


# CHAPTER 7

## THE INFLUENCE OF TRANSNATIONAL CULTURAL CAPITAL ON BLACK IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE YOUTH PERSPECTIVES OF SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

Johanne Jean-Pierre<sup>a</sup>, Maria Brisbane<sup>b</sup>, Sabrin Hassan<sup>c</sup>,  
Jonathan Bailey<sup>d</sup> and Hawa Barrie<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4451-7098>,  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0123-2244>,  
York University, Canada

<sup>b</sup>  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4257-7719>, University of Waterloo, Canada

<sup>c</sup>  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2992-9676>, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), Canada

<sup>d</sup>  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6676-5001>, Child, Youth, and Family Therapy, Toronto, Canada

### ABSTRACT

*Studies that focus on youth's perspectives of school discipline seldomly highlight immigrant and refugee youth's viewpoints. Meanwhile, the influence of newcomer parents' cultural capital is often assessed to investigate social mobility while their children's pre-migration cultural capital remains largely understudied. Drawing from Bourdieu's social reproduction theory, this study illustrates how transnational cultural capital affects Black newcomer high school students' perspectives of school discipline. This qualitative inquiry*

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*involved semi-structured interviews conducted with 28 Black newcomer adolescents between the ages of 16 and 19 in Ontario, Canada between 2019 and 2021. We find consistent with prior Canadian studies that the participants reported concerns regarding bias, anti-Black racism, and the lack of fairness of school discipline interventions. Yet, their views also diverged since they perceived that everyday civility and behavioral expectations in the classroom were lenient when compared with their country-of-origin education systems. These findings reveal the significance of examining newcomer youth's transnational cultural capital and not only parental cultural capital. The conclusions also point to the relevance of investigating transnational cultural capital in aspects of education other than academic achievement and social mobility. This study also reveals the importance of considering the intersectionality of the migration status and racial identity of French-speaking and English-speaking Black newcomer youth when we analyze their school experiences.*

**Keywords:** Classroom management; cultural capital; intersectionality; race; migration status; Black youth; school discipline; transnationalism

## INTRODUCTION

Studies examining youth perspectives of school discipline seldom focus on immigrant and refugee youth's insights. Meanwhile, immigrant youth's school trajectory is often examined through the analysis of the connection between parental cultural capital and students' academic achievements and educational outcomes. In this study, we investigate newcomer youth perspectives of school discipline. Drawing from a qualitative study conducted with French-speaking and English-speaking Black immigrant and refugee youth in Ontario, Canada, we argue that transnational cultural capital influences Black newcomer youth's nuanced and unique perspectives of school discipline practices. The findings reveal how the participants' views coincide with previous studies' conclusions in which racialized and Black students denounced the lack of fairness of school discipline practices. Yet, participants also perceived substantively different civility and behavioral expectations in the classroom compared to those of their country of origin. Participants also discussed the importance of intervening proactively to prevent and address school misconduct. The findings illustrate the relevance of the study of transnational capital through the examination of the distinctive point of view of immigrant and refugee youth.

## THE SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL CONTEXTS OF CANADIAN IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE YOUTH

Upon arrival in their host country, immigrant and refugee youth's experiences are shaped in part by their family life circumstances and context. Labor market constraints, the acculturation process, the lack of access to inclusive public services,

and language barriers affect newcomer youth's parent's transitions in the host country (Ari, 2019; Deckers & Zinga, 2012; Dlamini et al., 2009; Francis & Yan, 2016; Goitom, 2016; Hynie et al., 2012; Iacovino & Léger, 2013; Wilkinson et al., 2016). In the Canadian context, the lack of recognition of foreign credentials and professional experiences contributes to a job status decline for some newcomers (Wilkinson et al., 2016). Therefore, unemployment, underemployment, and low wages often induce financial stress on immigrant and refugee families (Francis & Yan, 2016). Moreover, in terms of acculturation, adapting to the host country's social norms and beliefs can potentially disrupt immigrant and refugee youth's preexisting conceptions of identity, culture, and connectedness (Ari, 2019; Burgos et al., 2019; Deckers & Zinga, 2012; Dlamini et al., 2009; Goitom, 2016). Some studies also reveal that immigrant and refugee families experience racism, linguicism, discrimination, and multiple forms of exclusion (Creese, 2010; Lewis, 2018; Zaami, 2015). Despite these challenges, immigrant and refugee families often develop a support network by settling in areas where they experience familiarity with other individuals of the same origin (Huot et al., 2014). They also find ways to build a sense of belonging through community and leisure activities as they adjust to a new context (Quirke, 2015).

