Market "Choices" or Structured Pathways? How Specialized Arts Education Contributes to the Reproduction of Inequality

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Abstract: Located in one of the most diverse cities in the world, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) offers several programs catering to a variety of student interests. Specialty Arts Programs (SAPs) have gained particular attention in part because of their reputation as excellent schools providing a unique opportunity for training in the arts. However, recently such programs have also raised concerns about who can access and who ultimately benefits from specialized programming in the arts. While the TDSB is committed to equal access for all families, the student populations at

these programs do not mirror the broader school population, serving mostly affluent families and students with access to high levels of social and cultural capital. Employing data from the TDSB's Parent and Student Census and the School Information Systems, the article first demonstrates the demographic homogeneity of specialized arts programs and then examines whether this homogeneity is a particular outcome of specialized arts programs or a manifestation of a *de facto* streaming mechanism that begins earlier in the schooling process. To do this, the authors explore the relationship between feeder schools and programs that guide students towards SAPs. Results demonstrate that the bulk of SAP students are drawn from a select few elementary schools across the board. Largely, the demographics of elementary feeder schools reflect similar characteristics of the SAP population and this relationship is amplified as the number of students drawn from feeder schools increases. In addition, students in SAPs experience a high level of belonging in school as compared to students across the system. While this outcome is often attributed to the immersion in arts-based curriculum, the authors query how the role of creating homogenous spaces through selective programming contributes to students' experience of belonging while at the same time reproducing structural inequality.
Keywords: arts education; school choice; structural inequality; Toronto District School Board; belonging

"Opciones" de mercado o caminos estructurados? Cómo la educación especializada en las artes contribuye a la reproducción de la desigualdad
Resumen: Ubicada en una de las ciudades más diversas del mundo, la Junta Escolar del Distracto de Toronto (JEDT) ofrece una variedad de programas para servir los diferentes intereses de sus estudiantes. Los Programas Especializados en las Artes (PEA) han ganado popularidad en parte por su reputación como excelentes escuelas que proveen oportunidades únicas para el entrenamiento de estudiantes en las artes. Aun así, recientemente han surgido críticas sobre cuales estudiantes logran acceso a estos programas y se benefician de la especialización y recursos que brindan. Aunque la JEDT está comprometida a ofrecer igual acceso a todas las familias, los estudiantes en estos programas no representan la diversidad de la población escolar amplia, y sirven mayormente a estudiantes de familias pudientes con acceso a altos niveles de capital social y cultural. Utilizando datos del Censo de Padres y Estudiantes y del Sistema de Información Escolar de la JEDT, este artículo primero demuestra la homogeneidad demográfica de los programas especializados en las artes y examina si esta homogeneidad es un resultado específico de estos programas o una manifestación de un proceso de segregación que comienza en etapas del proceso escolar anteriores. Para esto, los autores analizan la relación entre las escuelas que alimentan y dirigen estudiantes hacia los programas especializados en las artes. Los resultados demuestran que la mayoría de los estudiantes en los PEA vienen de un número limitado de escuelas elementales. En su mayoría, estas escuelas tienen poblaciones de estudiantes con características similares a los PEA, y esta similitud se aumenta a medida que el número de estudiantes procedentes de cada escuela aumenta también. Adicionalmente, los estudiantes en los PEA indican un mayor sentido de pertenencia en sus escuelas, comparado con los estudiantes en otras escuelas atreves del distrito. Aunque este sentido de pertenencia es atribuido al impacto del currículo en las artes, los autores cuestionan el como la homogeneidad de la población en estos programas selectivos contribuye al sentido de pertenencia y a la misma vez a la reproducción de la desigualdad estructural.
Palabras-clave: educación en las artes; opciones escolares; desigualdad estructural; Junta del Distrito Escolar; Toronto; sentido de pertenencia

"Opções" de mercado ou caminhos estruturados? Como educação especializada nas artes contribui para a reprodução da desigualdade
Resumo: Localizado em uma das cidades mais diversificadas do mundo, o Conselho de Districto Escola de Toronto (JEDT) oferece uma variedade de programas para atender os diferentes interesses dos seus alunos. Programas especializados nas Artes (PEA) ganharam popularidade em parte por causa de sua reputação como excelentes escolas que oferecem oportunidades únicas para a formação de estudantes nas artes. Mesmo assim, eles surgiram recentemente comentários que os estudantes ganham acesso a esses programas e beneficiar da experiência e os recursos que eles fornecem. Embora JEDT está empenhada em proporcionar igualdade de acesso a todas as famílias, os estudantes nestes programas não representam a grande diversidade da população escolar, e servem principalmente estudantes de famílias abastadas com acesso a altos níveis de capital social e cultural. Usando Pais e Alunos de dados do Censo e do Sistema de Informações sobre escolas JEDT, este artigo demonstra primeiro a homogeneidade demográfica dos programas de artes especializados e examina se essa homogeneidade é um resultado específico destes programas ou uma manifestação de um processo segregação que começa na escola etapas anteriores do processo. Para isso, os autores analisam a relação entre as escolas que se alimentam e estudantes diretos em direção especializadas em programas de artes. Os resultados mostram que a maioria dos estudantes na PEA vêm de um número limitado de escolas de ensino fundamental. Principalmente, essas escolas têm populações de alunos com características semelhantes PEA, e essa semelhança é maior que o número de alunos de cada escola também aumenta. Além disso, os alunos da PEA indicar um maior sentido de pertença nas suas escolas em comparação com estudantes de outras escolas do distrito de ousar. Embora este sentido de pertença é atribuído ao impacto do currículo nas artes, como autores questionar a homogeneidade da população nestes programas selectiva contribui para a sensação de pertença e ao mesmo tempo a reprodução da desigualdade estrutural.
Palavras-chave: educação artística; a escolha da escola; desigualdade estrutural; Conselho de Districto Escola; Toronto; sentido de pertença

Market "Choices" or Structured Pathways? How Specialized Arts Education Contributes to the Reproduction of Inequality

Schools play a significant role in sorting students into particular career trajectories and shaping individual futures. This sorting typically reproduces structural inequalities, ensuring that students who already benefit from social advantages secure their future positioning within social hierarchies (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Bowles & Gintis, 1978; Giroux, 1983). The practice of ability "tracking" or "streaming," for example, is one of the mechanisms through which such reproduction most typically occurs; scholars have long established that social class and race/ethnicity are closely linked to placement in differentiated academic tracks leading to disparate academic and career outcomes. Furthermore, the stark inequalities in opportunities and resources, as well as the differences in curriculum and pedagogy that characterize each stream ultimately lead to different outcomes. In turn, such outcomes reproduce social hierarchies and have long-term unequal consequences for students from varying economic, social, and cultural groups, securing structural inequalities (Anyon, 1979; Oakes, 1985, 1990).

In Ontario, Canada, while streaming has been the subject of much critique (Clandfield et al., 2014; Curtis & Livingstone, 1992; Deosaran & Wright, 1976),[1] there is extensive debate over whether and how schools should support students who are perceived as having differing abilities, individual interests, and idiosyncrasies. As well, the very ways in which such distinctions are recognized and become significant have been subject to debate (Reid & Knight, 2006). Most educators agree, at least in general terms, that students should not receive unequal treatment on the basis of how they are classified through social categories of class, race, gender, ability, sexuality, and other markers of difference. At the same time, there is also widespread support for the idea that students should be able to pursue their interests and vocational inclinations and that culturally relevant or responsive strategies are necessary for effectively engaging students from different cultural backgrounds. Indeed, most educators believe that schools should provide differentiated programming as well as curriculum and instruction in response to the kaleidoscope of students' abilities, academic aptitudes, as well as their cultural dispositions and identified proclivities and orientations. And yet, there is also widespread debate among educators about how best to respond to such differences and ensure equitable access to opportunities (see Viteritti, 2012).

Over the last four decades, neoliberal free-market individualism has offered an ideological solution to this quandary, framing both students and parents as individual consumers in an educational marketplace in which they are free to "choose" from a plethora of options (i.e. educational products) based on their particular interests and aptitudes. From such a worldview, inequalities in educational attainment are not the result of structural inequalities, as suggested earlier, but the direct outcome of individual choices and abilities. Some education scholars have argued that such a view largely obscures the many ways in which the system of schooling continues to reproduce social inequalities through more hidden but equally pervasive mechanisms (Ball, Bowe, & Gewirtz, 1996; Van Zanten, 2005). Still, many other educators support the basic principle that providing a wide variety of differentiated opportunities for students to choose from is the most effective way to address inequality (Viteritti, 2012).

In this article, we attempt to shed light into this debate by examining the pathways that lead certain kinds of students to "choose" particular kinds of opportunities. Specifically, we use the case of specialized arts high schools in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) to show that such "choices" produce homogenous school environments that contribute to the reproduction of structural inequality. The demographics of specialized arts high schools suggest that a very narrow subset of the student population – a subset that typically benefits from many forms of privilege – is actually able to access such programs. We argue that such choice schemes are not simply an opportunity for individuals to pursue their idiosyncratic interests and/or talents, but are also a key mechanism through which structural inequalities are reproduced. To demonstrate this, we first use data to show that, despite being described as "diverse," specialized arts high schools are characterized by the kind of demographic homogeneity that makes structural inequality evident. Second, we show that this homogeneity is not simply a characteristic of specialized arts high schools (perhaps the outcome of individual choices). Rather, we demonstrate that this homogeneity is in fact pervasive to the schooling pathways through which students arrive at such schools and that it is further reinforced through the very choice of attending a specialty arts program. We will contend that this pattern bolsters the argument that choice (in this case, choosing an arts education) exacerbates structural inequality.

