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Re-Thinking Learning-Work Transitions in the Context

of Community Training for Racialized Youth

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Re-Thinking Learning-Work Transitions in the Context of Community Training for Racialized Youth

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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

RE-THINKING LEARNING-WORK TRANSITIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF COMMUNITY TRAINING FOR RACIALIZED YOUTH

INTRODUCTION

The belief that community programs are an effective preventative response to the crisis of disenfranchised racialized youth has led to calls for better funding of such programs. These calls have been fuelled by an increase in youth gun crime in Toronto. In Canada's largest city, the year 2005 was dubbed the 'Year of the Gun' due to the striking increase in violent, gun related crime among youth in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), a disproportionate number of the youth involved were black and male. Toronto had 78 homicides in 2005; 57 were male and 48 percent of the fatalities were black men (Toronto Star, 2005). Compared to the USA, in Canada gun crime is considerably less frequent. Nevertheless, the disturbing rise in gun violence in 2005 resulted in a public outcry for more police presence in neighbourhoods where such incidents have occurred in order to arrest and convict perpetrators. This outcry has been accompanied by a call for an increase in preventative programming for "at-risk youth" in the hope of keeping them away from criminal activity. As 2006 ended there were considerably fewer youth gun-related deaths, a substantial increase in funds to community programs and increased policing. But while community programs may be a factor in the decrease in gun deaths among youth, the question of the long term effectiveness of these measures as a response to youth violence begs analysis.

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 communities in the greater Toronto area. My objective is to give voice to some of the challenges facing those on the frontlines, in part, so that government funders and policy makers will pay attention to these needs when setting funding criteria and writing policy. Thus I examine the effectiveness and long term viability of community programming as a response to the problems faced by disenfranchised youth, specifically Black youth. Given the lack of employment skills that are a consequence of high dropout rates among this group in Canada, (Dei, Mazzuca, McIsaac and Zine 1997; Lewis, 1992; Royal Commission on Learning, 1994), I look at how community programs contribute to employment opportunities for youth by providing them with employable skills, and in so doing establish viable and, in Canada under-studied, transitions from learning to work. The core of my analysis is rooted in a specific racialized, low-income community: Regent Park. Specifically, I examine challenges facing Regent Park Focus (RPF), one example of the myriad of community organizations in the Toronto area that are engaging youth with a focus on introducing youth to work in cultural industries. The RPF program provides education and training opportunities for youth in film, new media or music industries, all of which have a strong presence in the GTA.

As I'll show, RPF provides a relevant case study of the challenges facing organizations that are trying to provide opportunities for youth. These challenges include operational issues such as managing organization growth and operational funding. For example, while it may be relatively easy to find project funding, these organizations need a operational funding structure that is flexible and allows them to create programs that respond to and plan for their constituency's needs which may be emergent or shifting. Project funding is short term and limits an organization's ability to engage in long term planning. Beyond organizational and funding issues, however, this paper will pay

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 19921 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, governments are not being asked to test an initiative that has not been already proven in our own country.

The existence of disenfranchised youth in any society speaks to familial, governmental and institutional failures to provide for the most vulnerable; and in the case of the isolation, alienation and resulting disenfranchisement facing young, black men this may be especially so. The expectation that "young people will be propelled through the education system in pursuit of credentials and as a consequence, emerge out the other end able to both enjoy the individual benefits of their education as well as contribute usefully to the economy" (Smyth 2003, p. 128), simply fails to acknowledge that this will not be the experience or transitions of many youth, disenfranchised or not (Taylor, 2005; Staff and Mortimer; Wentling and Waight, 2002). As Looker and Dwyer (1998) argue, this model, perpetuated by organizations such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), is problematic; and that furthermore, such expectations have set many youth up to fail as they do not provide for differing responses or levels of engagement within society. In fact, the 1990 initiatives launched by the OECD focusing on the skills required for success in the technological age of the 21st century have resulted in education policies in many Western countries that have an overwhelming focus on service based economies. Thus, the argument presented in this paper that the predominant focus is on the service economy is further evidence of the cookie cutter response to the economic tide which can negatively influence education and training initiatives. If the economy is going in a particular direction then the expectation is that certain types of skill sets and qualifications will be molded within the education system in response to the "market." This leaves little room for innovation and creativity, either within our education and training institutions or within the broader economy. This in turn is yet another factor which supports the continued lack of attention to the increasing numbers of youth who will not fit into this mold , including the young people who are engaging with community arts programs and of whom we will focus on in this paper. As such, we see the perpetuation of transitions policy and