During their psychosocial development, newcomer youth often negotiate their identity through the adoption of the host country's cultural attitudes, the abandonment of some ideas and practices from their country of origin, and occasional cultural clashes with parents (Burgos et al., 2019; Francis & Yan, 2016; Huot et al., 2014; Hynie et al., 2012; Somerville & Robinson, 2016). These challenges can be addressed and mitigated through adequate supports and resources. Yet, several studies underscore that governmental agencies sometimes provide a sub-par level of service to immigrant and refugee populations, including the failure to address language barriers (Guo, 2012; Hynie et al., 2012; Lewis, 2018). Refugee and immigrant youth frequently play a significant role in helping their parents communicate with service providers, as they often learn the local language more quickly (Dippo et al., 2013; Hynie et al., 2012; Iacovino & Léger, 2013). Other factors that affect agencies' ability to provide an appropriate level of service include a lack of critical awareness of prejudice and stereotypes, and an inability to act as cultural brokers for families from diverse racial, ethnic, national, linguistic, and religious backgrounds (Brar-Josan & Yohani, 2019; Fellin, 2015; Gagné et al., 2017).

In addition to building a sense of belonging, several scholars found that a majority of immigrant and refugee youth are happy to have immigrated to Canada (Selimos & George, 2018; Tiflati, 2017; Veronis et al., 2018). Nevertheless, there are challenges that impact their social integration and sense of belonging. For instance, in a qualitative study, second-generation Muslim youth in Montreal, Quebec shared that they face discrimination in the community because of their religion (Tiflati, 2017). Additionally, Mason et al. (2022) conducted a study of African migrant youth in Alberta in which participants shared that schools can be sites of marginalization and discrimination. Some youths attributed their experiences of discrimination and bias to the broader societal context and believed that working hard would change their teachers' low expectations (Mason et al., 2022).

Concurrently, drawing from their strengths and cultural capital, immigrant and refugee youth often enact their agency to challenge the misconceptions associated with their origins. For instance, in a qualitative study conducted in Windsor, Ontario, African refugee youth explained that they enthusiastically share their culture with their peers with the hope that they will be better understood (Dlamini et al., 2009). Immigrant and refugee youth take matters into their own hands to foster new friendships and develop their sense of belonging when they participate in community activities like the Ottawa extra-curricular group mentorship program, an initiative that aimed to foster communication and stronger social ties (Pryce et al., 2019).

In a world increasingly connected through digital communication technology, newcomer youth are also strengthening transnational ties with friends and family across the globe (Farmer et al., 2015). For example, Syrian refugee youth in Ottawa shared that they use social media to learn English, share stories, build friendships, and bridge cultural differences with local and international friends (Veronis et al., 2018). Similarly, in Francophone minority communities (French-speaking communities outside of Quebec), research has shown that immigrant and refugee youth develop transnational and multilayered identities in French-language schools as they navigate multiple linguistic and cultural environments (Farmer et al., 2015; Lamoureux, 2012). Although they experience challenges, immigrant and refugee youth are creative and mobilize their agency to maintain and create relationships and adapt to new environments.

To transition and succeed in a new school system, newcomer youth need academic support, resources, and encouragement (Guo-Brennan & Guo-Brennan, 2021). This is important as newcomer youth acknowledge that there exist both benefits and challenges to their immigrant status when adapting to a new curriculum (Guo-Brennan & Guo-Brennan, 2021; Matejko et al., 2024). Many newcomer students arrive in school with advanced knowledge of some subject areas, such as math or science, while falling behind in social studies or English, highlighting how the pace of the curriculum does not adequately meet their needs. An additional challenge that some newcomer students face is access to the necessary classroom technology required to carry out their school tasks, which can further set them behind if alternatives are not provided (Matejko et al., 2024). In addition, scholars highlight that particular attention should be paid to the long-term effects of streaming in Francophone minority communities' schools (Huot et al., 2014; Schroeter & James, 2015). The latter is particularly important when considering that combined with race, socio-economic status, and gender, streaming practices impact Black and Latino students' schooling and postsecondary trajectories, as well as employment prospects in Canada (Briggs, 2018; Kamanzi, 2023; Lewis, 2018; Livingstone & Weinfeld, 2017; Moya & Butler-Kisber, 2019; Poteet & Simmons, 2014). These challenges are recurrent across cohorts of immigrant and refugee youth and have been the subject of debates among Canadian scholars regarding policy and practice that can best support their education.

In the case of Black students, including Black newcomer youth, some scholars highlight the way in which anti-Black racism affects several aspects of their educational trajectory. Anti-Black racism refers to the diverse and singular forms

of prejudice, discrimination, and exclusions that specifically target Black people since the colonial period, including enslavement, segregation, and contemporary forms of racism (Benjamin, 2003; James et al., 2010). Some examples include low academic expectations, the persistence of assumptions and stereotypes, the lack of culturally relevant curriculum, and unfair school discipline practices (Briggs, 2018; Jean-Pierre, 2021; Mason et al., 2022; Schroeter & James, 2015; Sibblis, 2014). Thus, as Black immigrant and refugee youth transition in the host country's school system, they encounter challenges and structural barriers because of the intersection of their migration status and racial identity, not only because of migration.

