

**What Can School Liaison Officers Do to Improve the Adolescent-Police Relationship with  
the Return of Vancouver's School Liaison Officer Program?**

Capstone Project

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LAWS-4003 Research Project

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April 5, 2023

### **Abstract**

This study is a secondary data analysis researching School Liaison Officers and the best practices in training, selection, and program management for the return of Vancouver's School Liaison Officer program. The research question is "What Can School Liaison Officers Do to Improve the Adolescent-Police Relationship with the Return of Vancouver's School Liaison Officer Program?" A significant gap in Canadian research was found on programs in Canada and on adolescent-police interactions, requiring the collection of data from other western countries. The research suggests a new program for the Vancouver Police Department and a national teaching program, with a focus on the need for post-secondary education, cultural training, situation training, and a reduced officer presence.

*Keywords:* School Liaison Officer, Adolescent-Police, Police Mistrust, Social Conflict Theory

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## **What Can School Liaison Officers Do to Improve the Adolescent-Police Relationship with the Return of Vancouver's School Liaison Officer Program?**

Many Canadian schools coordinate with their regional police agencies to place one or more police officers within their schools. These officers assist in school events related to public safety and help educate students on road safety, drug, and alcohol education, bullying prevention, social media safety, and gang education among other topic areas. These officers also help to act as a liaison between school administration and police agencies to assist in complaints and arising issues within the schools. These officers are normally called School Liaison Officers (SLO). Many major Canadian police agencies such as Toronto Police Service, Calgary Police Service, Edmonton Police Service, and formerly the Vancouver Police Department have programs to place qualified police officers in schools within their cities. According to an article by Katie Hyslop in *The Tyee* from January 13, 2023, the Vancouver school district agreed to review the SLO program after requests came regarding the concern of trauma caused to students and the overrepresentation of Indigenous and Black people targeted by Vancouver Police street checks. The school district then hired a private consulting firm to conduct a community consultation report, which resulted in most respondents holding positive or neutral views of the program. However, when viewing the responses of minority groups such as Indigenous and Black students, 53% and 60% respectively, did not agree that a SLO's presence contributed to a sense of safety in their schools (Hyslop, 2023). Due to the negative views expressed by most minority populations, the Vancouver School Board cancelled the program in April 2021, along with the New Westminster school board, and Toronto District School Board in 2017.

### **Research Question & Sub-Questions**

This research aims to provide suggestions and viable solutions to the Vancouver Police Department to improve the relationships between adolescents and police officers, as well as community relationships, through secondary data analysis of different programs across North America and other Western-culture countries. This can be examined through the question, "What Can School Liaison Officers Do to Improve the Adolescent-Police Relationship with the Return of Vancouver's School Liaison Officer Program?" The findings of this paper also aim to help influence changes and amendments to programs across Canada to better utilize SLO's. This paper will focus on what SLO's can do to improve the adolescent-police relationship with the return of Vancouver's School Liaison Officer program by observing programs used by school boards and police agencies in the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. This research will dive into the social contexts of each program, looking at the pre-existing relationships within the agency's authority, as well as what the partnerships have done to change programs to benefit the relationship between their officers and youth. The research also seeks to answer further questions such as how police officers interacting with youth can mitigate the results of social conflict theory, as well as identify the main causes of police mistrust in modern society, with a larger focus on a Canadian perspective. In answering these questions, this research will aim to provide additional tools to SLO's to better prepare the officers to conduct their duties, as well as provide the officers with a broader knowledge of harm-reduction initiatives linked to punitive measures.

### **Research Design & Methodology**

This research was addressed using academic articles and government articles, as both these sources are credible due to being peer reviewed and from reputable sources. The research design for this paper will follow secondary data analysis, as the articles being researched will be

past online data such as academic articles and government articles. The study will look at quantitative and qualitative data from these articles to gather theories and research data as to what solutions have worked best in other countries. The use of secondary data analysis will allow the researcher to gain a better understanding of programs being used in other countries and determine which programs, or aspects of programs, can be implemented in Canada. The use of previous data will also help answer the rates in which students observe trust issues with law enforcement members and suggestions available to fix this issue.