practice that ignores the differentiated experiences across youth groups and in so doing both normalizes and ratifies exclusions that are as predictable as they are inequitable.

This paper will show how urban, community programs focusing on the cultural industries such as RPF operate, how they fill a vital role in expanding learning-work transitions to meet the needs of those so often pushed off fulfilling and productive pathways, and the unique challenges, such as the ones introduced above, that they face in carrying out their work. However, before proceeding it is important to recognize the specific political and social context – inclusive of the role of provincial and municipal government and emergent social 'crises' such as Toronto's so-called Year of the Gun – in which these types of programs operate. Indeed, unusual in scholarship on learning-work transitions is the recognition that is registered here that sees the history and cultural identity of specific locations – such as a town, a city, state or province – as playing an active, even constitutive role in how these transitions operate.

POLITICAL CONTEXT AND THE ROLE OF SOCIAL CRISIS IN UNDERSTANDING LEARNING-WORK TRANSITIONS

As context for the argument of this paper it is important to note the role played by the Ontario Conservative government's policy changes in the mid-to-late 1990s, (Mike Harris was Premier of Ontario from June, 1995 to April 2002), which reflected a shift in focus towards learning-work transitions and service-based economies. In a special issue of the magazine Orbit, titled "School to Work Transitions", these matters are summarized nicely. Contributors looked at the educational reform agenda of the Conservative government of the time, and raised questions about curriculum implementation and delivery during the early stages of policy changes to education. The co-editors of the issue ask: "How can links between schools and work-places be established and sustained, and what contributions should firms be making as education faces the challenges of technological and structural change?" (Russell and Wideman, 2000, p. 5). This question suggests that governments have the capacity to work with business and education, if motivated. Government has a role to play in creating the

environment that will encourage educational institutions and the private sector to work with community organizations who are training youth to work in the creative sectors, including the cultural industries, to assist in bringing those skills to the marketplace. But, how this relationship works, the resources and broader social changes it requires, and the other significant societal challenges that need to be addressed to move this discussion forward, remain. This dilemma is more recently becoming recognized by policy makers and decision makers in local governments, and the projects are resulting in projects that are initiated by local governments. However most of their initiatives replicate the programs that community organizations are presenting.[2] While others attempt to bring together the organizations that are providing community cultural programs for youth to try and advance policies and practices through research prospects for policy makers.[3]

At the same time, however, government policy directions do not give a full picture of the context, indeed the crisis, which has led to the need to take a closer look at the role of targeted community programs. Of course, at a general level, government policy-making with regards to learning, labour markets and work is the target of pressure from business circles regarding shortages of labour in certain fields (Livingstone, 2006). However, government also responds to its reading of public opinion. The importance of this emerges for this paper in the case of Toronto specifically in relation to the public outcry over gun violence that arose largely based on the death of a young middle class white woman on Boxing Day 2005. The way this reaction affected policy, in fact, betrays additional complexities regarding whose 'public opinion' mattered in this context, and in turn the type of community program responses that would eventually be brought forward. In this sense, the specific biography of the city is deeply intertwined with the learning/work transitions process. In order to flesh this out further it is relevant to note some particular details.