Although there is no national educational system in Canada, as each province or territory regulates its own public school system, there are recurring and comparable recommendations across jurisdictions to improve the educational experiences of refugee and immigrant students. These recommendations include the implementation of a multicultural curriculum, the development of effective teachers' training, the strengthening of school–parent relationships, and the ability to respond to students' diverse needs. Several scholars note that curricular course content and standardized assessments in schools should reflect the diversity of Canadian society to facilitate the inclusion of all students and prepare them to become citizens in a multicultural society (Jean-Pierre, 2021; Li & Grineva, 2016; Usman, 2012). Other scholars suggest that there is a need to revise pre-service teacher formation to help teacher candidates acquire a trauma-informed lens, adopt a culturally responsive approach, challenge their own biases and stereotypes, and develop cultural humility to work with newcomer youth (Gagné et al., 2017; Levi, 2019; Lund & Lee, 2015; Volante et al., 2020). Alongside their educational needs, scholars contend that school personnel should consider the mental health, psychosocial, and emotional needs of refugee children and youth (Gagné et al., 2018; Levi, 2019; Miles & Bailey-McKenna, 2016; Stewart, 2012). Moreover, pre-service teacher formation can better prepare teacher candidates to understand and build upon the critical role that newcomer parents play in their children's lives.

Immigrant and refugee parents play an important role in the education of their children as they adapt to a new school system. Therefore, scholars suggest that teachers should learn to look beyond linguistic barriers and cultural differences to acknowledge and draw on newcomer parents' knowledge and cultural wealth (Antony-Newman, 2020; Guo, 2012; Guo-Brennan & Guo-Brennan, 2021; Hynie et al., 2012). Positive relationships with newcomer parents can spark stronger school–community connections and increase children's civic engagement (Dippo et al., 2013; Huot et al., 2014). Some researchers encourage teachers and school administrators to familiarize themselves with the heterogeneity of the realities and contexts of immigrant and refugee youth as they build relationships with them and their families (Arntson, 2020; Guo-Brennan & Guo-Brennan, 2021). This is significant, considering that the media portrayal of racialized and immigrant youth tends to convey limited and stereotypical representations (Arntson, 2020; Guo-Brennan & Guo-Brennan, 2021; Hamm et al., 2021). Societal stereotypes often find their way into schools and may require interventions to counter

their influence and detrimental effects. For instance, Hamm et al. (2021) reported that in rural communities, educators were aware that adopting an equity lens involved specific concrete actions that support immigrant and refugee youth. Yet, educators shared that they needed their school leadership endorsement to have the confidence to address local stereotypes and damaging attitudes toward immigrants and refugees (Hamm et al., 2021). Other dilemmas that teachers face in schools with students often relate to school discipline.

## SCHOOL DISCIPLINE PRACTICES DILEMMAS

The detrimental and ineffective nature of punitive school discipline practices has long been highlighted in the field (Fenning et al., 2004; Mayer, 2001; Salole & Abdulle, 2015; Sanders et al., 2022). Echoing schools' zero-tolerance policies, punitive school discipline is often adopted as a form of deterrence and includes a range of interventions such as heightened physical surveillance, suspensions, detentions, and expulsions (Jean-Pierre & Parris-Drummond, 2018; Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). Yet, scholars have shown that punitive school discipline negatively affects learning outcomes and can even lead to an escalation of misconduct (Fenning et al., 2004; Mayer, 2001). Rather than applying punitive school discipline strategies, scholars have proposed a range of alternative individual and school-wide disciplinary interventions that aim to positively impact students' development (Gerlinger & Wo, 2016; Gregory et al., 2021; Jean-Pierre & Parris-Drummond, 2018).

It is in this context that Ontario experienced a shift in terms of school discipline policies: from the *Safe Schools Act* (2000) to *Progressive Discipline* (2007) (Milne & Aurini, 2017; Ryan & Zoldy, 2011). At the time of publication, Ontario remains the only province in Canada to have formally shifted its policy explicitly from a conventional approach to school discipline (often involving a punitive and zero-tolerance approach) to a progressive discipline framework. Although transforming school policies to better support students is a step in the right direction, the lack of consistent implementation in Ontario may hinder efforts to adopt a progressive discipline framework (Milne & Aurini, 2017). This is a major issue since several studies show that students value fairness and consistency of school discipline practices, which are often emphasized in progressive discipline practices (Gerlinger & Wo, 2016; Woods, 2008).

Applying alternative approaches to discipline in schools often requires time, additional resources, and a strong commitment to a paradigm shift by all school personnel (Jean-Pierre & Parris-Drummond, 2018). In fact, the commitment of school personnel and leadership is critical to its success. Nevertheless, such shifts may also lead to extra exposure of school personnel to emotionally draining situations as they resolve student discipline incidents (Pollock et al., 2023). A transformative school discipline shift materializes the goal of moving away from punitive school discipline interventions that negatively impact many students' educational and life trajectories. In fact, several scholars contend that a paradigm shift is needed because school discipline practices tend to exclude and

even criminalize racialized students (Salole & Abdulle, 2015; Sanders et al., 2022; Sibblis, 2014).