### *Data Collection*

The author used the Justice Institute of British Columbia Library Resources to conduct the initial search using search terms drawn from the above questions. The table below displays the number of hits for each search term.

Database	Search Term	# of Hits
JIBC Library Resources	School Liaison Officers	Without criteria: 1,265 With criteria: 416
JIBC Library Resources	School Resource Officers	Without criteria: 13,095 With criteria: 5,811
JIBC Library Resources	Adolescent-Police Relationship	Without criteria: 2,156 With criteria: 1,400
JIBC Library Resources	School Liaison Officers AND Adolescent-Police Relationship	Without criteria: 0 With criteria: 0
JIBC Library Resources	School Resource Officers AND Adolescent-Police Relationship	Without criteria: 46 With criteria: 4
JIBC Library Resources	Social Conflict Theory	Without criteria: 76,727 With criteria: 39,302

JIBC Library Resources	School Resource Officer AND Social Conflict Theory	Without criteria: 107 With criteria: 13
JIBC Library Resources	Police Mistrust	Without criteria: 1,442 With criteria: 624
JIBC Library Resources	Police Mistrust AND Adolescents or Teenagers or Young Adults or Youth	Without criteria: 120 With criteria: 29

Three inclusion criteria were applied for each search term. The first being peer-reviewed journals to ensure that the article is coming from a reputable source. The second being that the article was written between 2003 and 2023 to ensure that the literature contains modern information with the most up to date statistics. The third criteria being the articles are written in English to ensure that the author can understand the sources. An additional criterion that is applied is that the studies must be based on a Western-culture country, such as the U.S., the U.K., Australia, New Zealand, and other European countries, to ensure that the programs and suggestions are relevant to the intended society. This final criterion is applied manually by scanning each result. The collected source through these criteria aims to produce relevant and credible results, as the use of non-peer reviewed articles in qualitative research can result in weak or incorrect results due to perceived or unperceived biases from the original authors.

The above noted criteria were not included when searching for grey literature such as program information from the Vancouver Police Department and other police departments. The author will also use the community consultation report from Argyle Communications to better understand the specific concerns students, teachers, and families perceive in Vancouver (Hyslop, 2023). Additionally, some articles used for supporting evidence and explanation of theories will not follow all criterion noted above.

### *Data Analysis*

The author will use the below listed search terms to produce results and narrow down the scope of the search to better address the research question and sub-questions. Search terms such as “social conflict theory” and “police mistrust” often provide a broad range of results that are unrelated to the current scope of the study and will be combined with other search terms to provide better results.

Database	Search Term	# of Hits with criteria applied
JIBC Library Resources	School Liaison Officer	416
JIBC Library Resources	School Resource Officer	5,811
JIBC Library Resources	Adolescent Police Relationship	1,400
JIBC Library Resources	School Resource Officers AND Adolescent-Police Relationship	4
JIBC Library Resources	School Resource Officer AND Social Conflict Theory	13
JIBC Library Resources	Police Mistrust AND Adolescents or Teenagers or Young Adults or Youth	29

After obtaining search results for each search term with inclusion criteria applied, the author will go through the results in a top-down approach. The author will start with the articles listed first and go down the list one by one, as the results will be listed by relevance to the search. Each article will be vetted by reading the abstract and key words, and if the abstract and keywords are relevant, the introduction and conclusion will be read to determine if the article will be selected for the annotated bibliography.

The first stage, reading the abstract and key words, will take under a minute to determine whether the article is fit for further reading. The second stage will take around ten minutes to



determine whether the article will contribute to the current research or not. To further support the final paper, grey literature will be used to strengthen the analysis and arguments of the selected articles and will not undergo the same vetting process as peer-reviewed articles.