The public outcry and political response linked to this death fixated on several factors: it took place on a busy city street; it took place on a busy shopping day; and it occurred as

a random result of the crossfire as one black male tried to shoot another. These factors, it would seem, were a potent combination. In fact, prior to her shooting, a young man was shot at a church during the funeral of his friend the previous week. These earlier shootings received less but also distinct forms of media attention: the first was characterized as a gang related incident, highly racialized as yet another in the string of shootings that had plagued Toronto in 2005; while the second was characterized differently as a young man who was the supposed witness in the shooting of the friend whose funeral he was attending when he was shot. The fact that this crime took place at a house of worship was highlighted in the media and used to further vilify the shooter as particularly inhumane for taking a life while friends and family mourned the loss of another. As 2005 ended the overriding sentiment with the rash of murders that had taken place was that these were young (black) "thugs" who were killing each other and the problem was not one that concerned the law abiding citizens in Toronto. The church killing barely disturbed this logic; that is, until an innocent white woman from a middle class family was randomly killed while shopping. The sense that society gives greater value to the life of a young middle white woman over that of a young black man is underscored when such events take place so close together and the level of response and outcry is so obviously different (Toronto Star, 2005: Section A 22).

The newspaper coverage at the end of 2005 also took an interesting look at the broad picture by mapping the homicides over the year in the city and briefly profiling some of the black male victims. The impact of the conservative Government's tenure was linked to the marked increase in gun crime. The view that the cuts to social assistance programs, general cuts in education and specifically the zero tolerance policies in the school system during Mike Harris' Conservative Government, is responsible for the society these youth, that come of age during the Harris years, (1995–2002), grew up in, lends further credibility to critical education theory which we review briefly below. Many of these policies adversely affected black students in particular. The Toronto Star's profile of one of the black men killed in 2005 points to the impact that adverse education cuts and policy changes had in low income neighbourhoods such as Jane and Finch[4],

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 in many low income GTA neighbourhoods. The article also highlights the continued systemic racism raised in the Stephen Lewis report published in the 1992:

> It is Black youth that is unemployed in excessive numbers, it is Black students who are being inappropriately streamed in schools, it is Black kids who are disproportionately dropping out, it is housing communities with large concentrations of Black residents where the sense of vulnerability and disadvantage is most acute, it is Black employees, professional and non-professional, on whom the doors of upward equity slam shut. Just as the soothing balm of "multiculturalism" cannot mask racism, so racism cannot mask its primary target. (Lewis in Toronto Star, 2005: Section A 22)

Lewis' report underscores the fact that when social exclusion and marginalization are impacting youth at large, the impact on black youth is greater than on other marginalized groups. These issues – in terms of their public policy connections and linkage to public outcry – set the stage for a deeper understanding of the community programs and learning-work transitions that they support for youth at risk. However, before proceeding to this research, it is important to take a moment to outline the basic theory and research that can inform this deeper understanding.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: A STARTING POINT

Critical educational theory is concerned with how institutions, societal culture and political processes reflect and reproduce broader social systems such as racism and capitalism (Hayes and Way, 1998). It is this observation that provides the initial framework for my analysis. Such systems tend to support the status quo and reinforce the inter-locking nature of racist and capitalist power structures that are difficult to break

through to affect social change. In a 2005 doctorial 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-defining of the power structure to impact decisions and outcomes not only for the positions of this paper but for a whole host of other critical social issues.

Critical education theory and particularly those who have taken a close look at how schools function to reproduce the social order has a significant history. Theories of reproduction as well as resistance as outlined decades ago by Willis (1980), Giroux (e.g., 1981, 1983), and Livingstone (1987; also Curtis, Livingstone and Smaller, 1992) noted that the latent function of schooling was a type of differential inclusion where outcomes were systematically distributed unequally across a class and gender hierarchy. Curriculum policy as well as cultural practice and broader economic and family systems were all implicated. Several scholars took inspiration from the work of Paulo Friere (e.g., 1970), Illich (1971) and others. At the same time it became clear that issues of race were not well represented (Wotherspoon 2004). Canadian anti-racist

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, leaving much to be examined in terms of the interlocking nature of race/class analysis in relation to extended pathways and transitions toward employment, including those paths that run through community-based programs. One of the goals is that this paper will encourage further scholarship in the area of study and shine light on the influence community programs are having in response to the barriers within the credential system. Such scholarship would give policy makers the evidence needed to encourage the support of local governments and their agencies in formalizing community programs to fill some of the gaps in the current credential system.