Ruck and Wortley's (2002) empirical study of racially and ethnically diverse students in the Toronto area showed that Black students were significantly more likely to perceive differential treatment in schools. More recently, in a qualitative study conducted in Toronto's priority neighborhoods, Salole and Abdulle (2015) reported that marginalized participants felt that they were monitored excessively by school resource officers, that they were not supported by school staff, and that they were at a higher risk of encountering the criminal justice system. Another mechanism of exclusion consists of the exclusionary practices of programs for suspended and expelled students, which should in principle be nurturing and rehabilitative. Sibblis (2014) argued that the *Fresh Start* expulsion program at the Peel District School Board in Ontario reproduced inequality, where Black students were often forgotten and underserved once enrolled. Programs intended to promote school safety can, in fact, create unsafe learning environments for Black and racialized students. In another study of programs for suspended and expelled students, Sanders et al. (2022) argue that trauma-informed and culturally relevant disciplinary interventions are imperative for supporting students who experience considerable forms of adversity. Their findings revealed the interconnection between exposure to adversity, a lack of connections at school, teachers' biased perceptions of students (particularly Black and Indigenous), and limited access to resources and academic supports over time (Sanders et al., 2022). Although these studies point to the detrimental effects of punitive school discipline in Canadian schools among different groups of students, the perspectives on school discipline of immigrant and refugee youth have not been explored.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

To analyze the experiences of newcomer youth, this chapter draws from Bourdieu's social reproduction theory and the role of transnational cultural capital in school settings (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Ogden, 2022). Bourdieu developed his theory of social reproduction in explaining class reproduction in France (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). It has since been applied to other social categories in various countries, including to investigate immigrant children's educational achievements and outcomes (Davies & Rizk, 2018). In the past, upper-class families would transmit their wealth primarily to ensure intergenerational economic prosperity. In the modern era, upper-class families also emphasize the transmission of cultural capital to foster educational achievement and, subsequently, gain access to prestigious postsecondary institutions and professions (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Cultural capital refers to cultural traits, practices, and skills that are rewarded by the school system; Bourdieu notes that high-status culture provided an advantage to French upper classes (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Bourdieu suggested that cultural capital enables the social reproduction of social classes and evolves in relation to the habitus within a particular field. The field is a specific domain of practice which, in the case of this study, is the education system. Habitus involves:

“the capacity to produce classifiable practices and works, and the capacity to differentiate and appreciate these practices and products (taste), that the represented social world, i.e., the space of lifestyles, is constituted” (Bourdieu, 2010, p. 166). Habitus includes disposition, attitudes, and behaviors developed through socialization and social actions within a social group. Bourdieu paid particular attention to how the habitus of the upper classes influences their children’s cultural capital, which in turn reaps its reward in the field of the school system.

Across countries and contexts, the theoretical underpinnings and the empirical application of cultural capital evolved, leading to a broad range of studies that mobilize cultural capital globally (Davies & Rizk, 2018). In the United States, quantitative analyses show that the consumption of high-status culture has a positive effect on students’ educational outcomes, independent of social class origin (DiMaggio, 1982). In addition, omnivorism (the consumption of heterogeneous forms of arts) characterizes the preferred nature of cultural capital in the American context, rather than solely high-status forms of arts (DiMaggio & Mukhtar, 2004). Drawing from qualitative research, Lareau (2002) points to the importance of the alignment between family routines and practices and school requirements as a form of cultural capital. Beyond social class, the use of cultural capital in education has also been examined across gender, ethnicity, race, and migration statuses (Davies & Rizk, 2018).

In the United States, immigrant students have high academic aspirations as well as strong academic performance compared to their non-immigrant peers (Feliciano & Lanuza, 2016). Yet, as highlighted by Ogden (2022), little attention has been paid to the role of immigrant youth’s embodied cultural capital developed in their country of origin as they transition to a new school system in a host country. Embodied cultural capital refers specifically to mind and body dispositions that students mobilize to navigate the school system (Bourdieu, 1986). For instance, Parada et al. (2021) found that Latinx youth in Ontario faced barriers as they attempted to navigate the school system, since their pre-migration cultural capital was not rewarded in the school system. On the other hand, Zaami (2020) argued that Black African immigrant youth in Alberta build upon their cultural capital and agency as they foster social integration by participating and sharing community initiatives. Despite these recent studies, migrant youth pre-migration embodied cultural capital is often overlooked, and the ways in which their prior habitus influences the ways they classify and evaluate everyday school interactions are seldom examined, particularly in the context of school discipline practices. Immigrant and refugee students are not empty vessels but rather carry their transnational cultural capital as they choose how to interact with teachers and classmates and make sense of the interactions and misconduct incidents that occur on school premises.

