountability and responsibility are more effective than exclusionary practices like suspensions and expulsions (Calhoun & Daniels, 2008), practices that school administrators, they argue, are too quick to utilize because they are unaware of the other possibilities (Calhoun & Daniels, 2008; Hasenstab, 2012).

Finally, while social media and the Internet ferment the anonymity that begets aggression in students (Mark & Ratcliffe, 2011), it is believed that face-to-face interaction, the key aspect of restorative conferencing, (Grossi & dos Santos, 2012) offsets anonymity and exclusion.
Restorative Practices, which require the voluntary participation of both the victim and the offender in order to take place, yield greater accountability because they bring both parties together (Boulton & Mirsky, 2006; Calhoun & Daniels, 2008; Grossi & dos Santos, 2012). This lack of face-to-face interaction is considered to be the underlying cause of cyber aggression (Mark & Ratliffe, 2011).

According to McCluskey, Lloyd, Stead, Kane, Riddell, and Weedon, (2008b) it is evident that cyberbullying and online aggression continue to affect adolescent populations and are compounded by the use of technologies that include social media. Research indicates (Wachtel, 2002; Zehr, 2002) that restorative practices, a means of repairing harm done to others in community, have some potential to effectively respond to cyberbullying.

2.2 Restorative Practices

While the term *restorative practices* and *restorative justice* are often spoken synonymously, it is important to note how they are distinguished by those who have pioneered them. Ted Wachtel, a former teacher and founder of the International Institute of Restorative Practices, defines the term *restorative practices* as “the use of informal and formal processes that precede wrongdoing…build relationships and a sense of community to prevent conflict and wrongdoing” (Wachtel, 2012) (italics added).

He explains that the term *restorative practices* is derived from restorative justice and the work of Howard Zehr (2002). Zehr, a criminologist whose work has evolved from the Mennonite tradition, defines *restorative justice* as “a process to involve, to the extent possible, those who have a stake in a specific offense to collectively identify and address harms, needs and obligations in order to heal and put things as right as possible” (p. 77). Thus, restorative justice is a reactive response to wrongdoing and restorative practices are aimed at prevention.
The Safe Schools Action Team of the Ontario Ministry of Education also suggests that safe schools policies include restorative practices as part of a continuum of preventive strategies (Team SSA, 2006). In order to understand how restorative practices came to be used in schools, it is necessary to understand its origins in the legal system (Zehr, 2002).

2.2.1 Origins of restorative justice.

Zehr contends that the legal system has influenced both the general public and the education system (2002). Perceived limitations in the justice system, he writes, that have affected victims, offenders, and law professionals (2002) have given way to restorative justice which attempts to address these limitations. He states:

Restorative justice is a process that involves, to the extent possible, those who have a stake in a specific offense and to collectively identify and address harms, needs, and obligations, in order to heal and put things as right as possible. (p. 37)

The United Nations offers a definition of a restorative process, defining it as “any process in which the victim and the offender, and, where appropriate, any other individuals or community members affected by a crime, participate together actively in the resolution of matters arising from the crime, generally with the help of a facilitator” (United Nations, 2006).

According to Zehr, in traditional judicial practice, the needs of victims, which include information, truth telling, empowerment, and vindication or restitution, are not met. The needs of the offenders, whose needs are different from the victim but still connected to the incident, are not met either. These needs include empathy, accountability, encouragement, and restraint (Zehr, 2002).

In order to understand what restorative justice is, Zehr makes a case for what it is not:

- It is not about forgiveness or reconciliation;
- It is not mediation;
- It is not designed to reduce repeat infractions;
● It is not a program;
● It is not primarily intended for minor offenses;
● It is not a North American development. (Zehr, 2002)

Zehr also indicates that restorative justice has its origins in the Mennonite populations in Ontario, Canada and Indiana, USA (2002). He maintains that it has also evolved into a variety of cultural and religious traditions and draws significantly on the traditions of the aboriginal communities of North America and New Zealand. Wachtel, on the other hand, maintains that it is connected to the Victim Offender Reconciliation Program that begin in the US and Canada in the 1970’s and 1980’s (2002). Regardless, restorative justice is not a panacea, is not an alternative to prison, nor is it necessarily the opposite of retribution (Zehr, 2002).

2.2.2 Restorative principles.

If the legal system metes out consequences that are punitive, authoritarian (Zehr, 2002), or adversarial, (McCluskey et al., 2007) then restorative principles establish the offense as a violation against people and relationship. This violation creates a sense of responsibility which then becomes the paramount obligation to make things right (Zehr, 2002). In both retributive and restorative justice, wrongdoing is acknowledged, but the acknowledgement in restorative practices is in the form of harms and needs and not vindication (Wachtel, 2002).

Restorative practices rely on an encounter (Wachtel, 2002) between the victim, the offender, and those members of the community who are affected, in the hope of repairing the harm done. Restorative practices include a continuum of interventions that can be used from statements that are intended to establish empathy to more formal conferences which include all those involved in an incident of harm (Wachtel, 2002). Figure 1 outlines this continuum.
2.2.3 School applications.

According to Wachtel (2002), restorative justice practices in schools are referred to as restorative practices but “approaches used in an educational setting must necessarily be shaped to fit that context” (p. 42). While core approaches often include an encounter that includes all of the stakeholders – the victim, the offender, and community members – it can include representatives or surrogates and can also include letters or videos. While encounters are led by facilitators, settlements are not imposed, victim and offender participation are voluntary, and the offender must acknowledge responsibility. If these criteria are not met, the encounter does not proceed (Wachtel, 2002).

Currently, researchers (e.g. McCluskey et al, 2008a,b) are examining approaches and practices used by organizations, schools, and religious institutions. While schools may adopt restorative practices, (McCluskey et al., 2008b) fundamental differences between judicial and educational contexts exists cannot be overlooked: “In law, there is not necessarily a relationship between the wrongdoer and the wronged” (p. 206). In schools, relationships are fundamental.

They suggest that a “broader conceptualisation of restorative approaches” (p. 199), very different from restorative justice, may make a “significant contribution to thinking about conflict in schools and help to promote social justice in education” (p. 199). However, they also contend that while there has been a strong base of support for restorative practices in schools, there has
not been a great deal of rigorous research conducted in this area. They also question the validity of some of the rehabilitative theory of restorative justice as irrelevant to schools, but conclude that whole-school restorative approaches that include student to student and staff to staff may yield significant change (McCluskey et al., 2008b).

In spite of these inconsistencies, researchers such as Frida Rundell, a former teacher, educational psychologist, therapist and faculty member at the International Institute of Restorative Practices believes that “restorative justice theory and practice has grown and challenged mainstream thinking and practice” (2007, p.52).

2.2.4 Ontario practices.

One of the earlier policy approaches to student discipline in Ontario was the Safe Schools Act (2000) which advocated a zero tolerance approach. In their examination of policy and practice in Ontario schools, Daniel and Bondy (2008) provide an overview of the origins of zero tolerance policies, which they contend were borrowed heavily from US adult justice practices and used as a litmus of Safe School policy in Ontario in the 1990’s that introduced “a political solution for an educational issue” (p.6). Their small scale, qualitative study examined the adverse effects of zero tolerance policies on five schools in Ontario. Daniel and Bondy question the use of zero tolerance practices in schools as they, by definition, are a practice associated with prison populations (2008). Under this definition, they contend that suspensions and expulsions are examples of retributive justice (Daniel & Bondy, 2008).