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[1]Since our research is based in Canada, in this article we use the term streaming, which is more common in Canadian schools and education scholarship than the term tracking, which is more common in the US. The two terms are interchangeable.

While the argument about the relationship between "choice" and structural inequality is not entirely new, we extend our analysis of the demographic data to discuss the ways in which discourses of the arts are implicated in the production of inequality and the enforcement of neoliberal market logics. As an alternative to academic streaming, specialized arts programs are typically premised on the idea that *any* student with artistic talents or abilities, regardless of social or cultural background, should be able to pursue training in the arts (e.g. Gore, 2007). Some educators have argued that specialized arts programs support the needs of such students with qualitatively different approaches to teaching and learning (e.g. Davis, 2005). By contrast, we build on our prior research through the Urban Arts High Schools (UAHS) project to argue that the kind of homogeneity that characterizes specialized arts education, as well as the schooling pathways that lead to them, is evidence of persistent structural inequality, rather than the outcome of individual talents and interests in the arts (Gaztambide-Fernández, Saifer, & Desai, 2013; Gaztambide-Fernández, VanderDussen, & Cairns, 2014; Saifer & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2017). We suggest that ideas about the pedagogical value of the arts and the needs of young artists reflect the neoliberal commodification of creativity and ultimately occlude the pervasiveness of racism and structural inequality.

The Toronto District School Board and Specialized Arts Education

The Toronto District School Board is the largest public school board in Canada and one of the largest in North America (TDSB, 2015). It has a regular day student population of approximately a quarter of a million students and a continuing education population of an additional 160,000 students (TDSB, 2015). In addition to being one of the largest, the TDSB is also one of the most diverse school boards in North America. In 2011-12, 29% of the student population self-identified as White, 24% as South Asian, 15% as East Asian, 12% as Black, and 20% identified with some other racial and/or ethnic identifier (e.g., Latin American, Mixed, Southeast Asian, Aboriginal, etc.) (Yau, Rosolen, & Archer, 2013). In addition, 44% of students spoke only English and 27% of all students were born outside of Canada (Yau, Rosolen, & Archer, 2013). The TDSB collects extensive demographic and experiential data through its Student and Parent Census. Collected data is then merged with program data, which enables analyses of demographic trends across program participation. Analyses of this broad and sophisticated database has led to the observation by several researchers that new, complex, and more diffused structural mechanisms exist within school systems that are ultimately responsible for organizing students and (unequally) distributing academic advantages (Parekh & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2017; Smaller, 2014).

Catering to diverse student interests and needs, the TDSB offers many specialty programs, including: French Immersion, the International Baccalaureate program, Advanced Placement opportunities, Gifted and Special Education programming, Elite Athletics program, Ontario Youth Apprenticeship, and Specialist High Skills Major programs. Often described as programs of choice, specialty programs often mirror the ways in which streaming produces demographic segregation (Sinay, 2010). Over the past few years, a number of studies employing TDSB data have identified stratified access to programming offered throughout the board (Parekh, 2014; Robson, Anisef, Brown, & Parekh, 2014). Concerns around the disproportionate representation of particular ethno-racial, class, and (dis)ability groupings across programs have re-ignited discussions on streaming and the role specialized programs play in re-segregating students into socially constructed categories. In this paper, we contribute to these discussions by looking closely at specialized arts programs. We use demographic data to show that rather than enhancing equal access, these choice programs contribute to structural inequality.

Specialized Arts Programs in the TDSB

Specialized arts programs have existed in the TDSB since the 1950s, specifically within the context of vocational schools that sought to prepare students for careers in design, illustration, and other visual crafts. Since the early 1980s, more programs have been established across the region to provide pre-professional training in the arts, including music, drama, dance, and visual arts, and later extending to musical theater and film (Graham, 1983). Currently, there are four such programs available across the board, two that are housed within larger, comprehensive high schools (within-school programs) and two that form their own stand-alone high schools (whole-school programs). In addition to pre-professional arts training, students in specialized arts programs are also taught the regular Ontario curriculum and are entitled to receive the same accommodations, supports, and services as other students across the TDSB.

Specialized arts programs in Toronto (and in Canada more generally) share many of the characteristics of arts "magnet schools" and other such programs in the United States (Goldring & Smrekar, 2000; Gore, 2007; Metz, 2003; Wilson, 2001). They typically serve district-wide (and sometimes beyond-district) populations, have varying degrees of autonomy, and usually involve some kind of selection process through which students interested in pre-professional training in the arts are selected using various criteria revolving around notions of artistic "talent." Like many such programs in the US, specialized arts programs have gained recognition across the TDSB and are considered among the better schooling options for high school students. They are known across the district for providing students with rigorous academic courses along with opportunities for "talented" students to pursue their interests in the various visual and performing arts. All four programs in the TDSB have a selective admissions process involving applications, written statements, and letters of recommendation, with three requiring some sort of live audition and one requiring an extended essay in lieu of an audition. Indeed, for students, parents, and teachers, being admitted into a specialized arts program is considered a significant accomplishment (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2010).

Given the selective admissions process, perhaps it is not surprising that – as we detail below – specialized arts programs end up having such a homogeneous student population when compared to the rest of the TDSB student population. Paradoxically those who advocate for such schools, as well as the teachers, parents, and (not quite as often) the students, describe the schools as "diverse" and as providing opportunities for *everyone*, regardless of social class or cultural background, to pursue careers in the arts. Indeed, in our research through the UAHS project, teachers and students in Toronto schools often described the students as coming "from everywhere" (see Gaztambide-Fernández, 2010).

When presented with this paradox, school constituents mobilize discourses of "talent" as a way to justify exclusion and unequal access (Gaztambide-Fernández, Saifer, & Desai, 2013). This move reveals the double gesture in how discourses of "the arts" are mobilized, on the one hand, to promote equal opportunity for all, while on the other, to limit opportunity for most (Caillier, 2006; Gaztambide-Fernández, Nicholls, & Arráiz Matute, 2016; Krahe & Acuff, 2013). To be fair, it is not difficult to argue that admissions processes have an exclusionary effect that, almost by definition, yields homogenous student populations (see Stevens, 2009; Warikoo, 2016). More complicated, but likely much more revealing, is to examine whether such exclusions are simply the result of unequal access to prior artistic training and exposure, or whether there are more hidden forms of inequality that ensure unequal access to programs. To contextualize this question, we turn to an analysis of the demographic data to show, first, who are the students that attend specialized arts schools and, second, from where these students come.

Market "Choices" or Structured Pathways?

In this section we examine whether it is true that students who attend specialized arts programs in the TDSB "come from everywhere," as they are often described by the participants in the UAHS project (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2010). We query whether such programs serve the needs of students interested in the arts from across the system and whether it is their unique interest that leads them to "choose" such specialized programs. If we assume that interest and talent in the arts is not a unique characteristic of certain social groups, as advocates of specialized arts education suggest, then we would expect not only that such schools would indeed be diverse, but that there would be no particular relationship between who the students are and from where they come. Even if we accept that admissions processes, as an exclusionary practice, produce homogenous environments, we would expect the students who succeed to come from a broad spectrum of schools. In other words, here we ask whether students *arrive into* a homogenous school environment that is produced by selective criteria, or whether the same homogeneity is characteristic of prior schooling. If so, such homogeneity would suggest that the "choice" to attend a specialized arts program is not simply the result of individual idiosyncrasies and interests, but that it is situated within the context of unequal opportunities and hidden structured pathways that, much like streaming or tracking, lead some students, and not others, into specialized arts education.

Data Analysis

We draw data for this analysis from a core sample of 550 students who transitioned from Grade 8 at a TDSB middle school into Grade 9 at one of three specialized arts programs, or "SAPs," in 2011.[2] All data were drawn from the TDSB's 2011-2012 data sets, which included the most recent iteration of the Student and Parent Census. As stated earlier, the census captures student demographics and experiences both inside and outside school. For the purposes of our analysis, we focus on the distribution of three variables: ethno-racial identification, income, and parental education. We focused on these variables as they are the most direct indicators of structural stratification. We employed a series of Chi-Square analyses to determine the relationships between variables.[3]

Specialized Arts Programs, 2011-12 – Demographic Profile

To begin, we provide a description of the demographics of students attending SAPs within the TDSB, beginning with income. The TDSB's family income variable is determined by linking the students' postal code to family income reported on the federal census to Statistics Canada.[4] These numbers are then collapsed into equitable income deciles, so that each decile roughly represents a step in the income distribution, with 10% of the student population allocated to each step based on their income. As shown in Figure 1, over one-half (56.7%) of the students who entered Grade 9 in SAP's in 2011 were likely to come from families representing the three highest income deciles in the TDSB.

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[2] Although there are four such schools, we were unable to obtain differentiating course code information from one of the "within-school" programs, making it impossible to identify the students enrolled in the specialized arts' program at that particular school.

[3] The statistical analysis was made possible through the generous support and guidance of Dr. Robert S. Brown, Research Coordinator at the TDSB.