## METHODOLOGY

This study is an exploration of immigrant and refugee youth’s school discipline perspectives. It was conducted in both official Canadian languages, English and

French, to capture the perspectives of immigrant and refugee youth who attend majority English-speaking schools, as well as from Ontario Francophone minority communities. The research questions of this inquiry are: What are immigrant and refugee youth's perspectives of school discipline? What do immigrant and refugee youth believe should remain the same or change in terms of school discipline practices?

This study mobilized a qualitative design to capture immigrant and refugee youth's insights regarding school discipline. This design enabled our team to see the world through the eyes of the participants and explore the meaning of personal and vicarious school disciplinary practices (Bell et al., 2023; Tavory, 2020). We conducted semi-structured interviews to enable questioning and probing of participants' responses as we sought to capture the interpretation of participants' experiences. The principal investigator (first author) conducted semi-structured in-person and virtual interviews that lasted an average of 20 minutes. Some of the questions we asked include: Can you describe how teachers deal with misconduct? Or what do you want teachers, principals, and other staff to know about how to deal with misconduct?

Recruitment took place between 2019 and 2021 in three Ontario cities and involved contacting community organizations through snowball sampling, which is a method that facilitates the recruitment of hard-to-reach populations like newcomer youth (Goodman, 2011). A purposive sample consisted of a total of 28 participants: 15 French-speaking and 13 English-speaking immigrant and refugee youth. All the participants volunteered to participate and signed a consent form. Parental consent was not required because all participants were aged between 16 and 19 years old.

The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. French-language interviews were translated to facilitate the analysis of the data by all research team members. Using MAXQDA (VERBI, Berlin), a qualitative data analysis software, the authors conducted a thematic analysis using the suggested steps in Nowell et al. (2017). Thematic analysis enabled the research team to identify and analyze patterns, similarities, and differences among participants' narratives. We engaged in an initial reading of the transcripts to become familiar with the participants' contributions. We then created initial codes, searched for themes, revised, refined, and defined the different themes through group discussions and comparisons. The research team consisted of a principal investigator and four research assistants who were all either immigrants themselves or children of immigrants. This research protocol was approved by an institutional research board. Pseudonyms are used, and identifying characteristics have been removed to maintain participants' confidentiality.

## FINDINGS

Previous studies revealed that Black Canadian students perceived some school discipline interventions as lacking fairness and influenced by racial bias (Mason et al., 2022; Ruck & Wortley, 2002; Salole & Abdulle, 2015). In this qualitative

inquiry, Black newcomer youth's views, across linguistic lines, overlap with previous studies that reported concerns regarding fairness. Yet, their perspectives also differ since their narratives underscore how everyday in-class civility and behavioral expectations are more lenient in Canada compared to their respective country-of-origin school systems. In addition, many participants are genuinely concerned for the welfare of their classmates, particularly those frequently involved in misconduct incidents or who face difficult life circumstances. Therefore, several participants suggested that schoolteachers and administrators should be proactive to address the underlying factors and needs that influence students' behaviors by better supporting students who experience challenges or who are frequently involved in misconduct. This theme coincides with other scholars' recommendations following studies conducted in Canada and abroad, which highlight the potential to prevent the occurrence or escalation of school misconduct (Fenning et al., 2004; Gregory et al., 2021; Sanders et al., 2022). Overall, the participants' views of school discipline practices are nuanced and shaped by their transnational cultural capital, as well as their knowledge of other countries' school systems' codes of conduct and disciplinary practices. Moreover, through their narratives, participants describe two types of misconduct: (a) minor misconduct and everyday incivility, and (b) major acts of misconduct, such as a serious breach of the student code or an incident that may involve two or more students.

*Realization That Schools Have Different Everyday Civility and Behavioral Expectations*

Several participants mentioned that responses to minor misconduct and everyday incivility were more lenient in Canadian schools compared to their countries of origin. This theme echoes conclusions from a qualitative inquiry which showed that Ghanaian migrant youth, who were used to a stricter school of conduct in their country of origin, were compliant and acted with deference toward teachers' authority in German schools, which in turn was rewarded by teachers (Ogden, 2022). Adult-child relationship norms differ across countries and cultures, reflected in various formal and informal school norms and codes of conduct. For instance, participants shared a perceived permissiveness toward in-class comportment, including compliance with instructions and respect or deference toward teachers in comparison to other countries' school systems. Sparrow, a 19-year-old student from the Caribbean who attends an English-language school, explains that in his country of origin, students were required to complete assigned schoolwork and to adhere to school norms. He also mentions that caregivers were usually notified when certain expectations were not met by students at school.

*Sparrow:* Back in my country, in [country in the Caribbean], it's like, you must do your homework, you have to sit down in class, you don't play with your phone in class, you make sure you do all your homework. If you don't do your homework, then your parent, or your mom, or someone you're going to have a problem with will be contacted.

Some participants expressed that they are surprised by teachers' responses to what they characterize as poor behavior in the classroom. For instance, West, a 19-year-old English-language school learner from West Africa, observes that even when students do not complete an assigned activity in class, teachers do not insist that students complete that task and, if they intervene, they do so with kindness.