Restorative practices, by contrast, has a focus “on helping the youth to recognize the social and emotional consequences of his or her behavior and to restore the situation with the victims and to themselves” (Daniel & Bondi, 2008, p.14). When zero tolerance policies were initiated in the early 2000’s, they were met with the intervention of the Ontario Human Rights
Commission as suspension and expulsion rates for students of racial minorities or disabilities began to soar (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2007). This situation has been attempted to be resolved by changes in legislation and policy which include, as alternatives to more punitive and exclusionary measures, restorative practices.

In conclusion, restorative justice, which focuses on repairing harm done, has been challenged and supplemented in Ontario policy with the addition of restorative practices in schools, which focus on preventing harm and building school community in a proactive approach.

2.2.5 Online social presence theory.

Tomkins’ (1962) explores the relationship between affect and motivation, or why most people do the right thing most of the time. It is the foundational theory of Restorative Practices (Wachtel, 2005). Social presence theory (Rettie, 2003) examines immediacy and intimacy. These two theories are explored next.

2.2.6 Affect theory.

Tomkins (1984) pioneered the theory of affect learning which contemplates the innate reasons why people do the right thing in most instances. He identifies nine affects, three of which are positive, six of which are negative, which are the person’s “primary motivational system” (p. 164). These affects govern “cognition, decision, and action” (p. 177) and are biological responses that hinge on “the significance of the face” and “shared eye-to-eye interaction” as the foundation of human emotional intimacy. It is feasible that this intimacy is less predictable in online communications or within the anonymity of social media. Affect theory is presented as the foundational theory of restorative practices (Wachtel, 2012) and is
operationalized through the use of a number of approaches that include restorative conferences, questions, and restorative circles (Macready, 2009).

2.2.7 Social presence theory.

Rettie (2003), considered the relationships between connectedness and online social presence, and built on the work of Short et al. (1976) who defined social presence, at that time through a telecommunications medium, as "degree of salience of the other person in a mediated communication and the consequent salience of their interpersonal interactions" (as cited in Rennie, 2003, p. 1). Social presence through information and communications technology suggests an interaction that is both immediate and intimate (Rettie, 2003, p. 1) and arguably, through social media, interaction that can evoke at least the vestiges of community (Köbler, Riedl, Vetter, Leimeister, and Krcmar, 2010).

But this feeling of “community” can be fleeting as it is related to the perspectives of those who participate in it, negatively or positively. Using the metaphor of the pacifier, which she suggests placates those who use social media, Rettie contends that “social presence is a judgment of the perception of the other participant and/or of the medium, whereas connectedness is an emotional experience, evoked by, but independent of, the other's presence” (2003, p. 3). And increasingly, while students may feel connected to their peers and families through the immediacy of social media, the degree to while they experience connection is really subject to perception and not to a “real” community (Rettie, 2003).

Given the dissonance of social presence between the participation of students who communicate online and their perspectives about that experience (Rettie, 2003), and given the predetermined biological responses of affect theory, which rely on the intimacy of face-to-face communication (Tomkins, 1984), a framework that combines the two emerges:
This framework combines the theories of social presence and affect theory. If social presence represents both connectedness and other person awareness, and the constraints of these phenomena in online environments, then Tomkins (1984) affect theory through restorative practices represents a means with which to repair harm done in online aggression and cyberbullying.

Figure 2 Social Presence Affect Theory Framework

2.3 Policy Development

This section of the review of the literature examines the scope and context of educational policy development in the field of safe schools since many of the policies implemented in the last fifteen years have influenced the actions of secondary school vice principals, those administrators typically charged with school discipline.
Education is increasingly political (Levin, 2008), which means that schools influence and are influenced by the relational complexities, expectations, and power structures of the societies around them. According to Darling-Hammond (1990) because schools exist in society, the “pedagogical slate is never clean” (p. 237) but subject to these forces. Therefore, policy development and implementation is not a process conducted in a vacuum but in the context of these forces. Policy development is also a construction of emerging socio-political beliefs that fall on previous ones (Darling-Hammond, 1990).

As policy is developed and implemented, it encounters major “actors” to consider whose own beliefs are diverse (Fowler, 2013, p. 37). These “actors” are players who all have the ability to influence other “actors.” Some policy actors include secondary school administrators and, in particular, vice principals who are often at the junction of safe schools policy and practice.

Politics and power are intertwined, and education is increasingly political. The entire educational landscape is dominated by policy. According to Levin (2008), “policies govern just about every aspect of education” (p. 8). From behavior of students, to curricula, to evaluation, to immunization, public policy shapes and informs and is shaped and informed by the electorate (Levin, 2008). An example of a policy that responds to a social problem that occurs outside of school time is found in the growing phenomenon of cyberbullying. The Ontario government, for example, has responded with updated safe school policies.

A tension exists, however, between the development of school policies and the successful implementation of that policy (Ball, 1993). While it is difficult to alter the long-established practices of institutions like schools (Levin, 2004), increasingly governments and schools want to know their efforts are supported by research (Levin, 2004, p. 2). The research study outlined here is intended to assist in this regard.
Policy development occurs in the context of the social, historical, and political forces shaping its implementation. According to Levin (2008), shifts in government are reflected by shifts in policy. The Ministry of Education for the province of Ontario, for example, has developed safe schools policies over the last fifteen years that mark a shift from more punitive to more progressive disciplinary and restorative measures. In 2000, and in keeping with what was termed zero tolerance policy, the Conservative government implemented Bill 81, the Safe Schools Act (Legislative Assembly of Ontario, 2000). This policy, which included the option of teachers to suspend students, was challenged by the Ontario Human Rights Commission. It was determined that the implementation of Bill 81 had an inequitable impact on students in vulnerable populations (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2007). Bill 81 was in large part rescinded by the incoming Liberal government in 2007 with the introduction of Bill 212 (Legislative Assembly of Ontario, 2007). Three years later, the Ministry of Education under the Liberal government published a resource guide entitled Caring and Safe Schools in Ontario (2010), which outlines, over two pages, the use of restorative practices in schools. These two examples show how policy development and implementation are not isolated processes but buffeted in the context of emerging socio-political beliefs that reflect their political parties of origin (Levin, 2008).

According to Fowler (2013), “Public policy is the dynamic and value-laden process through which a political system handles a public problem” (p.5). The public problem identified in the years of the Conservative government of the 1990’s was violence in schools. The policies developed to address that problem created other problems growing the number of suspensions and expulsions in schools, a phenomenon that saw the intervention of the Ontario Human Rights Commission (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2007).
The safe schools-related public problem of 2014 in Ontario schools would appear to be online aggression and bullying, and the specific legislation to deal with it is Bill 13 (Legislative Assembly, 2012). Policy development and implementation fall upon previously-constructed policies (Darling-Hammond) so Bill 13’s history is Bill 81, which means that Bill 13 adds to the repertoire of responses that schools have. As such, the more punitive measures taken to discipline students in the Province of Ontario 15 years ago, have given way to policies that are more restorative even when they are meted out in response to complex events like cyberbullying. These policy changes also reflect the increasing scope and expectation of schools to intervene (Leithwood, 2014; Pollock, 2014).