[4] While not perfect, "the use of data imputed by assuming individual information from ecological census data linked to postal code is a common method for estimating SES in the absence of more specific and detailed records" (Deonandan, Cambell, Ostbye, Tummon, & Robertson, 2000, p. 114).
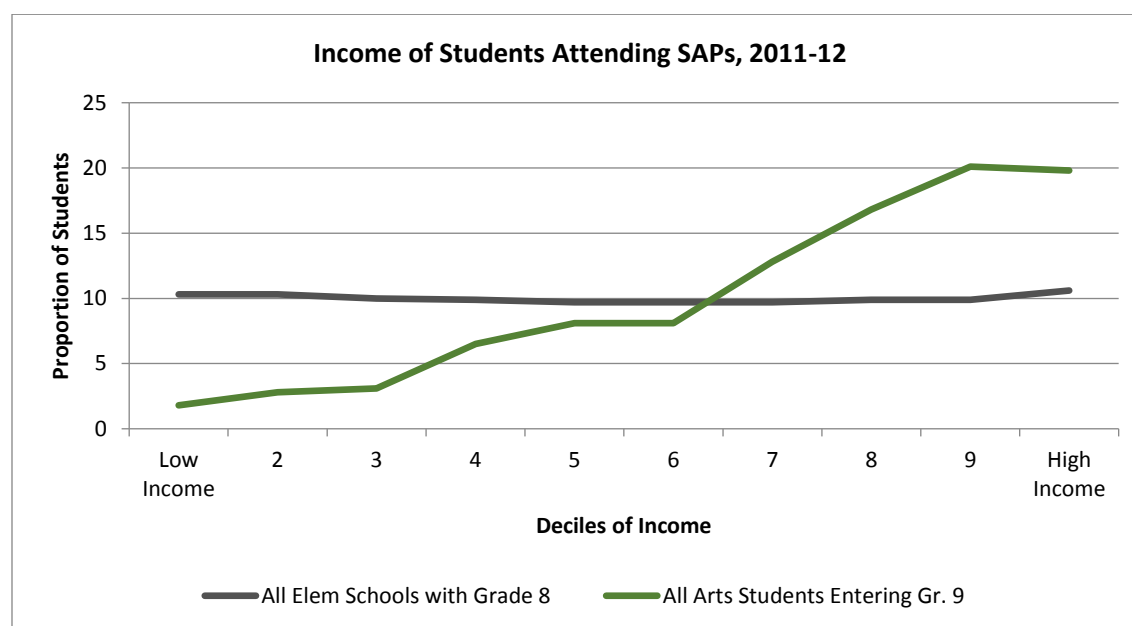
Figure 1. Income of Grade 9 Students Attending SAPs, 2011-12

With regards to ethno-racial identification, when compared to the demographic representation across all elementary schools,[5] students entering SAPs were disproportionately White (see Figure 2). Of students entering Grade 9 in SAPs in 2011, 67% self-identified as White, more than twice the proportion of White students across all elementary students (29.3%). Aside from the "Mixed" category, all other ethno-racial categories were significantly underrepresented among students entering SAPs, with South Asian students being the most underrepresented when compared to the larger elementary school population.

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[5] There are many kinds of elementary schools in the TDSB. While many run from kindergarten to Grade 8, others include kindergarten to Grade 5, while others only include Grades 4-8, or simply just kindergarten. Elementary schools included in this analysis were all elementary schools in the TDSB that included at least one Grade 8 class.
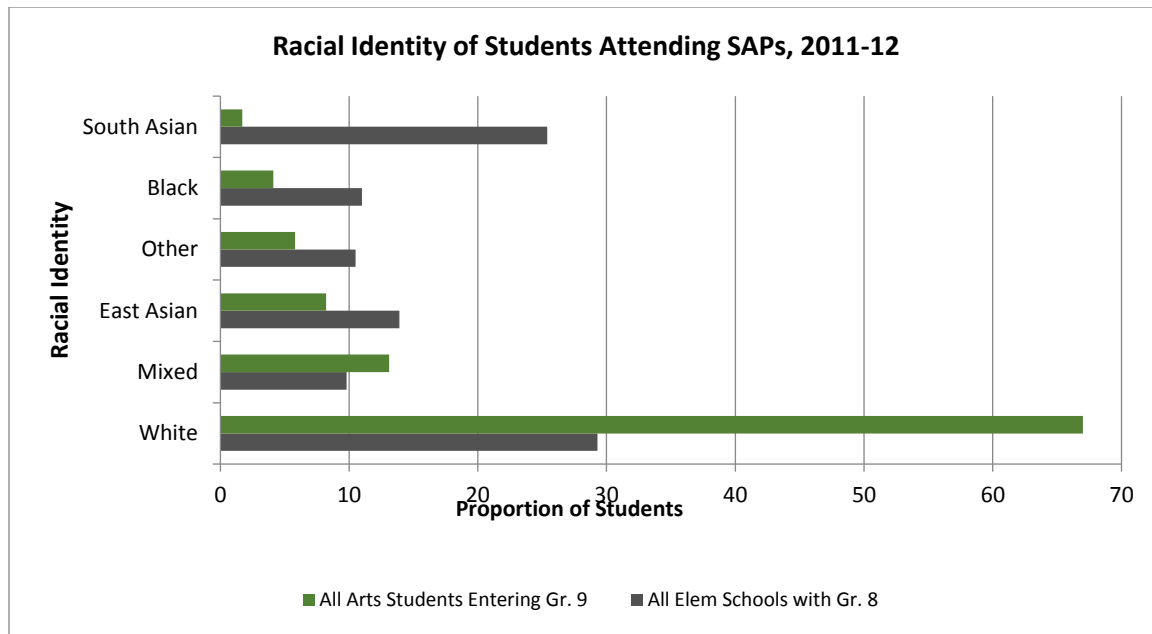
Figure 2. Ethno-racial identity of Grade 9 Students Attending SAPs, 2011-12

In addition to being wealthier and more likely to be White, students entering SAPs were also much more likely to have parents who had gone to university as compared to all other elementary students. As shown in Figure 3, while 53.2% of students in elementary schools had parents who had gone to university, that proportion rose to 73.2% for students entering Grade 9 in SAPs in 2011-12.

Figure 3. Parent Education for Students Attending SAPs, 2011-12

What these three comparisons show is that, while SAPs may very well be considered "diverse" by some unstated criteria, their student population is nowhere near as diverse as the larger

school district population—at least not in terms of income, race, and educational attainment, categories that are usually associated with structural inequality. Such lack of diversity could be explained by the fact that students with more economic resources (which are al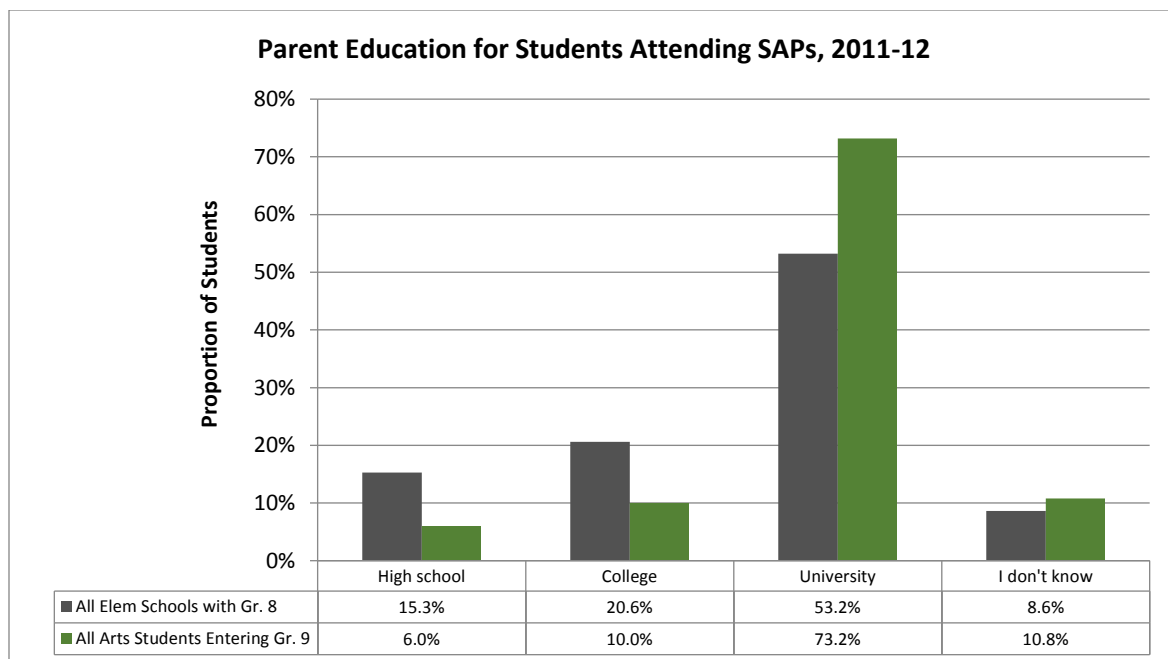so associated with different ethno-racial and educational categories) are more likely to have access to the kinds of training that might help them do well in an audition, for example. If this was the complete story, then the solution would be simple, either to change admissions practices or to provide more opportunities for prospective students. But what if the story is more complicated? What if the homogeneity that is pervasive to SAPs is not the result of the admissions process but of a more pervasive structured pathway? To investigate further, we turn to an examination of the schools that feed students to SAP's in order to establish whether this homogeneity is the outcome of a specific process driven by choice, or whether it is a reflection of a larger pattern of structured inequality.