## **Literature Review**

### *Training Programs*

During research conducted on SLO programs within Western countries, a recurring theme was noted by the researcher in which previous articles investigated the need for specialized training and the current lack of training in some agencies. According to Hyslop (2023), a freedom of information request was submitted to the Vancouver Police Department for all training materials used to train SLO's in Vancouver, which was returned with no materials. The Vancouver School Board has mentioned various times during public meetings that the officers assigned to work in the SLO program have special training, however, there does not appear to be any additional training given to officer in Vancouver before the beginning of their new duties.

The analysis of Bolger et al. (2019), looked at officers who received special training, higher education, or no additional training before beginning their new duties, finding a significant difference between officers. Officers that have received additional training or received higher education prior to beginning their careers were more likely to resort to less punitive measures in dealing with issues within schools, as opposed to officers who had not received either, who were more likely to take a more punitive approach (Bolger et al., 2019). In a review of articles by Desmoulins et al. (2022), Fisher et al. (2022), and Higgins et al. (2019), these researchers stated that officers who received special training dependent on the

demographics of their assigned schools were able to respond to the unique issues presented to them, and when further given more community policing training, officers were better able to respond to the needs of the community to better support the students the community surrounds (Desmoulins et al., 2022, Fisher et al., 2022, Higgins et al., 2019).

Another aspect noted by May et al. pertaining to training was budgeting (2011), as these articles had noted that when an agency experienced budget cuts it was normally first to hit the SLO program. With the reduced budgets for agencies, previous training provided was sometimes lost, or the requests for additional training were even harder to get approval for. This information directly contradicted what was stated in some other studies, where multiple parties outside of just law enforcement such as post-secondary institutions, professors, and community representatives supported the use of specialized training and higher education with officers in SLO programs (Trotman & Thomas, 2016).

### *Community Interactions*

A second theme consistently reviewed during research involved community policing. Community policing is a comprehensive reform movement that focuses on the importance of police working with citizens to prevent and respond to crime, disorder, and other community-related issues (Fisher et al., 2022). Although this framework is not necessarily a new theme, as this follows the original ideas of policing coined by Sir Robert Peel, this framework aims to bring policing back to community-based groups and strengthen the ties between police and the community. Community policing can be viewed as three dimensions, all interconnected. The first is community partnerships, followed by problem-solving, and finally organizational adaptation. Various articles argue that SLO's should follow a more community police-based approach to their duties, which would help to build better ties between students, the

administration, and the communities in which the students live. For SLO's to effectively conduct their duties, a strong partnership between the school and police is essential so both organizations can effectively work together in the same space (Fisher et al., 2022). SLO's are required to problem-solve situations differently to prevent and reduce crime and other issues and must share their authority with school administrators, requiring both organizations to adapt (Fisher et al., 2022).

Researchers stated that not only would SLO's benefit from approaching their duties in a more community policing based theme by building better relationships and receiving assistance from multiple streams of other authorities, but they would also benefit in their non-law enforcement duties. As police officers in a school setting, SLO's are sometimes approached by students for assistance outside of their normal law enforcement duties, which can sometimes include officers taking the role of mentors, counsellors, and educators (Higgins et al., 2019). These roles are normally referred to as the triad model by SLO's, where the most important aspect of their role is law enforcement, second being informal counsellors or mentors for at-risk students in either at home personal issues or in school behavioral issues, and third teaching crime prevention and drug-awareness programs (Higgins et al., 2019). Although these roles are not normally definitively stated in the responsibilities of SLO's in Canada, it is noted in various studies that officers do participate in each part of the triad model in their work to better incorporate into the school as a member of the community. These roles not only assist the officers in rooting themselves as part of the community to assist them in the completion of their duties, but also improve school safety and youths' perception of the police, two key areas of improvement necessary for effective policing (Broll & Howells, 2019).