When Fowler (2004, 2013) speaks of the American education context, she contends that the key stakeholders in education are actors who all have the ability to influence other actors; there are no guarantees that policy will be met with implementation or compliance because of the number of different actors and their representative interests. Government holds fiscal power, control over information, a well-established organizational structure, and the power of position. School administrators can control careers and working conditions, information disseminated, and the power of position as well. Teachers exert classroom control, and have power in sheer numbers, and position. Support staff have organizational resources and numbers, too. Students and parents have the resources of numbers and organization. Finally, the general public have the resources of numbers and organization and the power to remove elected officials (Fowler, 2004, 2013).

The composition of this group of different stakeholders would suggest that “policy transmission” which Darling-Hammond (1990) defines as the expectation to change “beliefs, knowledge, and actions based on a change process that consists primarily of the issuance of a
statement and the adoption of new texts” (p. 237) would not necessarily create the conditions for policy compliance. She explains that, “[T]op down policies can ‘constrain but not construct’ practice” (p. 235). The needs, circumstances, and perspectives of “policy actors” (Fowler, 2013, p. 36) at the local level can determine the extent to which policy is implemented. Finally, “[T]eachers’ and administrators’ opportunities for continual learning, experimentation, and decision making during implementation determine whether policies will come alive in schools or fade away when the money or enforcement pressures end” (Darling-Hammond, 1990, p. 235).

In summary, the literature presents multiple reasons why a policy which is implemented may or may not bear a strong connection to the policy as it was originally designed or intended.

2.3.1 A theoretical framework.

According to Hoy and Miskel (1991) a theory in educational administration is “a set of interrelated concepts, assumptions, and generalizations that systematically describes and explains regularities in behaviour in educational organizations” (p. 2). This study employs a theoretical framework based on Ball’s 1993 policy analysis categorization of policy as text and policy as discourse. Since this study examines how secondary vice principals interpret and enact safe schools policy, including the use of restorative practices, it is important to consider how this research can be analyzed. Ball’s theory of policy as text and policy as discourse (1993) provides a structure.

According to Ball (1993), policy texts are incremental as “the product of compromises at various stages (at points of initial influence, in the micropolitics of legislative formulation, in the parliamentary process and in the politics and micropolitics of interest group articulation)” (p. 16). In secondary schools, “[T]he physical text that pops through the school letterbox, or
wherever, does not arrive ‘out of the blue’ - it has an interpretational and representational history-and neither does it enter a social or institutional vacuum” (p. 17).

Policies change through the implementation process. Ball (1993) maintains that policies cannot enact themselves, but can create the conditions or circumstances that allow for them to be enacted. This enactment “relies on things like commitment, understanding, capability, resources, practical limitations, cooperation and (importantly) intertextual compatibility (p. 19). Although policies are designed to respond to a problem in education (Fowler, 2013), according to Ball, policies can change some aspects of school circumstances but “they cannot change all the circumstances” (p.19). According to Ball, school policies “are textual interventions into practice” (p.19). In summary, Ball’s view of policy as text goes beyond the words on a page to include the context of schools.

Ball describes policy as discourse as the construction of meaning through a “production of truth” (p.21). Ball and Bowe (1992) provide further definition:

…policy is a discourse, constituted of possibilities and impossibilities, tied to knowledge on the one hand (the analysis of problems and identification of remedies and goals) and practice on the other (specification of methods for achieving goals and implementation) (p. 424).
From the understanding of policy knowledge to the enactment of policy practice, this study considers the shifts in safe schools policies of the last 15 years and how they are enacted in schools. It considers how these shifts that include more restorative approaches are perceived by those responsible for their enactment. Finally, this study considers how experiences with related Web 2.0 technologies and the related behaviours of those who are part of these online communities are affected by evolving social presence.

3.0 Methodology

This study used qualitative methods following Lichtman’s (2013) approach to qualitative research that included “hearing the voices of those studied, using the researcher as a conduit for the information, studying things in a naturalistic manner, looking at the whole of things, and avoiding testing hypothesis” (p.70). This approach was chosen because the participants, secondary school vice principals typically charged with the administration of school discipline,
encounter and carry out school and provincial safe schools policies every day. The researcher herself, a former secondary school vice principal and current principal, has experience in this area. Because of this experience, the findings were reviewed weekly with the supervision team who provided independent considerations. In addition, the question prompts were pre-piloted (Glesne, 2011). Limesurvey and NING allowed for the anonymous and flexible postings of responses at any time during the day and extended data collection (Lichtman, 2014) that took place over a six-week period.

3.1 Research Questions

The study’s focus was on answering these essential research questions: “As Ontario education policy shifts toward more restorative approaches in education, how is this process enacted in the views of administrators? What are their experiences with related Web 2.0 technologies, behaviours, and the nature of social presence in their communities?”

3.2 Method of Data Collection

Data collection to respond to the study’s research questions followed a five-step approach (Creswell, 2012) that includes participant selection, access and permissions, information acquisition, data collection instruments, and data collection administration.

3.2.1 Participant selection.

First, participants were chosen that would best help the researcher understand the answers to the research questions. In this study, 8 to 12 secondary school vice principals were approached to participate, representing a purposeful sampling that was connected to the researcher’s overall research purpose. Nine in total participated. They acted as relevant informants (Lichtman, 2013) in this study.
3.2.2 Access and permissions.

Secondly, three different school boards were approached for consent to distribute the email of invitation to participate in the study. The principles of no harm, privacy, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and informed consent (Lichtman, 2013) were followed. Two boards, however, declined to participate and cited different reasons. One board indicated the study was believed to be excessive for vice principals and outweighed the possible benefits. It was felt that the project relied heavily on the use of open source, free subscription type applications to gather data and cited the protection of the gathered information as a concern. Concerns about the disclosure of information about events that happen at the school and the posting of images and video were also of particular concern.

A second school board did not have concerns about the storage of information using the NING or Limesurvey or the confidentiality and anonymity of participants. Concerns about the workload of the vice principals were cited, and it was felt that one of the areas of research, restorative practices, was already established as an effective response to school conflict which included cyberbullying and that further research in this area was not needed. Additionally, this board was also already undertaking a number of other research projects.

After obtaining consent from one school board, other informants that represented two other school boards were acquired through word of mouth using the same criteria, namely that they were secondary school vice principals who chose to voluntarily participate. In total, the nine participants are from 3 school boards.

3.2.3 Information acquisition.

It was felt that a small sampling of demographic quantitative data would be helpful. An online survey tool, Limesurvey, was chosen to act as the source of the data collection.
Limesurvey questions (Appendix A) included gender, age, years of experience, restorative practice training, understanding of policy legislation, school location, and familiarity with technology.

Given the complexities of the research questions and the context of them on the educational policy landscape, it was felt that qualitative research was warranted for this study because it “can help reveal underlying complexities” (Glesne, 2011, p. 188). Because the researcher acted “primarily as an observer but had[s] some interaction with study participants” (2011, p. 64), an interpretivist approach (2011) was used to analyse the findings in the NING. In this respect, the researcher functioned as an instrument using pre-piloted questions that were, in some cases, followed with depth probing ones (Glesne, 2011).