Feeder Schools Demographic Profile

Having established the demographic profile for SAPs across the TDSB, our next point was to better understand from which schools SAP students were coming (see Figure 4). Did the SAP population entering Grade 9 in 2011-12 represent an equitable distribution across the four quadrants of the TDSB, as implied in the widespread comment that students "come from everywhere," or were SAP students largely being drawn from a select number of elementary schools?

To provide some context, in 2011-12, the TDSB had 195 elementary schools that included at least one Grade 8 class. All 550 students entering SAPs in Grade 9 (2011) came from 112 schools, or 57% of the total number of possible elementary schools. In other words, just over half of all elementary schools were represented within the SAP population. In comparison to most high schools, where the majority of students come from elementary schools in the local area, this might seem remarkable and give the impression that students do "come from everywhere." However, when we look more closely at the students that enroll, we see that 315, or 57% of all students entering SAPs came into the program from only 18 schools, or 9% of all possible schools across the board. Narrowing the scope even further, 144 students or 26% of all students entering SAPs came into the program from five schools or 2.5% of all possible schools across the board. Figure 4 provides a visual representation of this breakdown. While SAPs offer open auditions and registrations advertised throughout the TDSB, over half of their students are fed into the programs from under 10% of schools across the Greater Toronto Area. This pattern begins to suggest that the story is more complicated than simply an issue of admissions practices driven by choice.
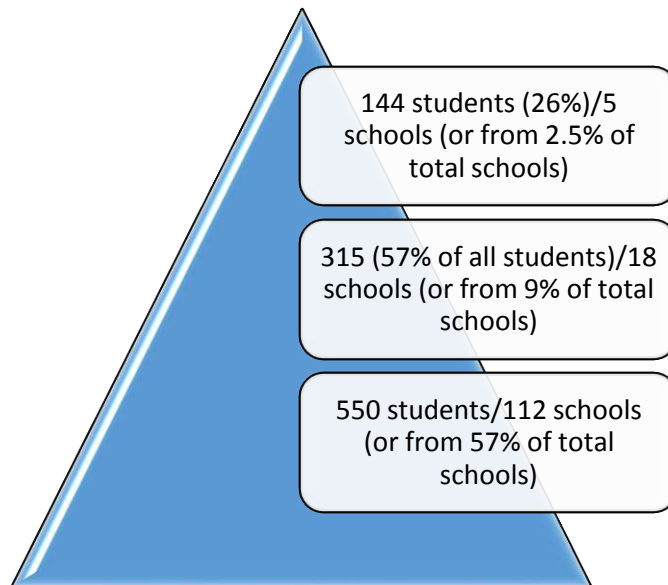
Figure 4. Relationship between the proportion of SAP students and feeder schools across the TDSB, 2011-12

The fact that a limited number of feeder schools are responsible for the vast majority of the students entering SAPs provides a strong rejection of the notion that students in SAPs "come from everywhere." Instead, it suggests that students are more likely to arrive at SAPs not only if they have access to the necessary arts training for success in the selection process, but also if they come from the "right" schools. But which schools are the "right" feeder schools? And more important in shaping our thinking, are there ways in which those feeder schools mirror the demographic characteristics of SAPs? Understanding the demographic profile of the feeder schools that send most students to SAPs adds a critical dimension to our analysis.

Comparing Feeder Schools and SAP Demographics

To begin with income, Figure 5 shows that the feeder schools that send students to SAPs also tend to have a greater proportion of students that are more likely to come from higher income families when compared to all elementary schools with Grade 8 across the TDSB. However, in contrast to students entering SAPs, there is a smaller proportion of students in the feeder schools who fall into the highest income categories, suggesting perhaps that attendance to SAPs actually exacerbates, rather than ameliorate, income segregation, a point to which we will return later.
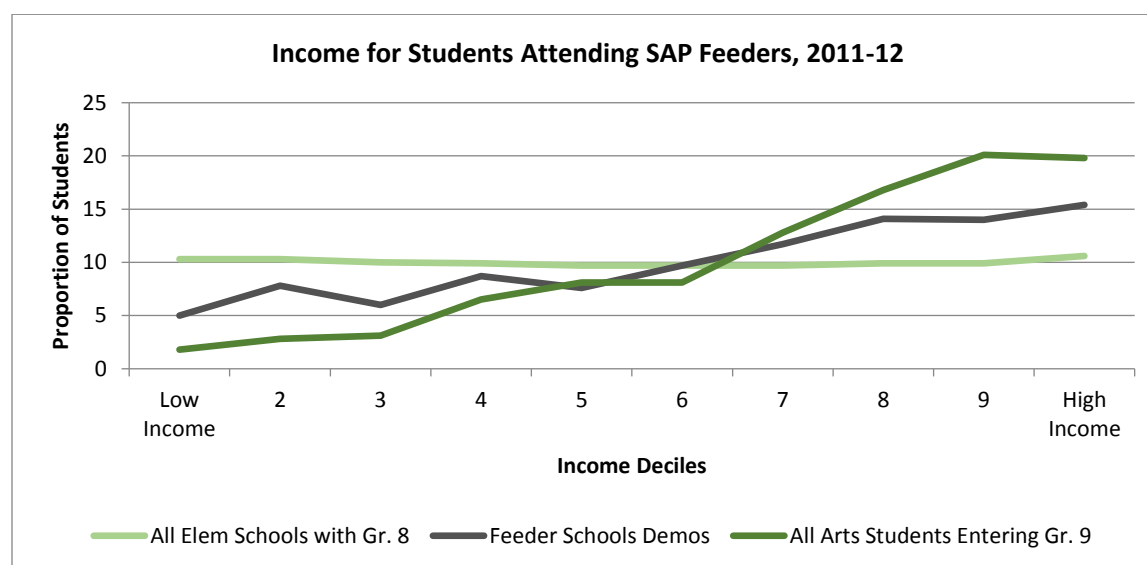
Figure 5. Income for Students Attending SAP Feeders, 2011-12

A similar pattern emerges in relationship to racial identification (see Figure 6). For instance, while 29% of the student population across all elementary schools self-identified as White, this was true for 40% of students within feeder schools and 67% of students entering SAPs for Grade 9. The converse was true for students who self-identified as Black, with a total representation of 11% across all elementary schools, 8.7% within feeder schools and 4% of students accessing SAPs in Grade 9.
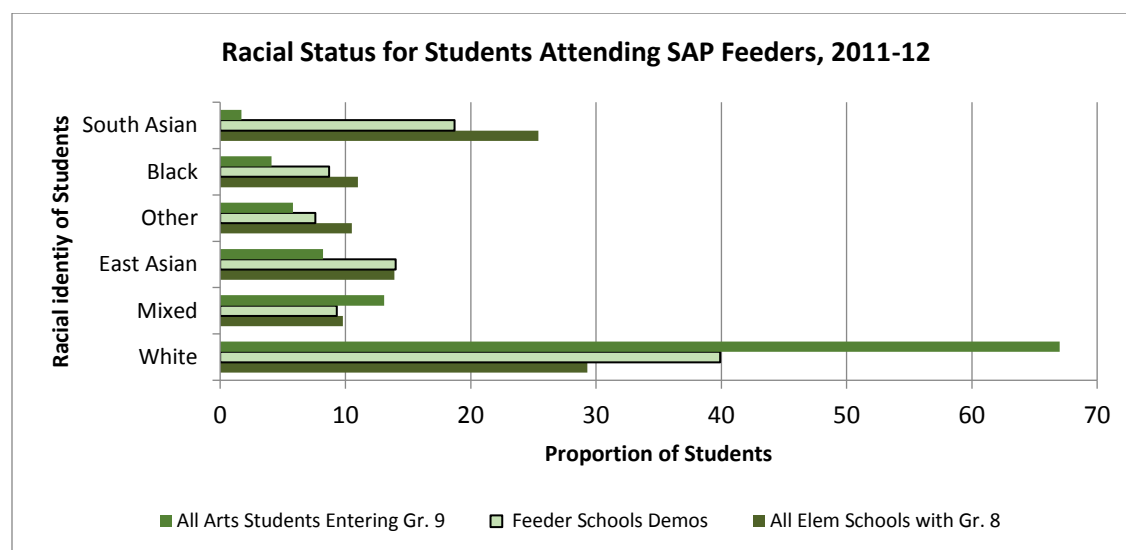
Figure 6. Ethno-racial Status for Students Attending SAP Feeders, 2011-12

The same pattern is also observed with regards to parental levels of education, with slightly greater proportion of students in feeder schools having parents who have been to university as compared to the all elementary schools (see Figure 7). And similarly, students attending SAPs were far more likely to have parents who have attended university as compared to the feeder schools.