### *Racial Disparities*

A third theme visited by various researchers included the effects of racial disparities between students and police officers, or even previous issues that students have experienced with police officers either first-hand or second-hand through family or friends. In the past two decades, the push for racial equality has become increasingly strong and loud. Along with the push for this equality has joined issues of police brutality and discrimination by police towards those of racial minorities, specifically Indigenous and Black individuals in Canada. Although Canada may hold an international reputation as a multicultural society of respectful people, Canada's Black population has long argued they face discriminatory police treatment such as biased stops and searches, to police use of force (Wortley & Owusu-Bempah, 2022). These well-publicized instances of police discrimination as well as elevated levels of police contact have fostered hostility and a mistrust of the police, further making SLO's jobs harder with students of a racial minority (Wortley & Owusu-Bempah, 2022).

It is also noted that in scenarios where SLO's are placed in schools with higher populations of racial minority students, an emphasis on punitive responses and exclusionary responses such as suspensions and expulsions become commonplace (Crosse et al., 2021). Although most articles surrounding the effects of police in racialized schools are based in the U.S., these studies focus on how the main reason for an increase of officers is simply for student safety, a tactic that is sometimes also used in Canada as a reason for an increase in presence. Reviews of the use of SLO's in schools appear that officers tend to use more punitive responses and formal processes in addressing offences, causing an increase in exclusionary responses and entry into the criminal justice system (Crosse et al., 2021). Researchers argue that the use of exclusionary responses with minority youth leads to disproportionate reactions such as a reduction in academic success and an additional push toward the criminal justice system (Crosse

et al., 2021). With these measures being used by SLO's, the "school-to-prison-pipeline" is expedited and increasingly used to minority youths' disadvantage, showing that in situations such as these, SLO's are doing the opposite of what they were brought in to do, and are only increasing crime rates and incarceration rather than lowering it (Crosse et al., 2021).

Although most research involving SLO's and minority youth focuses on the negative aspects of police being in schools, various articles argue what can change the relationship between both parties. Bottiani et al. (2020) examines how minority youth are treated within schools and to what effect that has on how youth view school. Even though youth may have certain thoughts and beliefs surrounding police, it was noted that students that experienced both culturally responsive teachers and caring SLO's were more likely to be engaged in school and be less disconnected from it, as opposed to students who experienced negative attitudes from both police and teachers (Bottiani et al., 2020). Youth who are treated respectfully by both teachers and police officers were significantly more appreciative of both parties and were more likely to continue to stay focused on school and build positive relationships (Bottiani et al., 2020, Pagnutti et al., 2020).

### **Theoretical Perspectives**

Social conflict theory states that social order is maintained through power by those with wealth who will attempt to hold onto it by any means and can be looked at through different dimensions such as social groups (Kivisto, 2021). With police officers holding a perceived higher social status than students, what can be done to achieve a collaborative and level setting to improve relationships? Karl Marx created and argued that social conflict theory is the social theory in which individuals and groups, which can sometimes be referred to as social classes, interact through conflict rather than consensus. Marx argued that the groups will take on various

forms of conflict, ranging from verbal to physical, to maintain the material and non-material resources. This theory can be simplified by using the example of the wealthy versus the poor, where the more powerful group, the wealthy, tends to use their power to retain it and in turn exploit groups with less power, otherwise referred to as the poor. Although social conflict theory is based on the constant conflict within society, and can be viewed as a negative, it can be argued that all human history is a result of conflict, in which the problems affecting one group are changed to a better society to make room for a new conflict between the classes. Social conflict theory today can be viewed through events such as Black Lives Matter, where minorities, African Americans, are fighting back against their exploitation and fighting for more power, which has in turn made some progress, but is still an ongoing battle. This theoretical perspective will be observed throughout the research as a link to deteriorating relationships between police and youth, and how police officers, who can be viewed as the higher power group, can ease conflict in the view of social conflict theory.