For the gathering of qualitative research, an online private social network (NING) was used, which requires a private login and password. For this study, the NING acted as a repository of information that drew out the narrative experiences of the informants. Open-ended, qualitative questions (Appendix B) were asked that drew out the informants’ knowledge of relevant safe schools policy, knowledge and use of restorative practices, knowledge and response to online aggression and cyberbullying, the administrator’s own role in relation to legislation and circumstances, and the nature of an online community and its relationship to school. The weekly prompts are attached as Appendix B.

3.2.4 Collection instruments.

3.2.4.1 Limesurvey.

Online surveys can be a very effective means of collecting data however, some researchers have expressed concerns about their means of securing data confidentiality (Klieve, Beamish, Bryer, Rebollo, Perrett & Van Den Muyzenberg, 2010). For this study, Limesurvey
was deliberately chosen as researchers believe it “is a trustworthy open source survey application designed for academic and institutional facilities” (p. 9). The Limesurvey is attached as Appendix A.

3.2.4.2 NING.

Although Merriam (2009) expresses a number of concerns about the nature of online data collection, including limited face-to-face interaction and equitable access to technology, NING was chosen for a number of reasons. First, it allowed for the extended collection (Lichtman, 2013) of research over a six-week period. The NING provided a platform for semi-structured interviewing (Merriam, 2009). It allowed for the posting of responses by busy secondary administrators (Pollock, 2014) at any time during the day or evening. It provided a medium with which the researcher could join as a participant observer (Glesne 2011) and provide relevant links to legislation and readings. It provided an environment in which informants could act as co-investigators and learners (Lichtman, 2013). NING provided for the anonymous and confidential postings of responses to questions through the use of pseudonyms and avatars. Finally, as a secondary school administrator and graduate researcher in digital technologies, the researcher herself could update, participate, and probe further without intruding on the work day of the participating vice principals.

3.2.5 Data collection administration.

The limesurvey was conducted anonymously. The NING functioned as a means to conduct an interview-like series of questions (Appendix B). Over the course of six weeks, the researcher posted one question a week and followed up with relevant, spontaneous questions to each participant. In this respect, the researcher functioned as a participant observer.
4.0 Findings

This study used a mixed-methods approach to data collection with an emphasis on qualitative data collection (Glesne, 2011). After obtaining consents, vice principals were emailed two links to this research study. The first link was to the Limesurvey, and the second link was to the NING. Initially, 9 secondary school vice principals completed the brief and anonymous Limesurvey (Appendix A). Then, over a six-week period, they participated in an online blog answering previously posted questions which took place on NING (Appendix B).

4.1 Limesurvey Data

This data included the age and gender of the participants, their years of experience as vice principals, their knowledge of Bill 13 and their familiarity with technology.

Of the nine participating vice principals participating in this study, 10 were shown as having completed the Limesurvey. This number would indicate that the Limesurvey had been completed twice by one participant. Since the data terms were not duplicated and it was not possible to determine who has responded twice, it was decided to include all respondent data in the reporting of the survey findings of this study.

Of the 10 respondents in the Limesurvey, 3 were male and 7 were female. Six participants were between the ages of 35 and 45 and 4 were between the ages of 45 and 60. Seven participants had between zero and three years in their role. Three vice principals had between four and six years of experience in their role. Most, then were fairly new at the role of vice-principal.
The participants were also asked to indicate their degree of knowledge with the recently legislated Bill 13. Knowledge in this area was diverse as five respondents had limited knowledge, two respondents had some knowledge and three respondents had considerable knowledge.

In light of the shifts in safe schools policy, and its moving toward progressive and restorative approaches to school discipline, respondents were also asked to indicate the degree of training that they had received in restorative practices. One respondent had no training, three respondents had workshop training, three respondents had 1-day training, and three respondents had considerable training.
had 2-day training. Most respondents, therefore, had some degree of training in restorative practices but not extensive training.

Figure 6 Restorative Training

Since one of the questions posed in this study related to Web 2.0 technologies, and participants were expected to be engaged in the monitoring of student online behaviour to some extent, respondents were asked to provide information about their familiarity with technology. The results indicated a range of responses from those who were familiar to one who was considered expert. Four participants indicated they were familiar with technology, five indicated they were experienced, and one participant indicated he was expert with technology. Overall, the group was familiar with technology.
Figure 7: Familiarity with Technology

In summary then, based on the Limesurvey data, most vice principals undertaking this research were female and relatively new to their role. Most were between the ages of 35 and 45 years. Half possessed an initial limited understanding of Bill 13. Most had received training in restorative practices, and most were either familiar with or experienced with technology.

4.2 NING Data

While the online survey was completed by all participants, the number of NING participants ranged and varied from week to week. For the most part, participation reflected the chronology of the postings; however, some respondents went back to prior postings from previous weeks or contributed to depth probing questions at different times. It was felt that this occurred as a result of how busy the vice principals were during the course of this study. Another explanation might be that the NING acted as a virtual place that could be accessed 24/7 and respondents waited to use it. Also, events in school life do not necessarily follow predictable patterns or successful outcomes. One last explanation might be the duration of the six-week study itself. As discussed in the Methodology section, the findings from the NING will be presented here in chronological order, almost in a story format. The gender of the participants has been masked in the reporting of the findings of this study.

Week One – Question One

The questions for the first week were, “How has Bill 13 affected the work you do in schools? What other policy or legislation has affected your work? In what ways? What policies or rules do you think about when you are resolving safe school issues?”

The respondents positively viewed the legislation in two ways. To some, the legislation provided helpful and explicit information that could be shared with students. These administrators used terms like direction, clear, streamlines, guidelines, guidance, defines and compels. One vice principal said that “Bill 13 has given school administrators clearer direction
and guidance when dealing with students.” Another vice principal said Bill 13 “defines bullying explicitly and it is helpful to have a detailed definition to which I can refer.” The respondent continued to explain that “this legislation compels the administration to notify both the parents of the student harmed as well as the student who has harmed someone…something that is ingrained in our practice.”

Other respondents reported that legislation gave support to practices in place even prior to its existence. These respondents used the terms solidifies, supports, and give credence to their practices as administrators. One respondent stated that, “Effective school communities and administrators were already addressing these issues prior to the implementation of Bill 13.” The vice principal further explained that “For obvious reasons, it is really important that this is included as students spend more and more time with these technologies.”

Interestingly, only one other policy was referenced in this discussion and that was one respondent’s reference to her or his individual board’s code of conduct. Notably, this respondent also felt that redemption and reintegration were as important as consequences when it came to cyberbullying and online harassment.

For the most part, other policies were not considered in the context of negative online behaviour and cyberbullying. Bill 13 was widely perceived to be a helpful policy both for the reinforcement of previous practices already in place as well as for future action necessary in what one correspondent described as, “creating a safe school environment and responding to the activities of students despite location and time of day”.

Week Two – Question Two

Prompt: “What cyber events happened this week? How did you respond? Under what part of the restorative practices continuum did your responses fall?”
A small number of respondents indicated that no negative cyber events were reported that week. Instead, the response focused on the proactive approaches the school had in relation to cyberbullying, particularly in the area of communication. Students, staff, and parents were cited as sources of information for negative online behaviour and cyberbullying. One vice principal posted that “Prevention/awareness is a big factor for us and having students repair harm and learn from their mistakes is very important.”

