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The Anti-Poverty Community Organizing and Learning (APCOL) project represents a partnership effort across several post-secondary institutions and a range of community-based groups in Toronto (Canada). This project was funded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada, under its Community University Research Alliance program (2009-2014). Drawing on carefully designed survey and case study methods as well as a participatory action research orientation - the aim of this research project has been to offer the most intensive study of activist learning and development in anti-poverty work in Canada.

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Abstract:

The City of Toronto experienced a particularly tremulous year in 2005. Dubbed the "year of the gun," the marked increase in violence among racialized youth lead to an increase in community cultural programming. These programs provided preventative measures for at-risk youth by exposing them to aspects of the arts and cultural sector, utilizing their interests in related fields as an alternative to other less-constructive alternatives. Many of these spaces acted as safe productive environments for youth to gather and develop self-esteem and as well as important marketable life skills that could be used in the labour force.

However there is currently some challenges within the inter-institutional learning work transition process. The training and learning-to-work transitions have not enjoyed the success that was envisioned in many cases. The research documented in this paper offers an opportunity for practitioners, policy makers and program funders to re-think the traditional approach as it relates to the arts and cultural programs for racialized at-risk youth in Canada's largest urban centre.

Keywords: learning and work transitions, racialized youth in Toronto, youth at risk, youth centred programming, arts and culture

The goal of this paper is to illuminate a specific, under-studied example of what was termed in the introduction of this volume as an 'inter-institutional learning-work transition'. In connection to this a further goal is to assist community leaders and workers who are on the frontlines of the development and delivery of arts and cultural programs that engage and educate disenfranchised youth in many of the low income

particular attention to the challenges facing the youth who are learning marketable skills at RPF. The hope is to share some information and ideas to encourage policy makers and community leaders to think about the steps that may be taken to develop an overall plan for effective youth engagement in the creative industries. For the current myriad of community programming to be worthwhile and not a fad to keep young people busy, it must include a viable plan for the learning-work transition: transitions from community programs to forms of apprenticeships or further education and eventually paid work within the cultural industries.

One of the desired outcomes is to see policy changes that encourage recognition of training within grassroots programming on a broad scale as an option for youth who have not been successful in traditional education settings. What we see is the value in recognizing the unique dimensions of learning-work transitions that racialized, disenfranchised and 'at-risk' youth face; that these individuals are frequently pushed off of conventional, prescribed pathways toward becoming a productive member of society; and, that for those who veer toward unproductive, unsafe or criminal behaviour, the societal response should not automatically be one of judicial punishment. These considerations are especially relevant when there is documentation to show that cultural programming can be effective in deterring youth from crime.

THE JOBS ONTARIO COMMUNITY ACTION PROGRAM INITIATED BY THE BOB RAE GOVERNMENT.

The Rae government was in provincial office from October 1990 to June 1995) in response to the Yonge Street Riots in 1992 is a good example of how cultural programs can equip youth with skills that enable them to pursue a career in a particular cultural field. One particular program, Fresh Arts, gave youth the opportunity to work and develop their skills in a discipline of their choice. Many of the young people who are now celebrities in Canada's urban music industry were given the opportunity to write and produce their own music and later went on to successful careers in the industry

based on experiences in this and similar programs. Thus, governme

which has a large Black population. Where previously the school was seen as a part of the community and was accessible for after school programs, the cuts resulted in a lack of space for community to gather and for accessible programming for children and youth

through to affect social change. In a 2005 doctoral dissertation Plastaras analyses the difficulty in challenging the capitalist power structure in the United States in response to the education crisis of African-American students. Plastaras' analysis is particularly relevant to the discussion here as it specifically points to how capitalism is benefiting from the diversity in the United States, since American students are being prepared to be leaders in the global market. However, what we see is that educational success does not translate to provision of opportunities for all students to be successful. Instead the power structure takes lessons from the diverse cultures and people that make up the United States and uses that knowledge to reinforce their power on an international scale (Plastaras, 2005). This position is an important point to note when discussing critical education theory since it recognizes that even when those in the echelons of power are appearing to recognize the benefit of inclusion and one may think more access and openness is possible, too often that inclusion benefits those in power and does not truly provide access for all people. In fact, Toronto is regularly applauded as one of the most diverse cities in the world where people from various cultures live and work together in relative harmony. However if the surface is scratched, ever so slightly, one finds that tensions are present that speak to the need for a re-

educational scholarship has emerged over the last two decades and by the 1990s it reached critical mass with the work of Dei (e.g., 1996) and James (1993; see also James and Haig-Brown, 2004); James (1993) taking issues of black youth transitions to employment as a core focus. Important to note here is that critical educational scholarship has, however, focused on the role of traditional schooling primarily, I

Since one might argue that their disenfranchised state is at the core of their destructive behaviour (Lewis, 1992). Thus, my argument is much more aligned with Bourdieu's notion of how schooling contributes to the reproduction of cultural inequality in society (Plastaras, 2005).