Interactionist theory, also referred to as interactionism, observes the interactions between individuals in various relationships, as well as the interactions between and within small groups (Collins, 2011). Max Weber was one of the original contributors to interactionism and argued that societies are the product of millions of daily social interactions between individuals. Interactionism focuses on several major components including individuals that make conscious decisions related to their actions during interactions with others based on their interpretations of the situational aspects, different social actors interpret the same social contexts and actions of others in diverse ways, and every human interaction takes place in a social context, which in turn influences how one acts (Collins, 2011). Some theorists of interactionism argue that social class is not an issue within the theory, as they believe that not every person from one social class

thinks in the same way as another. As this theory focuses on the interactions between various individuals, this research will employ this theory to determine how different personalities can affect the way different individuals interact. The research will look to determine if training on the interactions with certain personalities can benefit police officers in interacting with youth to mutually agree upon solutions to deviance or other social issues.

## **Results & Findings**

SLO's in Canada face many of the same issues that their partners do in other countries today. Although Canada has faced less of a backlash against law enforcement in comparison to other countries such as the U.S., police in Canada are still being held to the same standards, if not higher standards. Due to this added pressure, the strenuous job of interacting with youth, and the further stressors involved with minority youth, become increasingly apparent. In the Argyle Communications survey and report (2021), overall responses to the reports questions by students varied but showed a definitive need for change from all respondents. The report questioned respondents about whether they believe the SLO program contributes to a sense of safety in schools, with 53% of students strongly agree or agree with the statement and 20% stating that they either disagree or strongly disagree with the statement. Although the positive responses seem high, when broken down by minorities around 15% of Black and 47% of Indigenous students agreed in some capacity with the statement (Argyle Communications, 2021). Less than half of Indigenous students in Vancouver schools felt that SLOs made them feel safe at school, with an exponentially lower number of Black students feeling safe around SLOs, showing that the current work being done to bridge the gap between adolescents and police by the VPD is not effective. When analyzing if respondents believe the SLO program contributes to a sense of positive community in schools, only 50% of all students agreed in some capacity, with 75% of

Black students and 33% of Indigenous students not agreeing in some capacity. With these alarmingly sparse numbers of approval voiced in the report, what can SLOs do to improve the adolescent-police relationship with the return of Vancouver's SLO program?

### *Training & Education*

As stated by Hyslop (2023), the VPD does not have a current curriculum or additional training for its officers selected to work as SLO's. According to VPD (2023), they do not require an applicant to have any post-secondary education to apply. It is a preferred qualification, but there are no specifications for which field of study the education must be in. Post-secondary education can assist a police officer in having a higher level of understanding for various aspects of their job, from additional understanding of how people react, why people do certain things, and how to communicate with someone more effectively (Bolger et al., 2019). Officers that have received additional training or received higher education prior to beginning their careers were more likely to resort to less punitive measures in dealing with issues within schools, as opposed to officers who had not received either, who were more likely to take a more punitive approach (Bolger et al., 2019). In available literature it is stated that the training and education among SLO's in the U.S. varies tremendously, ranging from basic police academy training to a "minimum of forty hours of specialized training covering problems and challenges unique to school settings such as understanding special needs students, threat responses, active shooters, conflict resolution, and the SLO as an educator and informal counselor" (Bolger et al., 2019, p.256). This variation in training is shockingly concerning, allowing police officers to conduct their duties and extras around at-risk youth with no additional support, which can result in a fast track for youth into the criminal justice system.



In the U.S., there is a national provider for SLO training, known as NASRO, which instructs around 1,500 officers each year. This provider has existed in the U.S. since the 1990's and has been empirically studied various times to assist SLO's in being suitably trained for their job, providing solely voluntary training, and is not required of every SLO (Bolger et al., 2019). NASRO assists police officers in improving school safety and create a positive learning environment for students by taking more community-based approaches to various problems, as well as providing specific training on how to identify and deal with special issues within schools, such as students with autism (Bolger et al., 2019). This national program provides an opportunity for every SLO to put their best foot forward into their duties and assists them in creating a positive image of the police within their schools. This helps officers teach them how to deal with certain situations and helps create a standard level of response across the country for various situations. In a two-year study conducted in Ohio, disruptive behaviors, suspensions, and arrests all decreased after an SLO program was implemented that had been trained by NASRO (Bolger et al., 2019). Not only did this become a better environment for students, but it was found that when students had a good relationship with the SLO's, they were more likely to confide in them about crimes being committed at school, or even outside of school, assisting police in more effectively doing their job and making the community a safer place (Bolger et al., 2019).