Some vice principals reported negative cyber events that occurred and were brought to their attention. Students, staff, and parents were also cited as reporting sources in these events as well as in the interventions and consequences that followed them. Sometimes a “restorative focus” was reportedly used. One event involved a school-based verbal altercation among a group of students which then saw the conflict tweeted. One administrator felt that a practice was restorative “when all parties restore some dignity in [sic] the situation and when they either put aside their grievances or at least treat each other with respect at school.”

Another event involved texted threats which were reported to the vice principal by a student and the student’s parent. In this case, warnings were issued to all students involved, and parents were contacted. Interestingly, one parent sought input into the sanctions that were to be brought against the students although the vice principal said that “when they called me with the task of investigating their child’s concerns, they also entrusted me with following through on consequences that fall in line with progressive discipline policies.” In this case, a restorative conference was not considered because the instigator was not interested in doing so. It was felt that “A restoration meeting will only move forward in a positive direction if both parties are willing to be open to discussion.”
Another event also included the reporting of the online behaviour by a parent to the school vice principal. This time, the parent was reporting what appeared to be a case of online impersonation of another student with the intent to implicate that student in egregious conduct. A subsequent investigation by the vice principal, which sought police input, resulted in long-term suspension, social work support, and the integration of restorative questions throughout the investigation. In this case, the administrator felt that the situation was very complex and “will require extensive restorative practices.”

Vice principals reported variations as well as consideration in the restorative practices they used to respond to online aggression and cyberbullying. There were actions taken at different points of the restorative continuum that included the asking of questions only, instead of using more formal approaches like conferences. The data showed that while vice principals decided what parts of the restorative continuum would be used, the decisions were also influenced by the willingness of the students to participate. They also reported considerations about restorative practices that included time and the willingness of both parties who “must be open to discussion.” As one respondent indicated, “We can’t always restore relationships…What we can do is come to a common understanding.”

Week two’s postings indicate that students, staff, and parents are involved in the reporting of negative cyber behaviour as well as the interventions and consequences associated with it. Restorative practices are adapted to meet the considerations of the willingness of both parties to take part as well as the time required by the vice principals to administer them.

Week Three – Question Three

Prompt: “What in your view is cyberbullying? What does this term mean to you in relation to your experience as a VP? How is it distinguished from other negative online communication?”
Vice principals responded to the research questions with one vice principal reporting that “negativity and bullying has [sic] gone on since Socrates taught, but cyberbullying adds a new dimension to the role of the vp.” Throughout their postings, the vice principals made distinctions between cyberbullying and online conflict.

The respondents provided very clear terms of what they believed constituted cyberbullying citing the repetition of events, power imbalances, and harassment as its characteristics. Cyberbullying, one respondent contended, “uses online means and applications to harass another person. This can be in the form of direct communication with the victim (emails, chats, posts on their apps) or online communication online [sic] about that person.” Another respondent indicated that “Cyberbullying is the use of technology to repeatedly intimidate and harass someone.”

Vice principals felt that cyberbullying included direct and indirect references to another student whether that student was named or unnamed. While intent was identified as an aspect of cyberbullying, it was also mentioned that a lack of intent did not preclude it. Social media escalates the harassment in anonymity and brings shame to the student who receives it. There is a “profound impact if it is not discovered”.

The vice principals distinguished online conflict from cyberbullying indicating that the “victim sometimes is being more hurtful than the person they are upset with.” Another vice principal indicated that the “vast majority of online disputes are not cyberbullying”.

Vice principals indicated that there were both positive and negative aspects to social media and its use by students with complex implications for their role as administrators. They said that they spent “an inordinate amount of time ‘sorting and sifting’ information on social media.” The potential for public shaming was cited as a great concern as “young people are
given so much power in social media to broadcast their unkind thoughts that might have been either whispered or scribbled on a passed note in the past”. However, while there were negative aspects to online communication it nevertheless leaves “hard evidence” or a “digital footprint” that they could use in their investigations.

In their evolving roles as school administrators, vice principals specifically distinguished cyberbullying from other kinds of negative online communication, but even in the negativity, saw/see value in finding what was described as the “digital footprint.”

Week Four –Question Four

Prompt: “What other cyber events happened since the last reporting of events? How did you respond? Under what part of the restorative practices continuum (See Week 2) did your responses fall?”

This question was asked again in an attempt to determine the frequency and intensity of negative cyber events as well as the use of restorative practices to them. A lower response rate took place this week, an indication perhaps of the busyness of the vice principals or a lack of negative cyber activity.

One posting that took place this week involved what was identified as poor sportsmanship that had extended to social media through tweets that had been retweeted and then favourited. During this incident, a number of interventions occurred including sanctions, benching of players, restorative questions, and an impromptu restorative conference and a desire on the part of the vice principal to have all of the students involved in the process of “making things right”.

This event would indicate that restorative practices are, once again, fitted to the nature of the cyber event and subject to the considerations of time.
Week Five – Question Five

Prompt: “How do you perceive your role as an administrator in the context of legislation like Bill 13? In the context of media (including the Internet and newspapers)?”

As the study neared its conclusion, the number of participants rose from the previous week but was still lower than the onset of the study, an indication of the vice principal’s workload perhaps or the duration of the study. When they reflected on their roles as administrators in the context of the legislation, they repeatedly reported feeling a sense of “obligation.” These respondents spoke of the serious obligations they felt they had in the context of the legislation as well as the expectations of parents. They also saw the negative and positive aspects of social media.

Vice principals spoke of the obligation they felt to create a welcoming climate in their schools and to keep kids safe: “Our role as A[a]dministrators is always one of providing all students with the opportunity to come to school and feel SAFE [lower case] and SUCCESSFUL[lower case]. They had an obligation to prevent cyberbullying, to investigate it, and “to care for kids and help them learn.” It was felt that it was a “reasonable expectation among parents that when their send their students to school, they will be safe.” One administrator felt their role “is to continue to support students through the social media landscape, help them understand when they fall outside the lines of what is deemed appropriate, and hope for learning and better choices for the next time.”

One respondent spoke of the potential of social media and other technology to educate. The respondent spoke of hearing about the negative actions of students on social media, “however, other students use social media responsibly.” The vice principal elaborated stating that a “finite group of students that ‘overshare’…lack understanding of their actions” an indication perhaps that a large number of students use and understand their use of social media.
In the context of Bill 13, vice principals see their role as a role of obligation to keep their school communities safe.

Week 6 – Question Six

Online prompt “Reflect upon the nature of an online community and its relationship to your school. You may consider your own experience with online communities (this one or another) as well.”

The final week of research saw the participation of more vice principals than the previous week, a circumstance that, once again, may be construed as an indication of their busyness, the duration of the study, or the nature of the NING as a social network itself. These respondents spoke of the negative and positive aspects of online communities as it related to their work and their personal use. It was felt by the researcher that this question almost led the participants to making connections between the incidents they investigated and the nature of those communities and ones they participated in on their own.