*West:* School discipline here is by the way of using kind words, like encouraging you even though they know that this guy is not really doing its writing [assigned task in class].

Other participants, like Viviane, an 18-year-old English-language school learner from the Caribbean, underlined perceived instances of "disrespect" toward teachers that went unsanctioned much of the time, noting that this would not be tolerated in her country of origin. Viviane discussed with great dismay her perception that classmates address teachers like fellow classmates, rather than with the deference that teachers would receive in the schools she attended previously.

*Viviane:* You know the respect you have for your friends and things like that, that's how they treat teachers. I feel like it is a way that you can go and say anything to a teacher, so you can go, and you can say curse words at teachers, even in class. We could be just having a regular discussion in class and then you hear a swear word out of nowhere. Instantly. You could never do that in a [country in the Caribbean] classroom.

Blue, a 17-year-old student from West Africa who attends a French-language school, sympathized with her teacher after witnessing an incident in which he was disrespected by some of her classmates. In her account, she underscores how, based on her prior schooling, she believes that respecting teachers in the classroom is important.

*Blue:* I remember when I was in [City in Ontario], there were some students who, when the teacher was writing on the board, they would throw a ball of paper at him. And when the teacher turned around and asked who had done that, they all started making fun of him. And that was really .... Because these people [teachers] are standing up in front of us to teach us, they also have a family, they have children, and we have to respect them. Imagine that was your father, and someone did that to your father. Would you feel good?

Another student, 16-year-old Mélisandre from the Caribbean who attends a French-language school, also expressed frustration toward the lack of intervention by teachers to address disruptive conduct in the classroom that interferes with learning. She shared the following story in which her ability to learn history was hindered by the lack of classroom management by the teacher.

*Mélisandre:* In history class last year, my teacher was too nice. People would do whatever they wanted, and he would say, "You know what? I want to respect everyone and not yell at you." And that really got on my nerves because nobody would listen to him, and we didn't do anything in class. We were behind in everything we had to do, and there was no discipline, nobody would listen to him.

Immigrant and refugee youth learn to adapt to new school codes of conduct and various teachers' expectations. Newcomer youth's transnational cultural capital shapes their understanding of everyday civility and behavioral expectations and their perception of leniency toward compliance with schoolwork instructions, respect of teachers' authority, and responses to minor misconduct.

*Fairness Should Be Centered When a Major Incident of  
Misconduct Occurs*

Although school responses to minor acts of misconduct may vary greatly across national contexts, several participants highlighted that when a major act of misconduct occurred, school staff usually intervened, but not necessarily fairly. The interventions that they spoke about witnessing include office referrals, suspensions, and sometimes contacting parents. Many participants expressed a desire to see more fairness in school disciplinary action when a serious act of misconduct or a major incident involving two or more students occurs. Their perspectives overlap with anterior studies' conclusions that highlight how students and other stakeholders greatly value consistent and fair disciplinary interventions (Gerlinger & Wo, 2016; Jean-Pierre & Parris-Drummond, 2018; Woods, 2008). Several participants suggest that fair decisions can be achieved by engaging in dialogue and active listening with students, and by setting aside assumptions regarding students who are frequently involved in misconduct.

Woods (2008) argues that teachers can jump to conclusions when frequent “rule-breakers” are involved in an incident. Some participants highlighted that, on occasion, consequences were determined based on assumptions derived from the negative reputations of some students, or previous incidents of misconduct, before talking to all the students involved. They also shared that in their countries of origin, teachers would take the time to listen to all parties. For instance, Jasmin, a 17-year-old student from the Caribbean who attended an English-language school, explained that while the consequences of misconduct could be punitive, engaging in active listening with students enabled school professionals to avoid “picking a side” quickly before they decide which disciplinary action will be implemented for each individual student.

*Jasmin:* School discipline in [country in the Caribbean], if you slip, you're getting a detention. If you do cause trouble, you're getting a suspension. But they are not going to take ... they are not going to pick sides, you know? They are going to listen to both sides of the story before they do something about it.

Marion, an 18-year-old student from a Central African country now attending a French-language school, recalled an occasion in which they perceived the school principal's resolution of a conflict to be unfair. They witnessed the suspension of a Black student who responded physically to the use of the “N” word by a White student, who was not sanctioned for using this word.

*Marion:* There was this one time when a white student called a black student a [N word], and the Black student got mad and hit the white student. The principal suspended the Black student, who had to wait a week before he could come back to school. [...] I think it was unfair because he had called him the [N word]. And I also think that black people don't like the word [N word] very much, you see. So, he reacted. I think he [the white student] was to blame; you don't call another person a [N word]. [...] I think that some students are hurt when a white student treats them badly.