Parent Education for Students Attending SAPs, 2011-12

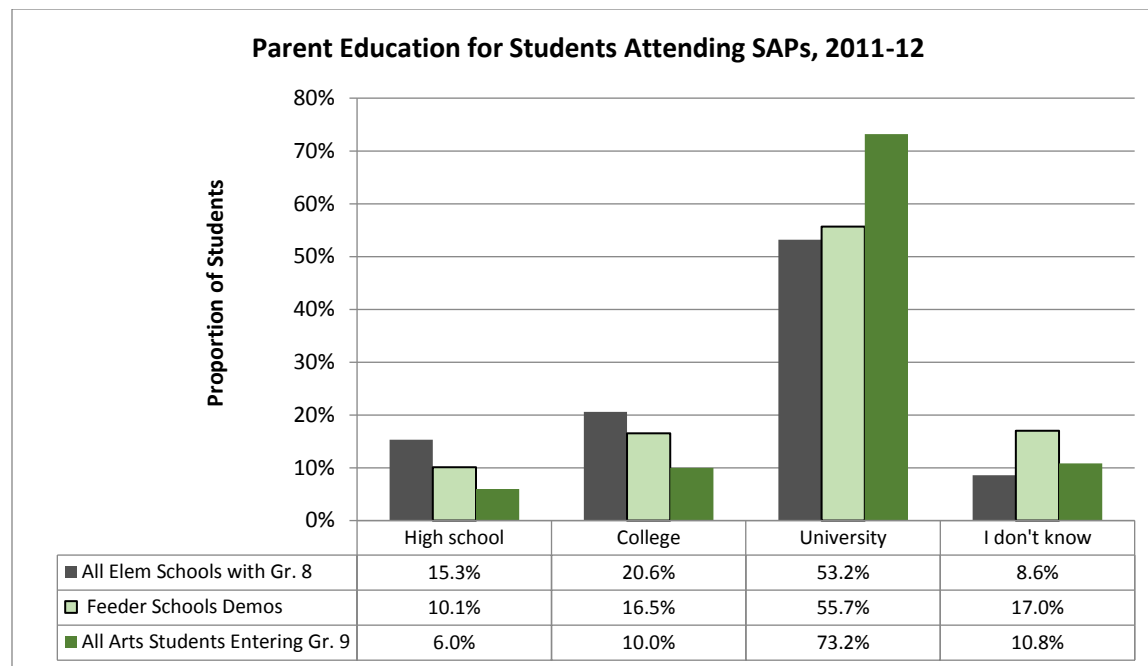|	High school	College	University	I don't know
■ All Elem Schools with Gr. 8	15.3%	20.6%	53.2%	8.6%
□ Feeder Schools Demos	10.1%	16.5%	55.7%	17.0%
■ All Arts Students Entering Gr. 9	6.0%	10.0%	73.2%	10.8%

Figure 7. Parent Education for Students Attending SAPs, 2011-12

This analysis of the demographic profile of the feeder schools shows that, while not quite as homogenous, students who attend SAPs come from schools that are also more economically privileged, less racially diverse, and more likely to have parents with a university education than most elementary schools across the TDSB. While this does point toward the idea of a hidden pathway that reproduces structural inequalities, we might still accept that, at least across this particular subset of schools, students are making individual choices that have the effect of producing increasingly homogenous environments. To further extend our analysis, we split up feeder schools into groups based on how many students from any given school enrolled in SAPs to determine whether the schools that sent the most students were more or less likely to reflect the demographic profile of the SAPs.

Feeder School Breakdown

When we compared the demographic profile of students entering SAPs to the demographic profiles of feeder schools based on how many students came from a particular school, more nuanced patterns emerged. We divided the feeder schools into categories based on the numbers of students they sent to SAPs: 1-5, 6-10, 11-20, and 21+. The key observation that emerged from this is that the greater the number of students a given school sends to a SAP, the more the school's demographic profile mirrored the demographic profile of students entering SAPs. In other words, schools that sent 11 or more students to a SAP were more economically privileged, had more students who identified as White, and had more parents with university education than any other school from which students left to attend SAPs.

A closer look at the cluster of feeder schools that sent between 11 and 20 students adds further nuance. Students in feeder schools that sent 11 to 20 students to SAPs were not only more likely to be more economically advantaged than students from all other feeder schools, they were also more economically advantaged than the population of students entering SAPs as a whole (see Figure 8). In fact, whereas 56.7% of students entering SAPs came from families within the three

highest income deciles, when we consider only the students that came from the feeder schools that sent the largest number of students, this proportion rose to 64.8%.
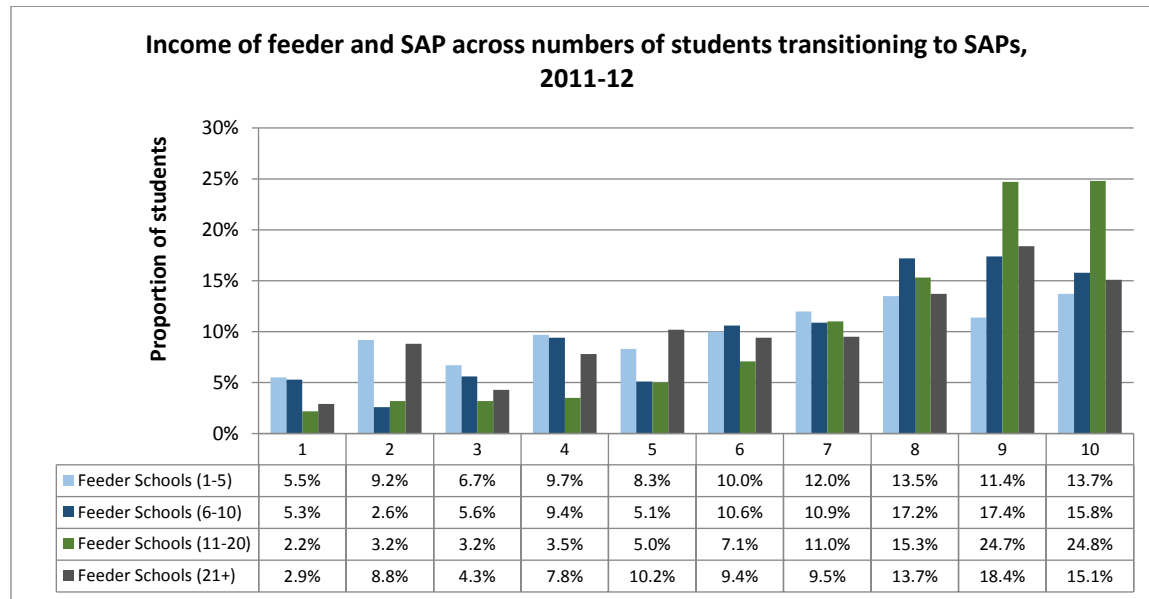
Figure 8. Income of feeder and SAP across numbers of students transitioning to SAPs, 2011-12

Similarly, while the proportion of White students rose along with the number of students sent to SAPs, the proportion of White students within feeder schools sending 11-20 students (64.6%) was roughly the same for the student population entering SAPs (67%).

More interesting, however, is that the proportion of White students coming from feeder schools within the 11-20 category is 76.4% and much higher than the total student population entering SAPs altogether (67%). In fact, of all the students who entered SAPs from schools that sent 11-20 students *none* of them were Black (See Figure 10). When we consider that less than a third (29.3%) of other elementary students that were transitioning to Grade 9 self-identified as White, these figures again underscore that SAP students are not only disproportionately White, but that their schooling trajectories are themselves marked by whiteness. That is to say that this overrepresentation is not simply the result of individuals making choices, but that these choices are situated within and shaped by schooling trajectories and social conditions that sustain white privilege and as such benefit White students more than students that identify with any other racial or ethnic category.

Ethno-racial identity by # of students heading to SAPs, 2011-12
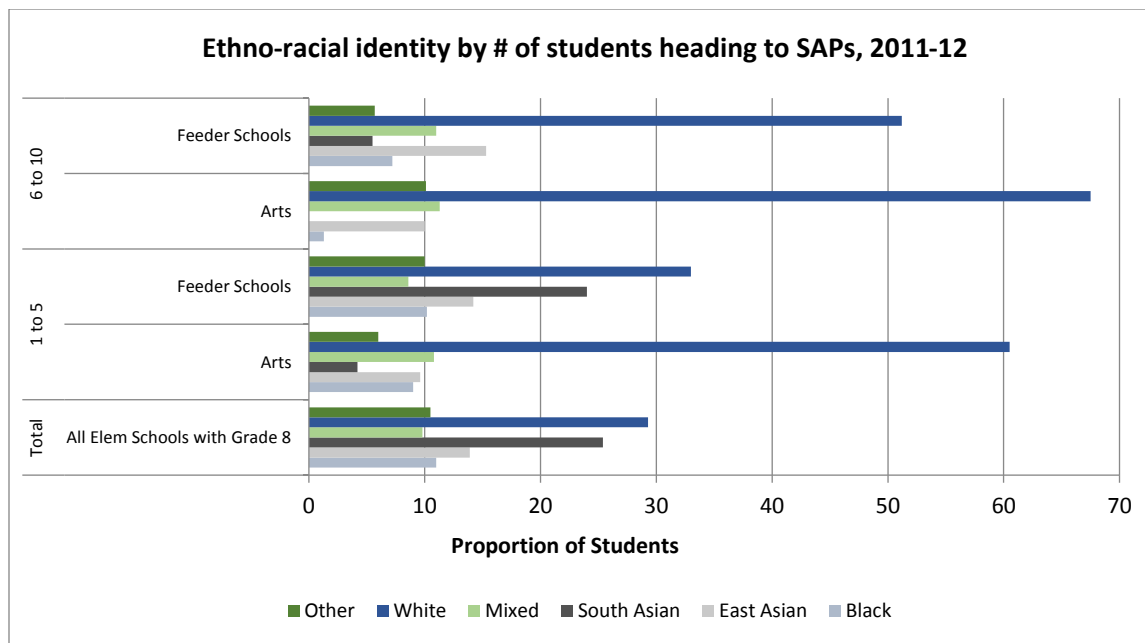
Figure 9. Ethno-racial identity by # of students heading to SAPs (1-5 & 6-10 students), 2011-12