One respondent felt that online communities were helpful in providing an opportunity to “learn from other educators through online discussion, blogs, and connecting with others in similar roles to mine.” The vice principal also saw this kind of communication as an alternative to what was perceived to be a decline in the funding of professional development. However, this respondent did not use the NING for these purposes and posted infrequently, an indication perhaps that the NING did not constitute an online community.

While another respondent was initially hesitant to use social media personally, a side effect perhaps of the work that was done in cyberbullying and cyber conflict, the vice principal acknowledged the potential for its use after receiving professional development on the positive use of social media to as communication links for schools: “This poses a timely question. Honestly, I have avoided being part of any social media network that offers the chance of the opportunity ‘to see’ my personal life.”
Another respondent acknowledged the positive aspects of online communities such as twitter, Vine, and Instagram for school communication. However, the darker side of social media, including the surreptitious filming of staff and administration, was also commented on as was the degree of online humiliation that the victim receives, whether that victim is a school staff member or, of even greater concern, a vulnerable student:

Students are connected through their own online communities which are often the new “Wild West” where stray online bullets regularly wound its inhabitants through online insults, ‘beefs’, etc. As Administrators we are asked to try to enforce law and order in these online environments.

When they reflect on the nature of online communities and their relationship to schools, vice principals perceived and identified positive and negative aspects to these kinds of communication but they expressed and revealed hesitation to participate in them.

4.3 Key Themes in the Findings

In this next section, key themes that emerged across weeks and across participants are identified.

4.3.1 Role of policy.

4.3.1.1 Value.

In short, the value of Bill 13 is recognized by the secondary school administrators in this study. Although only 50% of respondents indicated they possessed a limited understanding of Bill 13 at the onset of this study, respondents read the link to the legislation in the NING. This lack of detailed knowledge had little effect, however, on their understanding of their responsibilities as vice principals in response to cyberbullying or in their appreciation of the policy as both a reference and a catalyst for response. Respondents indicated that Bill 13 supported practices which were already in place prior to its implementation. It also compelled secondary school vice principals to take action that included suspensions, interventions like
social work, and progressive approaches to cyberbullying. They were also involved in dealing with online conflict and arguments, events that would appear to fall outside of the legislation.

4.3.1.2 Obligation.

Vice principals perceive their role as one of obligation when it comes to the context of legislation like Bill 13 and keeping students safe, and that obligation would appear come before and to extend beyond the scope of the legislation into creating safe school climates. In their evolving roles as school administrators, vice principals specifically distinguish cyberbullying from other kinds of negative online communication that they still feel obliged to investigate and use adapted restorative practices where they feel they are indicated.

4.3.2 Adaptation of restorative practices.

Vice principals were introduced to the restorative practices continuum through their participation in the NING. The restorative practices continuum was described as in fluctuation. Vice principals acknowledge that they cannot always restore relationships nor work restoratively in all cases of cyberbullying and online conflict. However, they adapt and integrate restorative practices in secondary schools to meet some essential considerations. One of those considerations includes the willingness of both parties (victim and offender) to participate. Another consideration is the time required by these vice principals to administer these practices. It would appear that they use adapted restorative practices during the investigation of incidents, following incidents, and long after incidents had happened in order to support students and provide them with the chance “to make things right”.

4.3.3 Social networks as online communities.

In reflecting on the nature of online communities and their relationship to schools, vice principals spoke to their positive and negative potential. Vice principals saw the value of their
use in school-based communication, but were hesitant to use them for their own personal purposes. They were familiar with Web 2.0 technologies like Twitter, Vine, Instagram, and Facebook, technologies that they used to investigate cyberbullying and online conflicts, yet they expressed a reluctance to use them personally and had, at least in one case, stopped using them. One participant likened this environment to the Wild West, and vice principals were sobered by some of the more sinister applications of this environment.

While they saw the value of online communities and blogs as an affordable alternative to more expensive professional development and the implications for its funding, the NING in this study was not cited as one such community. Although the NING is a private social network, with the capacity to imbed links to other websites, online content, and videos, this was not explored. Although it functions as a blog, most of the interactive postings that took place in the NING were posted in agreement to a previous posting.

Finally, while the positive value of online communities was obvious to secondary vice principals, it was also felt that they were “a little jaded”, the result perhaps of dealing with the kinds of negative online activity for which they felt an obligation to address whether it was embedded in legislation or not.

5.0 Discussion

The key findings of this study are considered in connection to the review of the literature in an attempt to answer more fully the following research questions: 1. How is the process of shifting, more progressive and restorative Ontario safe schools education policy enacted in the views of secondary school administrators? and 2. What are their experiences with related Web 2.0 technologies, behaviours, and the nature of social presence in their communities?
This study supports and aligns with the findings of much of the research that has been referenced in the review of the literature; however, it also provides some contradictions and distinctions, and elaborations in the area of how safe schools education policy is enacted.

5.1 Policy enactment – Bill 13.

The findings in this study would seem to support Levin’s (2008) contention that education is increasingly political and that schools are influenced by the complex forces around them. Even without a great deal of detailed knowledge about Bill 13, secondary school vice principals were responding to the issues that online aggression brought to their schools such as cyberbullying and harassment prior to this study.

The findings of the present study also support Darling-Hammond’s assertion that policy development is a construction of emerging socio-political beliefs that fall on previous ones (1990). In this case, the findings reveal the vice principals use and understand progressive disciplinary measures, language which is also included in Bill 13. However, they also use restorative practices, language which is not included in this legislation but in the language of other policies that were not referenced in their postings. An example of this would be in the posting of one administrator who had administered a long-term suspension but in the process continued to use restorative practices and expected them to be used at the long-term suspension program.

Fowler’s work (2004, 2013) is also confirmed in the findings of this study. When Fowler considers the context of education in the US, she maintains the actors or stakeholders have the ability to influence other actors. The findings would suggest this is also the case in Ontario, Canada. In the case of the present study, the policy actors include the vice principals who interpret and administer safe schools policy. They also include students, staff, senior
administration, and notably parents who report occurrences of cyberbullying and aggressive online behaviour and, in this context, influence the actions of the vice principals and the outcomes for the students involved.

One interesting finding of this study is that the principal is not identified in the findings of this study, nor in the research, as a figure who would weigh in on the interventions (punitive or progressive) in relation to the cyber incidents. This would support the researcher’s premise that, in secondary schools in Ontario, vice principals are typically the individuals who are responsible for school discipline. Typically, in the literature, it is the role of the principal which receives the most attention (Leithwood and Azah, 2014; Pollock, 2014).

While Fowler (2004, 2013) asserts that there are no guarantees that policy will be met with implementation or compliance because of the number of different actors and their representative interests, the findings in this study suggest that it is because of the number of different actors – students, staff, parents, and the legislation – that Bill 13 would appear to be met with compliance. Because policy development and implementation is not a process conducted in a vacuum (Darling-Hammond, 1990) and because schools are influenced by relational complexities, expectations, and power structures of the societies around them (Levin, 2008), this compliance might be the result of these forces and not solely the legislation itself.