The work of Carl James and Celia Haig-Brown (2004) also serve to reinforce the need to approach formal education with a more open mind. The authors contend that “[w]hile it is obviously desirable to complete grade 12, youth need to know that school is waiting when they are ready” (James and Haig-Brown 2004, p. 221), In fact, many community-based educational efforts shatter the lock-step educational myth expressed in dominant educational values when they provide youth with both developmental opportunities in their own right as well as a second chance to revisit credentials that otherwise simply represent missed opportunity. In other words, the approach to learning explored here shows that the formal educational institutions are not the only place that can help youth, particularly disenfranchised youth, in attaining positive personal outcomes as well as employable skills.

Expanding our appreciation for community as a site of learning, in turn, demands a consideration of different ways of knowing. It has been well documented that education systems in Canada (and elsewhere) are structured toward success for a certain type of

options for employment. While other programs give youth the hope to see they are able to play a productive role in society.

The transition from school to work is, of course, more difficult for those young people who have not been successful in high school largely because they learn in ways that the educational system does not accommodate (Bourdieu, 1989; Curtis, Livingstone and Smaller, 1992). Much of the research into school-to-work transition and the dialog

REGENT PARK FOCUS: LINKING COMMUNITY PROGRAMS TO CREDENTIAL INSTITUTIONS AND THE LABOUR MARKET

Earlier it was suggested the biography of a place matters, when an analysis of the least fortunate is taking place it is particularly poignant to see how the past is related to the present circumstances. Time has been taken to explain a particular moment in the biography of the city of Toronto by highlighting its social crisis. However, the effects of this biography are enacted not simply in the city, but more specifically neighbourhoods as well in relation to the make

Cabbagetown and Corktown), in order to end Regent Park’s physical isolation from the

principles governing the process of learnin

mainstream schooling. Smyth's position is one of the many that put accurately to the shortfalls of the current school system. Yet, the policies and structures that guide mainstream schooling persist, despite the high dropout rates that suggest that they are not effective for all youth. As such, it is time to rethink the definition of success as it is currently defined. The navigation of the credential system in a linear way as the model for effective preparation for work is leaving many young people behind. Many youth are either detouring from that path or disengaging from education altogether, increasing their marginalization in society which has dire consequences for any form of successful learning-work transition as well as other more damaging societal implications.

In the case of Toronto, it can be argued that the education system along with zero tolerance policies⁶ have further intensified these dynamics, and contributed to a rise in the expulsion of black students and to dropout rates among this group specifically. While studies have not been conducted to look at the link between dropout rates among Black students and gun crime, there is a common belief that these black youth who dropout from school make up a disproportionate number of the youth involved in gun violence, and the disproportionate rate of homicide among this group in Toronto. According to Gartner and Thompson (2004), "the homicide rate per 100,000 blacks in Toronto average 10.1 between 1992 and 2003. This was almost five times greater than the average overall homicide rate of 2.4 per 100,000 [people]" (Gartner and Thomas, 2004, p. 33). Zero tolerance was introduced in 1999, providing some suggestion that links the increase in expulsions to the rise in violent crime. This data further supports the position that links Harris Government policies to the increase in gun crime among some Toronto youth.

In continuing with the analysis of the findings from the RPF discussions, it became clear that not all of the youth who come to RPF are past recognizing the value of educational credentials. Some find the community training a safe environment to explore job interests and later are able to re-enter the education system and acquire the needed credentials for securing a job of their choice, while others have no interest in the formal

credential process. Robert is a clear example of this as he is now at the Academy of Design and Technology after three years at RPF. Robert detoured from the credential path, was on the fringes of society but had the skills and knowledge to be engaged again after finding a meaningful path. RPF gave him an opportunity to explore in a pressure free environment. The program not only gave him an opportunity to learn new things, he was also able to take a leadership role in teaching younger peers the skills he had acquired, which further re-enforced his knowledge and built his confidence about the knowledge he had gained. RPF keeps records of the students that have been through their programs and Adonis has also written letters of reference for many young people. Many youth who have gone on to further their education have come back to share with Executive Director, Adonis Huggins that the knowledge they gained at RPF gave them an edge with college or university programs since they had more practical training than most of their fellow classmates.