Ethno-racial identity by # of students headings to SAPs, 2011-12
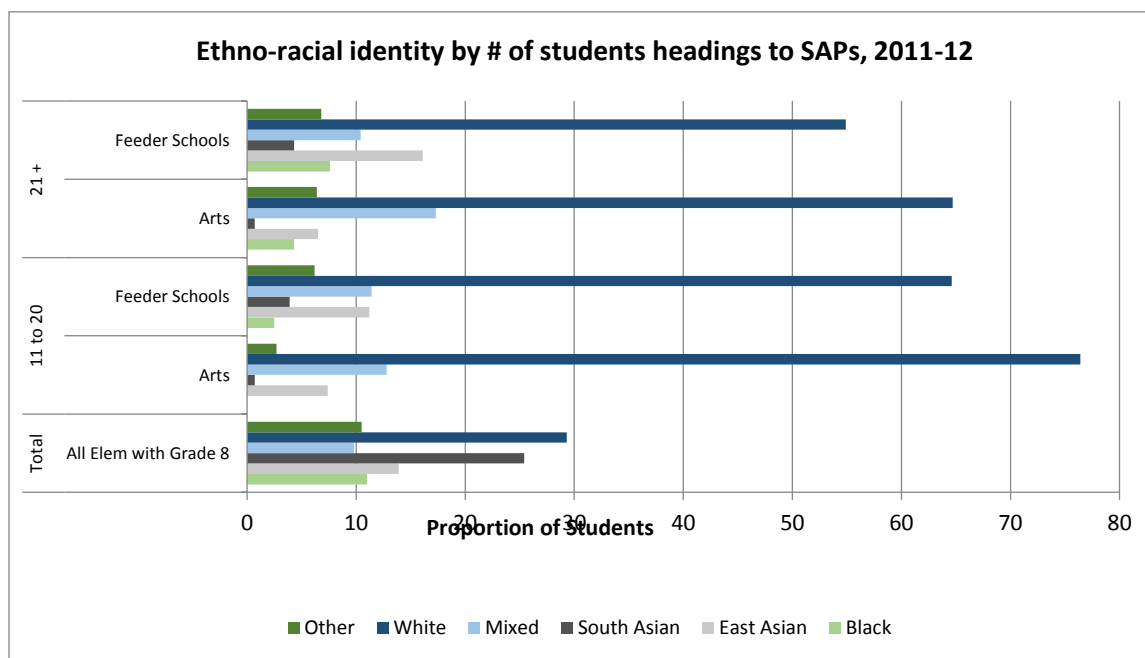
Figure 10. Ethno-racial identity by # of students heading to SAPs (11-20 & 21+ students), 2011-12

What is even more curious – and begins to point to how the arts are implicated in sustaining unequal advantages – is that even when we compare the overall student population in the cluster of schools that sent 11-20 students with the students from those same schools that enrolled in a SAP, the latter are still more likely to be White, wealthier, and have parents with higher levels of education than the former. That is, even when compared to students in similar school contexts, the students who choose an arts education are more privileged. Figures 9 and 10 provide a comparison between

the ethno-racial demographics of the overall student population in each cluster of feeder schools and the subset of students from those feeder schools that enrolled in SAPs in 2012. In every instance, the proportion of White students that go on to SAP's is always higher than the proportion of White students in the overall population in that particular feeder cluster (see Figure 11).

As illustrated in Figure 11, compared to the demographics in feeder schools sending 1-5 students, those moving on to SAPs are 1.8 times more likely to self-identify as White, a pattern that was repeated across feeder school clusters. Figure 11 also points to an interesting finding that requires further analysis, as it shows that besides White, students who identified as "Mixed" were also overrepresented among students that enrolled in SAPs as compared to the proportion of students in their respective feeder school cluster. We suspect that this is related to the high number of students that identified as "Mixed" in the cluster of feeder schools that sent 21 or more students, a cluster with a different pattern that requires a further analysis.
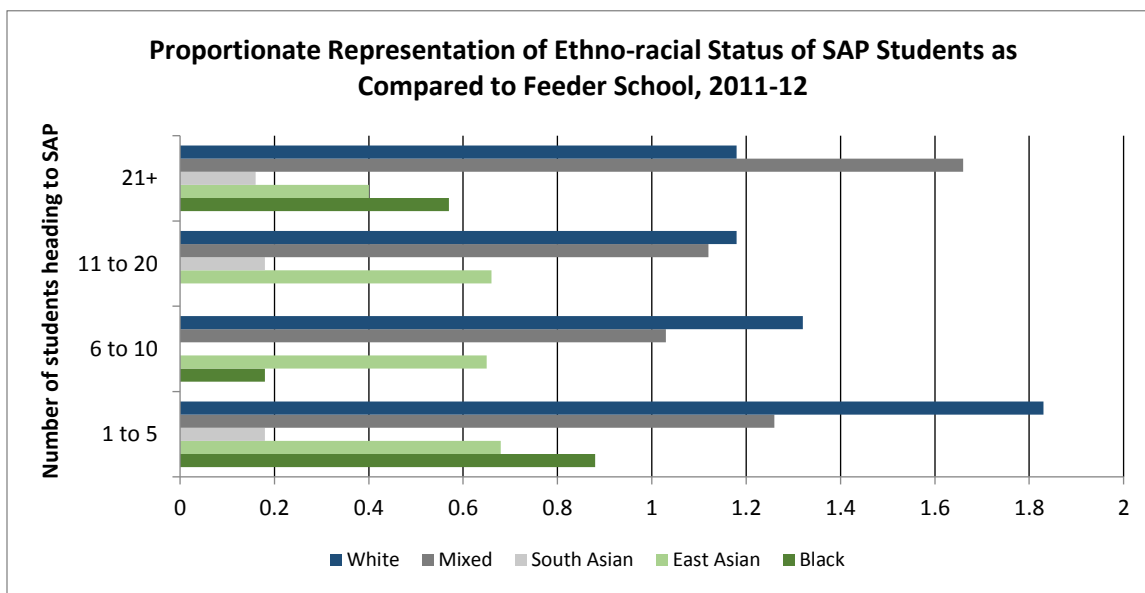
Figure 11. Proportionate Representation of Ethno-racial Status of SAP Students as Compared to Feeder School, 2011-12

Similar trends emerged in the analysis for students who had parents with a university education (Figure 12). Across the first three categories of feeder schools (sending 1-5, 6-10, & 11-20 students to SAPs), the proportion of students with university educated parents rose in relation to the number of students' feeder schools sent to SAPs. While the feeder schools that sent 11-20 students to SAPs had the highest proportion of students who had university educated parents (73.3%), an almost identical proportion among students entering SAPs (73.2%), students who came to SAPs from schools sending 21 or more students had the highest proportion, at 80.3%.

Parent Education for Students Attending SAPs and Feeders, 2011-12

	Feeder Schools	Arts Schools	Feeder Schools	Arts Schools	Feeder Schools	Arts Schools	Feeder Schools	Arts Schools	Total
	One to five		Six to ten		Eleven to Twenty		Twenty-one +		All Elem Schools with Gr. 8
High school	11.8%	9.3%	6.0%	2.6%	4.8%	4.8%	6.3%	5.3%	15.3%
College	18.5%	15.5%	12.7%	10.3%	10.2%	6.1%	10.5%	7.6%	20.6%
University	50.7%	62.7%	66.4%	73.1%	73.3%	78.2%	61.8%	80.3%	53.2%
I don't know	18.2%	12.4%	14.5%	14.1%	11.5%	10.9%	21.2%	6.8%	8.6%