Returning to the findings of Lewis' report discussed in the previous section and linking the critical educational tradition with it, we see several points which are echoed in the research. Speaking about systemic racism in the Ontario education system, Dei (2004) points out that: "[i]n spite of the addition of multicultural education, Canadian educational system serves to produce and reproduce racial biases, discriminations, exclusions and ultimately, inequalities" (p. 195). Such findings are highlighted time and again in Dei's research. In fact, what may be central to these debates is the promise of grassroots organizing for change which links parents, students and the community with the education system, and recognizes that forms of alternative education outside of the regular education system has value as an alternative for students to succeed. Dei (2004) points to Black parents' use of Afrocentric home schooling as an example of alternatives to mainstream schooling. It must be noted however that Dei speaks of schooling in the limited sense of gaining educational credentials. Lewis's commentary and Dei's research shows how critical education theory relates to perpetuating systemic racism. And in this paper I extend their observations suggesting that this same systemic racism may be what is hindering policy-makers from developing and implementing

policies and practices that can support and expand the work of community organizations that are working with disenfranchised youth.

What emerges from my discussion of context and the initial introduction of critical educational theory is the need to better understand community sites as an important link in the chain of alternative learning-work transitions that might speak to the needs of racialized youth directly. So, before our look at a specific initiative it is important to extend my discussion of a theoretical framework to these alternative sites, and to introduce broader notions of learning beyond schooling.

Community organizations as I use the term, refers to the existence of a group of people knitted together by their geographic location, socio-economic condition and some common social goals. The community organizations referred to in general and specifically here all have these common threads in that they are located in a particular neighbourhood and give access and a sense of ownership to a facility and/or services offered by and for the people of the neighbourhood. This does not mean that programs offered in Jane and Finch for example may not be utilized by people from another Toronto neighbourhood, however in the case of the programs that will be discussed here, the impetus for their start-up is the recognition of a need within the geographic boundaries of the community that they wish to serve. The raison d'être for the ongoing existence of the programming offered, is to serve the immediate community.

Learning as it takes place within community organizations, gives youth access to knowledge through informal, non-formal and tacit learning; a significant gap exists within critical education theory's understandings of learning and its connection to labour markets. This type of education may be at odds with dominant perspectives that hold fast to the idea that formal education, for example represented by a high school diploma, is essential for the development of young people. In this paper I challenge the strictness of these dominant educational values by showing that education outside of the traditional institutional setting can impart valuable skills and knowledge to youth and develop good citizenship which is of particular importance to disenfranchised youth.

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 learner, leaving a large portion of students and the future labour force marginalized (Livingstone, 2004; Galabuzi, 2006). Giving legitimacy to informal, non-formal and tacit learning for developing skills that may be taken into a paid work environment is an essential change that needs to take place in policy generally speaking, and may be particularly important for a full understanding of the dynamics of learning-work transitions. Since many community organizations are approaching training in an informal or non-formal way, "lived experience" becomes an essential part of the maturity and life lessons required for a young person to contribute to civil society in a meaningful way through their work. Some community programs have managed to make this connection, acting as the intermediary between youth and employers or educational institutions to provide access to employment or credentials that create opportunities and

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 dialogue around a "new vocationalism" has attempted to remove the stigma of the route of the so-called 'low-achieving' high school student's avenue to employment from vocational education (Lehmann and Taylor, 2003; see also the introductory chapter of this volume). However, despite the inclusion in this new vocationalism school of thought of the concern for re-directing high school students who are not university-bound, what remains neglected is the sub-group of students who do not go into traditional vocations such as the skilled trades. I argue here that this narrow fixation on giving greater credibility to students who are largely being streamed into the skilled trades emerges largely because it is safer than dealing with the much more difficult – and more socially radical – task of addressing the more extreme needs of young people who increasingly in a country like Canada cannot find success anywhere in the current academic structures and who, in turn, are barred from apprenticeship and related occupational opportunities. In these cases, it would appear that only a social crisis – for example, as in the case of Toronto's Year of the Gun – holds the potential to open opportunities for public discourse on providing a broader ranger of opportunities for the disenfranchised. At the same time, it seems equally clear that crisis, while perhaps necessary, is not sufficient for solving the problems at hand. What is also needed is a policy response that will truly engage business, government and community stakeholders so that the approach to the issue of disenfranchised, and perhaps particularly racialized, youth is proactive and expansive rather than reactive, misdirected and ultimately ineffective. With that stated we will now move to highlight our case study of RPF.