Another group of youth are those who have left the credential path all together and have no desire to re-engage with formal education. Their capabilities are often not identified within the school system. What we learn from the research on RPF is that these are the young people that the education system has failed because it is not geared towards their learning style or structured to meet their needs. The community organizations offering training in the cultural industries often provide an environment of multi-tasking and experiential learning opportunities that appear to suit many of these youth. These young people are often less confident in their abilities because they have been unsuccessful in the school system (Curtis, Livingstone, Smaller, 1992). Therefore, success in this new informal learning environment provides a much needed boost to their (e) -0.a (st) 0.s(e) -0.a (st) 0id bbo

programs that are introducing some of our most vulnerable young people to work in cultural industries.

While one might hope that it would not have taken a crisis of gun violence as seen in 2005 in Toronto for policy makers to recognize the need to make the changes which would support non-traditional transitions into working in the creative sectors; in many ways these events – their timing, sequencing and character specific to the Toronto context – have served a contradictory function in this regard. It is contradictory in this specific case in the sense that while public funding and public attention has come to be focused on the issue of marginalized youth, they have emerged in ways that may be problematic should more expansive, long-term support and a recognition of multiple ways of knowing and school-based marginalization continues to be under-appreciated. The fact remains that long before the crisis there was a desperate need among black youth in Toronto especially young black men who are looking for something meaningful in life, in some ways this has become obscured. Some of these youth are looking for a new start after encountering some dangerous and potentially deadly detours in life. Others have not yet reached such extremes but are on the cusp of making decisions that could irrevocable impact on their lives. This urgency is evident by the tragic loss of so many young lives in Toronto in 2005. The need for concrete change to provide a range of meaningful opportunities for young people to become productive citizens is

CONCLUSION

The evidence is there to support the position that the creative industries are growing and thus provide viable career path options for the 21st century. Community organizations are responding with interesting and innovative programming for many marginalized youth. There are aspects of this situation that are comparable across different locations and times which was, in part, demonstrated by the Imagine a Toronto (2006) report. But the specificities of location also matter. In the Toronto case, we have been here before, after the young street riots in 1992 the NDP government funded programs such as Fresh Arts⁷ which was a part of the Jobs Ontario Community Action program. With the renewed initiative at the grassroots toward arts and cultural programming in the wake of the increase in gun crime in Toronto it is an important time for pointed action.

Programs like RPF with the potential to do what Tchibozo describes as a 'hedonistic variant,' by providing youth a place to acquire some skills and therein determine a potential career path, are in need of support to ensure their long term viability as a part of the learning-work transition in Toronto. Support for such programs could provide a model towards a remedy for the crime and violence that is on the increase in other Canadian cities. The necessary next step is for business and government to recognize the opportunity to support the development of these programs into valuable alternatives that reintegrate marginalized youth into society.

There are some obvious gaps in the literature concerning learning and work transitions and the cultural sector. In recent years some OECD nations have begun to recognize the value of the cultural sector to their economies (2006 Imagine A Toronto). The focus on manufacturing and skilled labour reflected in the literature is in direct response to the labour environment that have dominated OECD economic markets for much of the 20th century. As we begin the 21st century and the creative economy continues to mature studies will reflect the new challenges that are particular to the creative economy. The biography of place may emerge as an area of interest for learning and work scholars as

they consider the ways governments and policy makers choose to engage youth in non-traditional ways with the economy alongside the social issues that may impact policy.

The youth who have benefited from Regent Park Focus are a testament to possibilities that are untapped if governments are willing to provide solutions that see community organizations take a more active role in policy and practice. In an age where information is so readily available to all youth, our marginalized young people are very aware of the options and opportunities' that are not being made available to them. The tragedy would be to have our business leaders and policy makers continue to believe that creating programs on a project by project basis is sufficient to engage and assist the next generation of youth who are on the margins of our society. This research has led to various opportunities to see first hand what can happen when a young person is on the border between productive citizenship and criminal offender. Finally there is an anecdote that illustrates the tragic outcome that is too often occurring in Toronto neighbourhoods. It involves a young black man who was a leader in initiating a theatre project in the Alexander Park community, a low income housing project in the heart of Toronto at Spadina and Dundas. He had written much of the script for the theatre program that was to tell the story of how the youth in that community felt about the recent increase in gun violence in Toronto. He was arrested while we were developing the project. The Centre's Director was aware that he was still engaging in petty drug crime and hoped the theatre project would motivate him to leave that lifestyle altogether. One has to wonder if that young man could have seen an opportunity to pursue a career as a writer, or actor or director, or some other professional. Would he have st

NOTES

- ¹ The Yonge street riots in down town Toronto took place after the verdict for the Rodney King trial in the United States came back.
- ² The Mobile City was a digital photography project/competition aimed at enhancing youth participation in community building in the twin cities of Milan and Toronto. Ten winners from Toronto travelled to Milan in July to participate in a group exhibit. A week later, the winning

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