Figure 12. Parent Education for Students Attending SAPs and Feeders, 2011-12

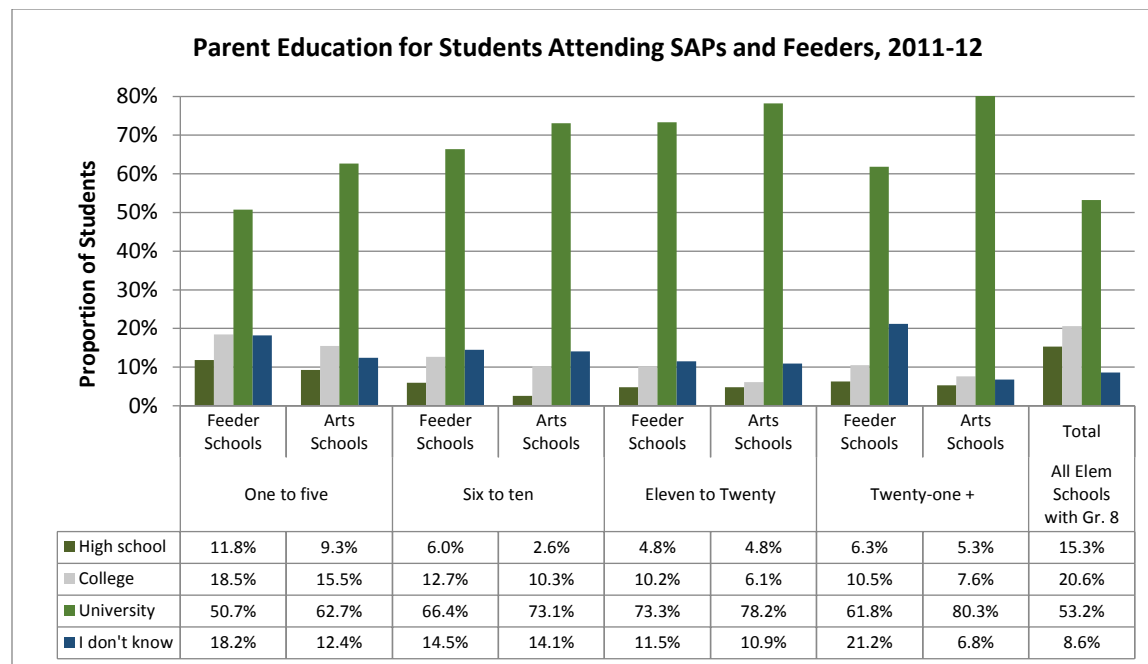In addition to having the largest proportion of educated parents, the cluster of schools that sent 21 or more students to SAPs in 2012 had other unusual characteristics that suggest future examination. There was a high proportional representation of students that identified as "Mixed," and although the students that came from these schools were also disproportionately wealthier and more likely to be White, they were at least somewhat more diverse in terms of both income and ethno-racial identification than the students in the 11-20 cluster. Further analysis is required to make sense of this pattern, but we hypothesize that these differences are related to the fact that the schools that sent 21 or more students were also specialized arts schools that were open to students from across the district. The fact that students from this cluster had the highest proportion of university educated parents suggests that perhaps there is a cultural capital "effect" that enhances the chances that students with high cultural capital, regardless of ethno-racial identification, are more likely to choose a specialized arts program.

What should be abundantly clear, however, is that arrival at a specialized arts program is not simply the result of a "choice" made at a specific moment in time, but that these choices are situated within and shaped by educational trajectories – or pathways – in which students who identify as White and who come from high income families with University educated parents are clearly advantaged by their positioning in the social structure. It is likely that it is also this positioning that enhances the chances that these students have the necessary exposure to and training in the arts to ensure a successful admission. However, when we focus too specifically on the fact that students who are admitted to SAPs typically have more exposure and training in the arts, we miss the larger picture of how structural inequality works to reproduce social advantage by producing the conditions for particular choices to be made by individuals. After all, not all students who are admitted to SAPs have a background in the arts, and not all students who have a background in the arts "choose" to attend a SAP.

In order to understand these processes better it is necessary to account for other conditions that may have an impact on whether an individual chooses to attend a SAP and how such choices are shaped by structural inequality. To conclude this section, we offer our analysis of students'

experiences of belonging in SAPs and in their feeder schools in order to suggest a more nuanced account of the conditions that shape the choice to attend a SAP.

Who "Belongs" in a SAP?

Drawing on the levels of inclusion, membership, safety, and shared power that students reported in the TDSB Parent and Student Survey, Parekh (2014) developed a measurement that estimates the extent to which students experienced a sense of "belonging" in their schools. The scale of belonging largely measures students' sense of acceptance from both peers and educators, their sense of safety and inclusion, as well as their sense of shared power and being a valued contributor within their schools and classrooms (Parekh, 2014). Building on this, our analysis shows that a high proportion of students in SAPs reported a higher sense of belonging when compared to all other students in most other schools (see Figure 13). While it is entirely possible that a focus on the arts enhances the creation of an affirming educational environment for students who are artistically inclined, what the data show is that students who attend SAPs *already arrive* with a strong sense of belonging, which we would suggest developed in their prior – similarly homogenous – schooling environments. In fact, the data suggest that a larger proportion of students entering SAPs already had a much greater sense of belonging in school (83.7%) when compared to other students within their own feeder schools (68.2%) as well as to all students transitioning from Grade 8 to Grade 9 (67.3%).

Students' experience of belonging, 2011-12

	1 to 5	6 to 10	11 to 20	21 +	Total
Arts Students	81.9%	75.0%	90.5%	83.5%	83.7%
All feeder school students (grade 9)	67.3%	67.0%	72.6%	71.4%	68.2%
All grade 8-9 students	67.3%	67.3%	67.3%	67.3%	67.3%
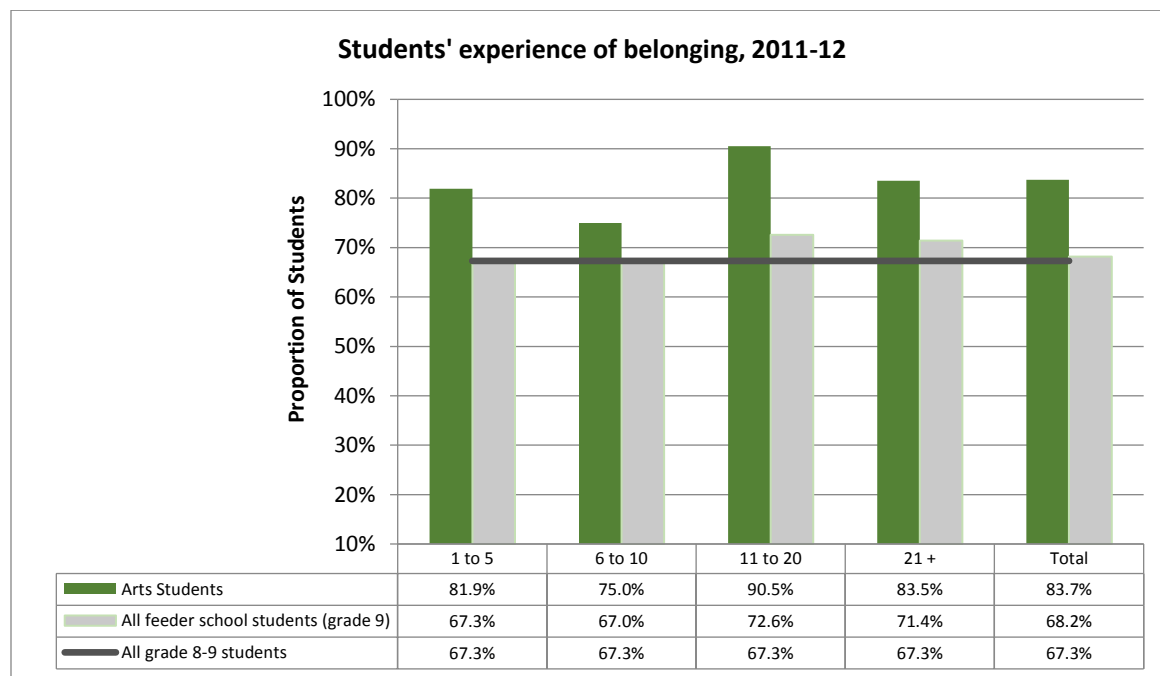
Figure 13. Students' experience of belonging, 2011-12

This "belonging" effect was most pronounced for students attending SAPs who came from schools sending 11-20 students to SAPs. These students formed the most privileged and homogenous group and were the most likely to experience a sense of belonging (90.5%). This suggests that students that choose a specialized arts education are making those choices within the context of a homogenous environment marked by whiteness, economic privilege, and high levels of cultural and social capital. While we are not denying that the arts may contribute to a strong sense of belonging, what our analysis suggests is that students may be more likely to choose a SAP when they

already feel a strong sense of belonging in school, and that this sense of belonging is shaped by being in a homogenous environment of relative privilege where whiteness and economic and social advantage are key determinants.

　　While individuals do indeed make a "choice" to attend a SAP, that choice, we argue, is shaped by particular dispositions that are reinforced by students' experiences in an educational pathway in which they build a sense of belonging and where they receive advantages that they feel they deserve. Such a feeling of belonging may very well be part of the reason why students "choose" to attend a SAP, but it is the result of an educational pathway that is shaped by the structural advantages inherent to whiteness and to having access to economic, cultural, and social capital; in short, such choices are structured by inequality.

Discussion and Implications

　　In this article we have demonstrated that specialized arts programs in the TDSB are not, as advocates would have it, reflective of the racial, cultural, and economic diversity that characterizes the urban region within which they are located. Instead we have shown that SAPs are homogenous environments in which mostly White students with high levels of economic and cultural capital benefit from the high status, added resources, and the focus on the arts that SAPs provide. Moreover, we have queried whether this homogeneity is simply the outcome of individuals choosing a particular kind of educational opportunity, as a neoliberal market logic would suggest, or, as we would argue, characterizes the educational pathways within which such choices are made. From our theoretical grounding and empirical evidence, we argue that there is a strong case to suggest that these pathways are largely shaped by structural inequality. Our analysis supports that rather than being a vehicle for addressing inequality and ensuring equal access to educational opportunities to all students, specialized arts programs produce the same patterns of inequality as academic streaming and are therefore implicated in the reproduction of structural inequality. Less clear, however, is the role that "the arts," understood as a particular set of discourses and ideas that reflect certain values about cultural products and practices (see Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013), play not just in the production but also in the justification of inequality. In order to do this, here we draw on our own previous analysis of qualitative data collected for the UAHS project.