Phoenix, a 16-year-old student from a Central African country who attended another French-language school, reported a similar incident in which

only a Black student was suspended following an altercation after the use of the “N” word by a White student. She characterized the decision to suspend her friend: “I thought it was unfair: they should have suspended both of them, but they only suspended one.” Marion and Phoenix, who witnessed disciplinary actions that they characterized as unfair, inferred that a banalization of the use of a racist epithet impacts the process of school discipline, particularly to the detriment of Black learners. Likewise, other scholars have reported that schools tend to punish Black students who respond impulsively to the use of the historically charged “N” word while showing relative leniency to students who use it (Beagan & Etowa, 2009; James et al., 2010). This further alienates Black students and further increases the distrust of some Black parents toward schools.

Another example of lack of fairness was observed and retold by Jade, a 19-year-old student from East Africa attending a French-language school. She characterized a disciplinary intervention as “unequal” because school administrators did not consider that her friend had been a victim of bullying and that her misconduct was a response to prolonged instances of intimidation. Jade stated:

For me, a person who is bullied should not be punished. It is the other person who must be punished. So, it is not equal to punish someone just for reacting. She might have not acted properly, but it is after dealing with this several times. It is the straw that broke the camel's back. If a person acts this way, there is a reason.

Overall, newcomer youth suggest that it is important not to jump to conclusions when a misconduct incident occurs, particularly when more than one student is involved, to ensure fairness toward all students – even those who have a history of frequent misconduct. Understanding the social context and interpersonal dynamics between students is important to inform fair school responses, particularly where bullying and discriminatory behaviors such as the use of racist epithets take place. In some participants’ narratives, like Jasmin’s, we observe that the awareness of the importance of fairness in school discipline practices predates their migration to Canada.

*School Staff Should Turn Their Attention to the Needs of Students,  
Not Only the Misconduct*

Many participants recognized that some of their classmates face various challenges that affect their educational journey and contribute to acts of misconduct. They suggested different proactive and preventive initiatives to better support students beyond the disciplinary interventions following acts of misconduct. Echoing scholars who note that students miss learning opportunities and do not necessarily adopt positive behaviors when they are suspended (Fenning et al., 2004; Gregory et al., 2021; Jean-Pierre & Parris-Drummond, 2018), some participants suggest that suspension is not an ideal solution because of the teaching and schoolwork that is missed. North, an 18-year-old student in an English-language school, provides a rationale for that perspective.

*North:* Suspension, it's a tricky one because they kick kids out of school, from learning. I think suspension should probably be used when ... not on first-time offenders, I guess, I don't think it should be used right away for people, especially if they seem repentant or something. Obviously if it's something really bad, then maybe they'll get a suspension. [...] Because making kids miss out on school and stuff, and then maybe they have to come back and catch up on all of it is not the most ideal way to show kids that school matters and you should behave properly here. Because if you tell them, okay, leave school, kids take suspensions as vacations. They just leave, and lie at home, play video games. Yeah, just make sure that they keep up on their schoolwork, and suspensions are for the worst of worst things.

Some participants' comments resonate with scholars' recommendations that school administrators should plan supports and resources beyond meting out discipline (Gregory et al., 2021; Sanders et al., 2022). For example, Jess, a 17-year-old student from West Africa who attends a French-language school, suggests that prevention is important and interventions after misconduct should consider this.

*Jess:* Okay, what I'd like them to know is that while disciplinary measures at school may seem effective, they aren't more effective than prevention. I think there is a tendency to put too much faith in discipline when an incident occurs, but I think we should make as great an effort to prevent the incident from happening in the first place. Because once it has occurred, there is a victim, there is someone who's been affected by the incident. And afterward, we don't make as much effort to try to help the person we've disciplined to prevent it from happening again.

Bailey, an 18-year-old student from East Africa who attended a French-language school, stated that school staff should be proactive and address students before school misconduct occurs. She perceived a lack of effort and outreach to parents of students who experience bullying, mental health issues, or academic difficulties. Likewise, Hunter, a 16-year-old learner from West Africa who attends an English-language school, echoes Mayer (2001) in suggesting that schools should contact parents more often. Other participants suggest that it is important for teachers and administrators to build relationships with students so they can address their needs and provide positive reinforcement with a proactive lens. This could address the need to develop positive connections with school staff as suggested in other studies (Gregory et al., 2021; Sanders et al., 2022). For instance, Sandy, a 17-year-old student from West Africa and the Caribbean who attended an English-language school, suggests that a relational approach, involving frequent regular interactions, is key to being proactive and encouraging positive behavior.

*Sandy:* And regular connections, not just popping up every few months, because students won't be comfortable compared to when we build connections almost every day. They start to feel comfortable and open up more so that it wouldn't lead to bad behaviour.

Other students, like Raven – a 17-year-old learner from West Africa attending an English-language school – note that school professionals should: “Be open-minded with them, like talk to them and let them know what's going on. Let them tell you what they're going through and see if you can help in any way.” Furthermore, other participants highlight the need for more positive

reinforcement from teachers, especially when students who frequently engage in misconduct improve their behavior. Lou, an 18-year-old student from West Africa attending a French-language school, considers that positive reinforcement is valuable, stating: “When someone behaves well, to say, ‘You’re behaving nicely today’ to encourage the student to behave well the next day.” Likewise, scholars also highlight the importance of providing social, emotional, and behavioral supports (Brar-Josan & Yohani, 2019; Gregory et al., 2021; Sanders et al., 2022).