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-up, the history and the existing programming that will be detailed further here. Regent Park Focus (RPF) was established in 1989 as a part of a provincial government's -initiated strategy to promote health in vulnerable communities across Ontario. This program is funded through the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to address the rise in violence and drug addiction in the neighbourhood. The organization is located in Regent Park, Canada's largest and oldest public housing community having been built in the late 1940s. It is a lower income neighbourhood located in downtown Toronto. It is bound by Gerrard Street East to the north, River Street to the east, Shuter Street to the south, and Parliament Street to the west. It is an extremely culturally diverse neighbourhood, with more than half of its population being immigrants. It is home to approximately 7,500 people. Over 50% of the population living in Regent Park are children 18 years and younger (compared to a Toronto-wide average of 30%). The average income for Regent Park residents is approximately half the average for other Torontonians. A majority of families in Regent Park are classified as low-income, with 68% of the population living below Statistics Canada's Low-Income Cut-Off Rate in one of its census tracts, and 76% in the other (compared to a Toronto-wide average of just over 20%). Poverty is a reality for seven in ten Regent Park families. Regent Park's residential dwellings are entirely social housing, and cover all of the 69 acres (280,000 m²) which comprise the community. The city government developed a plan to demolish and rebuild Regent Park over the next ten years, with the first phase having started fall 2005. The addition of market units on site will double the number of units in Regent Park. Former street patterns will be restored and housing will be designed to reflect that of adjacent and affluent neighbourhoods (including

Cabbagetown and Corktown), in order to end Regent Park's physical isolation from the rest of the city. RPF is one of the many community programs offered in Regent Park for underprivileged children. Being the oldest social housing complex in Toronto this community has many lessons to teach others about community activism and organizing. RPF is a good example of the level of community excellence possible with very little resources. RPF provides a community-based facility for training in new media, video production, music and photography. Youth are also able to engage in production of a radio show which airs on a local station as well as publish a community newspaper. In a number of cases, with the support and guidance of the staff at RPF, youth have been able to use the skills acquired in the program to enter post-secondary institutions and eventually the labour market.

The following are brief testimonials documented through ongoing discussions with Adonis Huggins, the Director of RPF. My discussions with Huggins, in turn gave rise to observations of his program and further informal contact with program participants. Huggins spoke at length about some of the success stories of youth that have gone on to work in a sector of the creative economy after initial training at RPF:

> Carl[5] started with Regent Park Focus in 1997. He was interested in video production and trained with RPF for three years before going on to Centennial College's Film and Television program in 1999. Currently he is working as a segment producer with Much Music.

> Robert also started with RPF in 1997 and was with the program for three years. He went on to work full-time with the youth video production organization "Global Hood" in Dufferin Mall. Now, he is studying at the Academy of Design and Technology.

These profiles are interesting as they point to the Tchibozo's notion of hedonistic variant whereby youth choose a training model and later deduce the occupational target that is revealed through their training (Tchibozo, 2002, p. 338). Tchibozo's analysis of the