### *Community Policing*

Without a connection to the community and people in it, an SLO would struggle to identify ways of mediating risks, solving problems, and assisting in creating a stronger and better community. Community policing has been conceptualized to contain three dimensions as to what is needed for it to be successful; community partnerships, problem-solving, and organizational adaptation (Fisher et al., 2022). In interviews conducted in Fisher et al.'s study, officers stated

that a strong collaboration between police and schools in defining the roles of SLO's helped to ensure that each party was on the same page, and the most satisfaction for the officer's job was achieved. This also helps ensure that any issues relevant to a certain district or set of schools can be adequately addressed. Furthermore, officers stated that a substantial portion of their job within the schools involved building relationships with students, teachers, administrators and even outside agencies. With the ability to build these relationships, and with most officers going out of their way to meet and get to know as many staff and students as possible (Fisher et al., 2022), this further helps to enforce the community policing aspect of their job. By creating these relationships, both staff and students feel more comfortable approaching the officers for help inside and outside law enforcement.

When SLO's create relationships with staff and students, they can more effectively change the police perspective that some at-risk youth may hold (Fisher et al., 2022). By effectively creating relationships, officers can expand their toolset from law enforcement actions to the other two aspects of the triad model, those being an informal counsellor and an educator (Higgins et al., 2019). Although these roles may not seem related to front-line policing, they are key roles within being an SLO, as they enable the officers to steer students out of the path of trouble and educate them and mentor students into more productive avenues. By incorporating the last two arms of the triad model, police officers can more effectively connect with minority students, and continuously work on forming positive relationships for both the present and future (Higgins et al., 2019).

### *Cultural Sensitivity*

Unfortunately, when SLO's are placed in schools with higher populations of racial minority students, an emphasis on punitive responses and exclusionary responses such as

suspensions and expulsions become commonplace (Crosse et al., 2021). The use of these methods of correction only pushes students further away from being connected and engaged in schools, which in turn opens at-risk students to criminal activities (Crosse et al., 2021). Various researchers, such as Crosse et al., stated that many SLO's were placed into schools in the U.S. that were a part of certain types of communities, which could be attributed to higher crime areas, which further increased the exposure that students in these schools had to police (2021). Due to various "zero-tolerance" policies that had been enacted in U.S. schools, these types of communities and schools were especially targeted by police, and often were communities of minority (Crosse et al., 2021). The presence of police officers in these schools only furthered the rift between youth and police, as officers expressed next to no discretion in these policies, causing many minority youths to have interactions with SLO's in negative and punitive ways. When youth are constantly targeted by policies that require them to face exclusionary measures, they are often faced with a lack of school engagement and interest in school (Bottiani et al., 2020).

Minority youth are often the recipients of racial discrimination at an alarmingly high rate within schools, which can negatively affect their wellbeing (Bottiani et al., 2020). When youth are exposed to both culturally responsive and caring role models, such as teachers and SLO's, their school engagement and connection are more likely to stay high, as opposed to those who are negatively treated by role models (Bottiani et al., 2020). By working to ensure that both teachers and police are educated and informed on relevant and appropriate measures for interacting and approaching students that often experience racial discrimination, the engagement from these students in their academic careers can be achieved, as well as continuing to positively impact the relationship between youth and police. Even though the focus is to keep students

engaged in school, the use of student voices for what they believe can assist them and police is crucial in identifying positive avenues of mediation (Desmoulins et al., 2022, Pagnutti et al., 2020).