　　As we have argued elsewhere, discourses of the arts work to occlude, or, to use Bourdieu's concept, "misrecognize" social advantages and unequal outcomes. Cloaked underneath the banners of "talent" and artistic interests or inclinations, discourses of the arts are mobilized to justify unequal outcomes in terms of who is admitted to SAPs (Gaztambide-Fernández, Saifer, & Desai, 2013), who feels more or less "entitled" to the benefits of an arts education (Gaztambide-Fernández, Cairns, & Desai, 2013), what kinds of parents "choose" such an education (Saifer & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2017), and what sorts of future careers different kinds of students might pursue (Gaztambide-Fernández, VanderDussen, & Cairns, 2014). This misrecognition is further entrenched by the kind of neoliberal "creativism" that enforces a narrow conception of creativity at the service of the market economy (Gielen, 2013; see Kalin, 2016). From such a view, the purpose of arts education is not to address inequality, but to ensure that those with the right kinds of talents are able to develop the proper dispositions to contribute to the creative economies (Kalin, 2016). Here, creativity and talent replace intelligence and academic achievement as a way to justify streaming and unequal outcomes that are otherwise clearly the effect of structural inequality. By assuming the premise that *anyone* can be "creative," advocates are able to justify a narrow focus on those who are actually able to express creativity, misrecognizing how such expressions are actually the outcome of unequal access (Gaztambide-Fernández, Nicholls, & Arráiz-Matute, 2016).

This raises the question not only of just precisely who is inclined to "choose" a specialized arts education, but who is able to embody creativity and express artistic talents the "right" way in order to successfully gain access to such opportunities. While it is beyond the scope of this article, we would like to suggest that "choosing" the arts and, specifically, the particular kind of Eurocentric arts curriculum that SAPs offer is part of an investment in whiteness as property (Harris, 1993). Such investments in the arts, which also allow more White students to successfully gain access to SAPs, allow participants to secure unequal access to resources along racial lines on the basis of discourses of the arts that are ostensibly racially blind. The fact that the pathways that lead students into SAPs are marked by racial segregation and culminate in an increased sense of belonging for a group of students marked predominantly by whiteness actually point to the deeply racist underpinnings of arts education and discourses of "the arts."

This query has important policy implications if the goal of choice programs such as SAPs is to ensure equal opportunity and access. Since the homogeneity of specialized arts programs is not, as we have argued, the result of a narrow set of students making a specific "choice" based on their particular interests and talents at a particular moment in their educational trajectory, the solution cannot be focused simply on ensuring that more students from different backgrounds have the opportunity to make similar choices successfully. Since such homogeneity is the outcome of a longer and more hidden pathway leading privileged students to specific outcomes, the solution requires strategies for interrupting the transfer of privilege from one generation to another across class and ethno-racial lines. This would include, for instance, limiting – or at least undermining – the ability of wealthy parents to use schooling options as a way to enhance their own children's advantages. It would also require a deliberate rejection of the Eurocentric curriculum that secures arts education as White property.

This analysis also sheds a different kind of light for interpreting the increased sense of belonging experienced by students in SAPs and what policy implications this might have. Advocates argue that this phenomenon of increased belonging is related to students' participation in arts focused curriculum and the result of environments conducive to creativity and a greater sense of cooperation and mutual understanding (Gore, 2007). This contrasts with reports, particularly from parents, of high levels of stress related to competition as well as pressure to do well on both academics and the arts (Saifer & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2017). The evidence suggests that this sense of belonging is not, in fact, related to the focus on the arts, but to how larger forces lead privileged students through educational spaces in which they feel that they belong and where they can foster a "sense of entitlement" to educational advantages and opportunities (Gaztambide-Fernández, Cairns, & Desai, 2015). In fact, the sense of belonging may be more related to being surrounded by students who are equally privileged, which would raise critical questions about the value of diversity, particularly for students who are privileged by race, class, and social advantages.

Conclusion

We begin our conclusion by noting some of the limitations of the analysis presented here and listing some important lines for future research before returning to a discussion of what our work has to contribute to a discussion about whether choice programs are a more equitable alternative to streaming. First, our analysis is limited to a snap shot of the 2011-2012 cohort of students that entered SAPs. Future research needs to include a larger data set that includes multiple years, more information about where students are coming from geographically, and that includes the pathways of students who enter SAPs after ninth grade. This would also allow us to enquire further into the differences between the clusters of schools that send 11-20 and over 20 students. We also

suspect that there are some important differences between programs that are "within-school" versus "whole-school," as described earlier. In the case of "within-school" programs, this would allow us to investigate whether there are differences between the students enrolled in the SAP and other students at the same school. We also need to inquire further into the characteristics of the feeder schools, including whether there are specific curricular programs that somehow advantage students in their chances to enter SAPs.[6] Lastly, we hope to compare the trajectories of SAP students to those of students in other programs considered elite or exclusive, such as Gifted Education, Elite Athletes, and International Baccalaureate.

With these limitations in mind, we want to highlight three key observations about the relationship between SAPs and their feeder schools and to highlight what these observations suggest about whether programs of choice actually address the broader concerns about equity in relationship to streaming. The first observation is that students enrolled in SAPs are not drawn equitably from across the board, as most advocates suggest, but instead are disproportionately drawn from a handful of elementary schools. In this way, SAPs replicate one of the key issues with streaming, which is that they draw and serve students from specific segments of the population. It begins to suggest that the homogeneity of SAP student populations is not the result of similar students making similar choices, but rather of hidden pathways that disproportionately lead students from some areas into privileged programs.

Given the racial and economic stratification and segregation of large cities like Toronto (Hulchanski, 2010), the fact that most SAP students come from specific neighborhoods suggests that SAPs exacerbate rather than attenuate structural inequality, even if they draw from a larger geographic base than most other secondary schools. It counters the notion that by focusing on artistic "talent" or even "interest," SAPs can provide more equitable access. Indeed, it confirms the notion that the identification of intellectual giftedness or giftedness in the arts expresses the productive qualities of property (Mansfield, 2015). This is underscored by a second observation that, overall, the student populations attending SAP feeder schools are more likely to emulate the characteristics represented within secondary SAPs.

An extension of this finding is that while the feeder schools are similar in their demographic profile to SAPs, the SAPs represent an intensification of class, income, and racial segregation. In other words, while feeder schools that send the most students to SAPs have student populations that are also wealthier and more likely to be White, the proportion of such students from those schools that attend SAPs is even higher. As with the discussion about economic capital, this finding supports the theorization of how whiteness and wealth advantage some students over others in the same way as it does in streaming.

Mansfield (2015) describes the use of giftedness, and we would argue "talent," in the distributive decisions around what resources are made available to students. From the observed trends in the data, the relationship between class, income and race at the elementary level could be key in the construction of talent – artistic or otherwise – in the secondary level, and could also be used to justify the streaming of resources into programs that serve the needs of privileged students. This finding again suggests that the relationship between class, racial and economic privilege could be an important piece to the structural reproductive power of educational programing in schools.

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[6] This analysis would also be enhanced by collecting more information about what students apply for admission to SAPs and the ability to compare between those who are not admitted as well as those who are admitted but choose not to attend. Such data is more difficult to collect because of variations in how records are kept across programs.

Finally, the last observation is that students in secondary SAPs are much more likely to report experiencing a sense of belonging in school. While it could be argued that the focus on the arts within secondary SAPs has an impact on students' experience of belonging, what our analysis suggests is that this sense of belonging is established much earlier and it likely has much more to do with a shared experience with other students who are more likely to be White and wealthier. What our analysis suggests is that students not only have a shared economic and racial experience, but they also have already established friendship and social networks to other students who arrive at SAPs. We hypothesize that these links and shared experiences are far more significant in the development of a sense of belonging than any links established through the arts. This is confirmed by the fact that the highest proportion of students experiencing a sense of belonging comes from feeder schools sending more than 11 students to the SAPs.

Moreover, not only would SAP students experience a sense of commonality among their peers, considering the high likelihood that they share similar racial, economic, cultural and class experiences, but they also share the fact of having been labeled "talented" by virtue of being admitted to a SAP. While other students overtly struggle to access academic opportunities or internally grapple with their own identity and value within such a large public institution, students selected to participate in the TDSB's SAPs are "chosen" by the system and rewarded for being able to express abilities that are more likely to be the outcome of their social positioning. Such recognition confirms the "status beliefs" of students who are privileged by their economic and ethno-racial positioning in the social hierarchy, further entrenching structural inequality (Ridgeway, 2001; Stolte, 1983). The confirmation of exceptional talents through admission into a SAP justifies subsequent access to resources that other students could only dream about. More perniciously, it makes the demographic make-up of prestigious programs like SAPs appear to be a logical outcome of naturally occurring differences in the cultural and academic dispositions of different groups of people. In short, it confirms racist and classed-based assumptions about what constitutes artistic talent, justifying racial and class inequality.

Market choice logics that benefit those with the most capital to invest cannot address inequality. Only an analysis of structural inequality and deliberate attempts at interrupting its reproduction can achieve equity and social justice. This requires examining patterns of inequality that begin much earlier and that are linked to how schooling opportunities map on to the stark geographical segregation of the city in terms of race and class. To put it bluntly, what our research suggests is that interrupting the reproduction of structural inequality requires a more radical and systematic effort to curtail the role that schools, and specialized programs in particular, play in how economic and racial privilege ensure academic success. It requires the demystification of schooling as a mechanism for social reproduction and a deliberate effort to interrupt the transferring of racial and class privilege through high status programs that reinforce racist and classist cultural hierarchies.

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