5.1.1 Policy chicken and egg.

Even though public policy shapes and is shaped and informed by the electorate (Levin, 2008), some of the vice principals participating in this study acknowledged that their actions in relation to cyberbullying preceded the legislation and now extend beyond its scope. This would indicate that while school administrations accept and see the value of safe school education policy like Bill 13, they will not necessarily wait for the implementation of policy if it does not
help them meet their obligation of keeping students safe. The findings also suggest that secondary vice principals investigate and address online conflict, a phenomenon that exists outside of the scope of the legislation. In this respect, the findings would belie that secondary school vice principals can and do use a certain autonomy outside of the development of safe school legislation and, two years after the implementation of Bill 13, continue to do so.

This apparent autonomy also challenges Fowler’s contention that policy is a process “through which a political system handles a public problem (2013, p. 5). In this study’s findings, the actions taken by some secondary school administrators prior to the advent of Bill 13 attempted to address the public problem before it was handled by a political system. Not only do the needs, circumstances, and perspectives of “policy actors” (Fowler, 2013) at the local level determine the extent to which policy is implemented, the needs, circumstances, and perspectives of the vice principals at the local level of school cause them in some cases to take action before legislation exists.

Ball (1993) maintains that policies cannot enact themselves, but can create the conditions or circumstances that allow for them to be enacted. The findings in this study would challenge this assertion also. It would appear the conditions and circumstances preceded the legislation, work in support of the legislation, but now extend beyond the legislation into the area of routine intervention by the vice principals in online conflicts.

5.1.2 Further research potential.

Ball (1993) also refers to the tension that exists between the development of school policies and their successful implementation. However, little consideration in research has been given about how and to what degree action is taken by secondary school administrators prior to the development of policy. Little consideration has been given to how they act in the absence of
it or how they continue to act outside of its scope. Since governments and schools want to know their efforts are supported by research (Levin, 2004), this gap in research may be an area of future study.

5.2 Policy Enactment – Restorative Practices

The findings in this study would appear to support the enactment of recent shifts in policy that include non-punitive interventions that increase individual responsibility (such as facing those they have wronged) and decrease exclusion (specifically suspension from school) are taking place in schools. This shift includes suggestions from the Safe Schools Action Team (2006) of the Ontario Ministry of Education that include the use of restorative practices. According to the findings of this study, these new measures could include parent contact, restorative practices, and progressive disciplinary measures. However, the study’s findings are unable to support the assertion that face-to-face accountability and responsibility are more effective than exclusionary practices like suspensions and expulsions (Calhoun & Daniels, 2008) even though the vice principals in this study consider and use both.

The study does challenge Calhoun and Daniels (2008) and Hasenstab (2012) who suggest that school administrators are too quick to utilize punitive measures over progressive ones. During the six weeks of this study, the vice principals considered progressive approaches, restorative practices, and verbal warnings to a much greater extent than they used punitive measures like suspensions. This finding would support the research premise that policy shifts in Ontario education have been translated to the extent that there is a move from punitive to more progressive approaches.

The vice principals in this study spoke of the challenges associated with the anonymous quality of cyberbullying and harassment, a phenomenon thought to be the underlying cause of
cyber aggression (Mark & Ratliffe, 2011). They felt it was of paramount importance to discover incidents of cyberbullying because of its “profound impact” on students. However, they also asserted that an “inordinate” amount of their time was spent investigating what some vice principals felt was relational conflict and not cyberbullying. Of interest to this study was the breadth of restorative practices outlined, including conversations, questions, and impromptu conferences that were used in an attempt to offset anonymity and aggression matching theories of Grossi and dos Santos (2012) in both cyberbullying and online conflict.

While vice principals used restorative practices, they did not always include both parties in small impromptu conferences if they felt this was going to further negatively impact the victim or if both parties did not agree to participate. In this respect, the assertion in the literature that restorative practices yield greater accountability because they bring both parties together was not supported (Boulton & Mirsky, 2006; Calhoun & Daniels, 2008; Grossi & dos Santos, 2012). Additionally, vice principals in this study acknowledge that they cannot always restore relationships nor work restoratively in all cases of cyberbullying and online conflict. This position might suggest a lack of compliance with policy or merely an adaptation of restorative practices policy in response to school (local) needs.

### 5.2.1 Use and adaptation.

Restorative practices are defined as “the use of informal and formal processes that precede wrongdoing…build relationships and a sense of community to prevent conflict and wrongdoing” (Wachtel, 2012). The approaches discussed by the vice principals in this study appeared to have adapted this approach. Referring to the restorative practices continuum (Figure 1), the vice principals use restorative practices informally. They described their use of restorative practices as in fluctuation. They reported their use of restorative practices as using statements,
questions, and small impromptu conferences typically in response to wrongdoing and not necessarily in preventing it. They also opted not to include some participants if they were not willing or if their participation would further affect the victim, in keeping with the established principles of restorative practices as articulated by Wachtel (2002). Of interest in this study’s findings is that no formal conferences were reported to be used during the six-weeks of postings, perhaps due to what the vice principals perceived were the constraints of time. The findings in this study would indicate that vice principals adapt restorative practices to suit the circumstances of the situation.

Zehr (2002) contends that violations against people and relationship create a sense of responsibility which then becomes the paramount obligation to make things right. While the vice principals who participated in this study appear to understand and enact these principles, they also appear to have assumed this responsibility themselves. For example, the vice principals in this study spoke repeatedly of a sense of obligation they had to “keep students safe”. They also used language like “making things right.”

Current researchers (e.g. McCluskey et al., 2008 a,b) examining approaches used by schools including restorative practices suggest that relationships in schools are fundamental and, unlike in those in the legal system, subject to the ongoing interaction of both victims and offenders. The vice principals in this study would appear to use restorative practices in this respect, but are also aware of limitations that include the willing participation of both parties, the time required to make this happen, and an awareness that, “We can’t always restore relationships”.
5.2.2 Further research.

McCluskey et al (2008b) acknowledge there has been a strong base of support for restorative practices in schools. This is evident in the quantitative findings of this study that suggest that most vice principals have received some training in restorative practices. It is also evident in the qualitative findings that show how restorative practices are used and adapted for example in questions and in impromptu conferences.

These same researchers (McCluskey et al. 2008b) also contend that there has not been a great deal of rigorous research conducted in this area (2008b). Further study in this area, perhaps as it pertains to the workloads of vice principals and the degrees of training they have received in restorative practices appear to be logical next steps.

5.3 Web 2.0, Behaviour, and Social Presence

This section of the discussion examines the reported experiences of secondary school vice principals with related Web 2.0 technologies, behaviours, and the nature of social presence in their communities by considering these experiences relative to the research contained in the review of the literature.

5.3.1 School as community.

There is considerable belief that schools bear some responsibility for responding to bullying and online aggression (Boulton & Mirsky, 2006; Calhoun & Daniels, 2008; Grossi & dos Santos, 2012; Hasenstab, 2012; Mark & Ratcliffe, 2011). The findings in this study would indicate that this is both understood and accepted by the vice principals in this study who report having an obligation to keep schools safe and to create an inclusive climate.

School legislation and policy are also often identified as the means to respond to bullying and cyberbullying and other aggressive acts that students commit (Boulton & Mirsky, 2006;
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Calhoun & Daniels, 2008; Grossi & dos Santos, 2012; Hasenstab, 2012; Mark & Ratliffe, 2011). This assertion would appear to be supported in this study’s findings as the vice principals feel they have an obligation to keep students safe and “care for kids and help them learn.” There was evidence in the study that this responsibility predates the existence of Bill 13 and vice-principals extend its scope to include online conflict as well as a legislated response to cyberbullying. In holding this responsibility, however, the vice principals do speak of a “new dimension” to their role and the “inordinate” amount of time spent “sorting and sifting” through social media.