## **Discussion**

The Vancouver School Board along with the VPD have stated in various news articles that the SLO program is set to return to Vancouver schools in the Fall of 2023. One thing not mentioned is how the program will return, and if there are any changes to be made to how the program originally operated. The Argyle Communications report stated various issues present in the previous program (2021), culminating in the suspension of the program in Vancouver. Various issues included low approval ratings, low feelings of safety and connection with SLO's, and a desire by both students and administrators to see changes to how the program operates. These disapproval ratings include only 53% of Vancouver students feeling safe in the presence of SLO's, 50% of Vancouver students believing SLO's contributed to positive community, and various respondents believing the program should be overhauled completely, up to the complete removal of the VPD from schools (Argyle Communications, 2021). With these various concerns present in the return of the SLO program, strong changes to how the program selects and trains its officers, and what their true role within schools is, the program's construction requires evidence-based suggestions.

### *Officer Selection*

The report stated that many respondents, both students and community members, believed that the current SLO's did not truly represent the demographics of students in Vancouver schools, which resulted in many minority students feeling uncomfortable with the

presence of police within the school (Argyle Communications, 2021). The respondents to the report further suggested that VPD officers interested in becoming a SLO should be subject to a selection process that focuses on filling positions with those of the school demographic (Argyle Communications, 2021). As stated by Bottiani et al. (2020) and Pagnutti et al. (2020), when students from racial minorities can see police officers and mentors that are the same as them in positions to make a difference, a deeper connection is able to be made between both parties, providing a bridge to the gap, and changing the perception for the better. Not only are students able to feel more comfortable around police in situations like this, but the officers can better communicate, understand, and relate to minority students as they speak from their own experiences and upbringing.

The implementation of a selection process that more accurately assigns qualified police officers to SLO positions would help to bridge the gap between adolescents and the police. By ensuring the process stays competitive, the VPD would be able to narrow down candidates to those that have higher education in areas that are relevant to dealing with youth and individuals with various special needs, resulting in more informal and impactful resolutions to issues. This selection process would also allow the VPD to fill positions in schools with officers of certain demographics to provide a broader range of inclusivity to students in these schools.

### *Officer Training*

As stated by Bolger et al. (2019), officers that have gone through higher education or have received specified job training for SLO's are more likely to take less punitive actions and resolve issues with informal means. The VPD currently does not require a post-secondary education for officers to apply, but it is a preferred qualification. Although this does not explicitly determine that most officers in Vancouver do not have higher education, it does allow

various officers to begin their careers without higher education or receive education in areas that may not be relevant to front-line policing. To better serve the community, and students in the role of an SLO, the implementation of a requirement for specified higher education in areas relevant to front-line policing such as psychology and conflict resolution could help to improve the daily interactions of all parties. The implementation of specific job training for SLOs is also a necessary change for the VPD to ensure proper reimplementation of officers into schools. As conducted in the U.K. by the West Midlands Police, the cooperation between police and post-secondary allowed for the creation of a teaching program for SLOs (Trotman & Thomas, 2016). This partnership allowed for front line members, police administrators, and various educators within the School of Education at Newman University to collaborate and build a program after conducting various interviews with both police officers and members of the school's community to determine which areas needed further education, and what curriculum was required for officers to be successful (Trotman & Thomas, 2016). As the VPD currently trains all recruit officers at the Justice Institute of British Columbia (JIBC), along with all other municipal police agencies in British Columbia, it is suggested that the VPD collaborate with the JIBC as the U.K. program has done to create a program designed for further training of police officers transitioning into SLO roles.

To further the necessity of further training for police officers transitioning into the role of SLOs, the need for a national training program is suggested. Drawing from the program known as NASRO in the U.S., which provides specialized training to 1,500 police officers annually (Bolger et al., 2019), a national program within Canada with a similar goal would aid police agencies across the country in ensuring their officers are prepared for their new roles. Not only would the program provide the option for further training to agencies nationwide, but it would

also assist in ensuring that SLO's treat situations in an equivalent manner across the country as opposed to harsher or lighter resolutions in different departments. NASRO's goals are to ensure that SLOs are working at their full capacity to maintain school safety, create a positive learning environment, and a positive community, all of which are concerns expressed in the report by Vancouver students (Bolger et al., 2019). Although this program would allow for a national training standard, due to the demographic differences noted across Canada, the specific responses to certain groups and activities in some areas may require regional changes or enhancements, something that will be required to ensure full efficiency of SLOs.