Overall, the participants did not believe that suspensions are an effective response to misconduct. Rather, they suggest that it is paramount that teachers and administrators be proactive by contacting parents, building relationships with students, and providing supports to avoid a re-occurrence of inappropriate behaviors.

## DISCUSSION

Although immigrant and refugee youth’s perspectives on their educational journeys are investigated in several Canadian studies, the research questions rarely focus on school misconduct and disciplinary practices (Burgos et al., 2019; Guo, 2012; Mason et al., 2022; Selimos & George, 2018; Veronis et al., 2018; Zaami, 2015, 2020). Immigrant and newcomer youth make sense of their everyday schooling experiences in relation to their prior habitus, previous school systems’ codes of conduct and expectations, and the pre-migration cultural capital acquired in their country of origin or transit country. This study demonstrates how transnational cultural capital influences English-speaking and French-speaking Black immigrant and refugee youth’s perspectives on minor and major incidents of school misconduct, as well as everyday classroom civility and behavioral expectations in Ontario urban public schools.

On the one hand, similar to prior scholarship touching upon Black Canadian experiences of school discipline, most participants are concerned that some disciplinary interventions that they witness lack fairness. Despite Ontario having an explicit educational policy that focuses on non-punitive disciplinary practices, participants in this study noticed that a lack of consistency and fairness in school disciplinary practices remains an ongoing issue. It is a dilemma that persists when major discipline incidents occur. At the same time, incidents involving anti-Black racism, including the use of racist epithets such as the “N” word, are still not treated with the seriousness that Canadian-born and immigrant Black students believe they deserve (Beagan & Etowa, 2009; James et al., 2010). On the other hand, as reported by Ogden (2022), newcomer youth note that teachers’ responses to minor misconducts and what they interpret as a lack of “respect” diverge from their country of origin’s disciplinary practices. Finally, many participants believe that more proactive and preventive measures should be implemented to support students frequently involved in school misconduct, or those who face various barriers to their education and development.

Interestingly, the themes identified in this chapter were found across linguistic lines among Black immigrant and refugee adolescents attending French-language

and English-language schools in Ontario. This illustrates how transnational cultural capital, and the intersectionality of migration and anti-Black racism inform newcomer youth perspectives regardless of the official language community in which they live. It also demonstrates the relevance of acknowledging that exposure to different national educational systems socializes migrant youth into different habitus (collective expectations and valuation of attitudes and behaviors), which in turn impacts the development of pre-migration embodied cultural capital (mind and body dispositions) among immigrant and refugee students. Yet, given that this study relies on narratives and not observational data, it is not possible to deduce if and for how long Black newcomer youth's pre-migration embodied cultural capital influences their actual behavior in the classroom after they arrive in Canada. What we know from Ogden's (2022) study is that respect for school authorities and compliance by Ghanaian migrant students was rewarded by German teachers, suggesting that disposition in the classroom may matter for the quality of education migrant youth receive in their new host country. In the Canadian context, we have yet to explore to what extent Black newcomer youth benefit from teachers' positive responses and support when they mobilize their transnational cultural capital in a way that aligns with teachers' expectations.

## CONCLUSION

The findings we discuss in this chapter cannot be generalized to all immigrant and refugee youth. However, this qualitative inquiry enables us to discern the importance of transnational cultural capital in newcomer students' interpretations of school disciplinary processes. In the Canadian context, conducting education research in both official languages, English and French, can illuminate aspects of convergence and divergence of schooling experiences in relation to migration and child and youth development. This also showed how the intersectionality of race and migration contribute to the unique points of view of Black newcomer youth. In this chapter, perspectives of school discipline converged around three themes among English-speaking and French-speaking participants.

Future studies could explore how teachers evaluate newcomer youth behaviors, and if they in turn reward these students for the behaviors that align with school expectations. We could also examine whether transnational cultural capital influences in-class behaviors and social interactions of newcomer students across all age groups, and to what extent this persists over time after entering the Canadian school system. An investigation of teachers' perspectives on the evolution of civility and respect toward school authority figures before and after the implementation of the Ontario *Progressive Discipline* policy in 2007 could perhaps help us understand participants' observations of leniency toward incivility and minor misconduct. We do not know if the degree of classroom disruption and lack of deference toward teachers is influenced by a lack of support by school leadership when teachers intervene, or if this is more a result of internal or provincial policies. This chapter illustrates the relevance of not only investigating newcomer parental cultural capital in relation to educational achievement

and postsecondary outcomes, but also how immigrant and refugee youth transnational cultural capital shapes perspectives of various aspects of schooling, such as misconduct and disciplinary interventions.

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