Boulton and Mirsky (2006) maintain that a positive school culture is necessary to respond to bullying, cyberbullying, and other aggressive actions of students. The study indicates that vice principals perceive this importance as well, because for example they say that their obligations also include creating a welcoming climate. According to Hasenstab (2012), school administration is also perceived to be key in establishing a safe school culture. The vice principals in this study appear to have this perception of their role themselves.

5.3.2 Social networks as community.

While researchers argue that social media interaction can evoke at least the vestiges of community (Köbler et al. 2010) and interaction is both immediate and intimate (Rettie, 2003), the feeling of being in a community is related to the negative or positive perspectives of those who participate in it. In considering social media as community Rettie (2003) argues that students do not experience an emotional connection to a “real community.” In this study, vice principals continue to use restorative practices, even when they are adapted, to respond to online aggression and cyberbullying that take place in social media. However, the findings indicate that they do not use the more formal end of the continuum that includes conferences or the more formal opportunity for parties to meet face to face. This is an area that may be suggested for
further research consideration in the context of the workload of the vice principals. It appears likely that the incidence rate of online events makes it difficult to see each event through to its optimal conclusion.

5.4 Web 2.0 Technologies and Behaviours

Participants in this study reported interaction with a number of Web 2.0 technologies including Facebook, Twitter, Vine, Instagram, and cell phone texts. Rettie (2003) contends that there is a dissonance in social presence theory between the students who participate in these technologies and their perspectives about that experience. The findings in this study would indicate that secondary school administrators also experience a kind of dissonance as they immerse themselves in these technologies in their roles, but maintain a distance and wariness when it comes to their personal use of them and their interaction with them in professional development, a result it is believed of school experiences that once vice principal said had “jaded” them.

5.4.1 Social presence.

Short et al (1976) defined social presence then as the “degree of salience of the other person…and the consequent salience of their interpersonal interactions” (p.1). Social media like Facebook include social presence that Rettie defines nowadays as “a judgement of the perception of the other participant” (2003, p.3). This is not to be confused with connectedness which, Rettie argues, is an experience of emotion. The findings in this study would indicate that students, parents, and the vice principals establish and maintain social presence on social media in responding to online aggression and cyberbullying by reporting these incidents and then investigating them.
However, the findings in this study would indicate that this presence (Rettie, 2003) is not extended to other social media for personal use or for professional development. For example, vice principals were reluctant to use social media for personal use or had stopped using it entirely. Some vice principals saw the value of Web 2.0 technologies for the purposes of professional development but did not view the NING, the private social media network connected to this study, with the same potential. Finally, the awareness of their own social presence in the monitoring of emerging social media was likened to the vigilance of the sheriffs in the “Wild West” who by their presence “enforce law and order in these online communities.”

6.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

This study attempts to reveal how the process of a shifting, more progressive and restorative Ontario safe schools education policy is enacted in the views of secondary school vice principals, those administrators typically in charge of school discipline. It also examines their experience with related Web 2.0 technologies and the behaviours of those who use them.

6.1 Policy Shifts and Enactment

The literature review and findings of this study would suggest that secondary school vice principals analyse the problems that affect the safe and caring cultures of their schools and identify remedies to those problems. There was also an indication that they are able to decide on and use specific methods or interventions for safe schools infractions that range from and integrate progressive and punitive responses, representing a shift in the policies that have been enacted over the last fifteen years.

Interestingly, the research of this study would indicate that they have taken some of these actions prior to the development of policy, during and throughout its implementation, and past implementation and beyond the policy’s scope. This enactment would confirm their own
assessment of their role as one of obligation and, by their monitoring and intervention, a role of presence.

It is recommended that this be a future area of study as there appears to be little current research about how and to what degree action is taken by secondary school administrators during the policy enactment process and following it. Further study in this area, perhaps as it pertains to the workloads of vice principals and the degrees of training they have received in restorative practices might be logical next steps.

6.2 Restorative Practices

Restorative justice practices in schools are referred to as restorative practices and are distinguished as such because they “are shaped to fit that context” (Wachtel, 2002, p. 42). In a synthesis of the literature reviewed and the findings of this study, it would appear that the vice principals in this study did use restorative practices in an attempt to get the offenders to recognize and take responsibility for behaviour and to restore the situation and themselves.

However, they also recognized when policy practices had to be adapted and that restoring relationships in schools is not always possible. Of further promise is one vice principal’s assertion that even when restoration is not possible, we can “come to a common understanding.”

6.3 Web 2.0 Technologies and Behaviours

The literature review and findings of this study reveal that vice principals in this study enact policy which supports safe schools, and they appear to understand the importance of their school communities as safe places to be and their own role in relation to that expectation. While they engaged with and used Web 2.0 technologies to respond to online aggression and cyberbullying, events that they felt had a “nexus” in their schools, and while they could see the
negative and positive aspects of these media, some vice principals nevertheless maintain a
distance and wariness when it comes to their personal and professional use.

This is an area that should be considered in future study. It would seem that the vice
principals in this study access and use relevant Web 2.0 technologies that require they remain
current with social media applications like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Vine. While they
use these technologies in the day-to-day context of their jobs, they would appear to use them
with great reluctance for their personal use and, it would seem, professional use.

Given the increasing focus on technology in educational institutions in elementary,
secondary, and post-secondary institutions, the hesitation of some of the vice principals in this
study to use these technologies beyond the scope of their school day is a further area of interest
worthy of investigation.
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Appendix A: Limesurvey Questions

The following questions were asked of participants to collect preliminary information using Limesurvey.

• What is your current leadership position?

• How many years’ experience have you acquired as an administrator?

0-3 years  4-6 years  7-10 years  11-15 years  16-20 years

• What training have you received in restorative practices?

None  Workshop  One Day  Two Days  Four Days

• What is your gender?

Female  Male

• What is your age category?

20-35 years  35 to 45 years  45-60 years

• What understanding do you have of Bill 13?

None  Limited  Some  Considerable  Expert

• Is your school in a rural or urban setting?

• How would you rate your level of familiarity with technology?

Not familiar  Novice  Familiar  Experienced  Expert
Appendix B NING Questions

Week One – Question One

How has Bill 13 affected the work you do in schools? What other policy or legislation has affected your work? In what ways? What policies or rules do you think about when you are resolving safe school issues?

Week Two – Question Two

What cyber events happened this week? How did you respond? Under what part of the restorative practices continuum did your responses fall?

Week Three – Question Three

What in your view is cyberbullying? What does this term mean to you in relation to your experience as a VP? How is it distinguished from other negative online communication?

Week Four – Question Four

What other cyber events happened since the last reporting of events? How did you respond? Under what part of the restorative practices continuum (See Week 2) did your responses fall?

Week Five – Question Five

How do you perceive your role as an administrator in the context of legislation like Bill 13? In the context of media (including the Internet and newspapers)?

Week 6 – Question Six

Reflect upon the nature of an online community and its relationship to your school. You may consider your own experience with online communities (this one or another) as well.