To fully integrate into communities, it is essential that SLOs understand and appreciate their cultures. Students that believe the mentors in their lives are caring and culturally responsive are more likely to stay engaged and connected to their school, allowing them to complete their education and progress more easily in life (Bottiani et al., 2020). This requires that officers be able to identify various cultures and determine certain responses that are expected to deal with conflict or conversation between each, something that can be difficult to learn but possible to identify through trait training. Students in various surveys state that when an officer can communicate respectfully and learn how the student wants to proceed with a conversation, students are more likely to respect them and be comfortable in future interactions (Pagnutti et al., 2020). With the implementation of further training of methods of communication and listening skills, SLOs would be better equipped to deal with minority students outside of their demographic.

### *Officer Presence*

Another suggestion noted during the report's survey stated that SLOs should not be armed or dressed as police officers. Although this suggestion may present concerns about officer

safety in situations where a physical altercation occurs or instances of use of force are required, various changes could be made to the presence of SLOs to make students feel safer and continue to keep police officers safe. Although the argument of different societal and cultural aspects could be made on the difference between Canada and the U.K., officers of the West Midlands Police that work as SLOs are known as Police Community Support Officers, who are armed with little to no self-defense tools (Trotman & Thomas, 2016). This implementation of officers in this role with minimal tools is the result of proper de-escalation and conflict management training, allowing officers to talk subjects down and convince them to do what the officer wants rather than immediately use force (Trotman & Thomas, 2016). Additionally, it is suggested that VPD SLOs be equipped with a modified tool kit, like those of a security guard which may only carry handcuffs, OC spray, and a baton. This reduced tool kit provides a lighter officer presence with the removal of a firearm, allowing students to feel more comfortable interacting with SLOs (Pagnutti et al., 2020). Furthermore, it is suggested that SLOs adopt a different or modified uniform, one still representing the VPD but presenting less as an armed officer. It is suggested that the uniform resemble something less tactical and more civilian to present SLOs as a member of the community rather than tool of oppression to minority students (Crosse et al., 2021, Pagnutti et al., 2020).

### **Recommendations & Conclusion**

The return of the VPD SLO program to Vancouver schools is a crucial step in continuing to bridge the gap between adolescents and police. Although the Vancouver School Board suspended the program in 2021 after the release of Argyle Communications report (2021), the program is set to return in the Fall of 2023 (Hyslop, 2023). The report endeavored to represent all beliefs surrounding the previous SLO program, and what was necessary for change to better



suit Vancouver, bringing to light how students felt SLOs did not contribute to a sense of safety or community to minority youth. By utilizing the responses available in Argyle Communications report and consulting relevant research within the SLO field (2021), an outline of an improved program that will better represent Vancouver's various demographics can be composed. It is necessary to improve the standard of SLOs through the added requirements for post-secondary education and the implementation of additional specialized training for these officers to better equip them for their new roles (Bolger et al., 2019). Not only is proper training required to better serve the communities of Vancouver, but so is the need for a more demographically represented officer who understands the cultural sensitivities facing Vancouver's minority youth (Pagnutti et al., 2020).

This research suggests that a new program following the gathered research be created in Vancouver, but also that a national training program be implemented to better prepare SLOs across the country. It must be noted that there is currently a large gap in Canadian literature available surrounding the topic of SLO and youth interaction. To overcome this, research was found on programs in other countries like Canada allowing connections to be drawn to how policing is conducted in Canada. To first bridge the gap between civilians and police across the country, the gap must be bridged between adolescents and police, to aid in building mutually beneficial relationships for the future.

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