principles governing the process of learning-work transition espouses four key concepts, the determinist approach which is dictated largely by familial and social roots; the random approach, leaving the matter to chance; the chaotic approach, whereby a prior predictable outcome is cancelled by a major live altering experience and finally the strategic approach where intentional choices of the agent result in a desired outcome. The strategic version of school-to-work transitions is relevant here as it places emphasis on the agent as one adapts and is complex in relating to social history and environment. However the strategic variant is further dissected by the author into two more variants: the hedonistic and the utilitarian. The utilitarian variant assumes that people chose an occupational target and then decide on the appropriate training model. While with the hedonistic variant a method of training is chosen allowing individuals to find their occupational target through the training process. This approach to training for youth at risk is fairly safe as it usually allows low risk of failure, which is key for youth who have not had good experiences with traditional methods of learning (2002). This model is repeated in communities all across the GTA. Drop-in programs allow young people to freely commit as much or as little of their time to learning a new skill or exploring an interest without any pressure as to the outcome. Youth are not coming into RPF expecting to get a job if they learn how to make a CD or a video. They come to explore without the pressure of an expected outcome. This is not to say that there is no structure or boundaries to provide youth with a learning outcome and a clear sense of achievement. Instead of being linked to making life changing decisions from the outset, the structure gives clear boundaries for youth so they know what is acceptable within the environment in which they are working. This hedonistic variant is an essential component of what draws these youth in and creates a safe space to experiment and explore without the demands of acquiring credentials or beginning to plan for the future.

According to John Smyth (2003), the ability to explore and discover outside of the linear school environment is markedly different from the deterministic structural process seen within mainstream schooling. Smyth's argument points out that more young people are drawn to a complex process that allows them more agency than currently exists in

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 policies[6] 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 self-esteem. Program Director, Huggins of RPF shared an example of one such young person:

> Kevin is a high school drop out and former drug dealer who came to RPF
> in 2004 and was with the program for one year. He is a rapper who wrote
> and produced his CD at the music studio at RPF. RPF was able to get this
> young person enrolled into George Brown College based on an

assessment of the learning he had acquired at RPF. However, Kevin was
not successful at the college and dropped out shortly after enrolling.

The RPF Director pointed out that he was not surprised that Kevin was not successful at one of the local community colleges he had initially enrolled in because he was always adamant that school was not for him and, he just wanted to work. Huggins admitted that if he was able to help Kevin get some work experience, he would have pursued this option over the academy. Adonis sees RPF's role as creating as much access and opportunities as possible for these young people to give them choices to find what they want to do with their lives. He added that the choice they make as agents of their own destiny is preferable to blind obedience.

Creating these choices is the reason RPF is in the process of developing a new pilot project with the aim of creating more options within learning-work transitions than are currently available for disenfranchised youth. RPF has links to the education system but the organization does not have links to employers for those young people who do not wish to go back to school. RPF is in the preliminary stage of developing a three year pilot project with the Toronto Community Housing Corporation to take 12 youth per year who are identified as "having potential." They will receive career development opportunities in new media and digital production through a training program that will see the youth from start to finish with a work-based apprenticeship with a local media business. In the first year of the pilot, the curriculum will be structured for four to six months to prepare the youth for a two-month apprenticeship with a production company where they can take an idea through the development process from concept to completion. This project will see 36 youth over three years go through this program and track their placement in jobs after the six to eight month training program in informal settings. The hope is that this project will provide a model that will allow young people such as Kevin the access to training for work that is happening outside of the confines of the academy. Such innovative projects recognize that not every young person will want to learn in a school setting and is seeking options and opportunities for them.

As noted earlier, Canadian policy makers have typically failed to come up with alternatives for acquiring schooling credentials outside of the mainstream education system. In their comparison of work transition policies in Germany and Canada, both Heinz and Taylor (2005) and Lehmann (2000) found that compared to European countries of the OECD, North America is ineffective at developing training initiatives that partner educational institutions with employers and labour. Heinz and Taylor (2005) maintain that North American "employers are noted as underinvested in long-term employee training programs and [are] less active in education programs compared to those in most other OECD countries" (Heinz and Taylor, 2005, p. 5). They highlight the fact that high youth unemployment and a desire to increase the number of high school graduates have created a climate of urgency driving policy makers to address these challenges through vocational programs within secondary schools. Currently, in Canada, there is no significant body of research on grassroots community education and training programs that are working with young people who were previously unsuccessful in the school system but are now finding successful learning outcomes through informal, non-formal or tacit learning. Nor does research focus on the disenfranchised youth who may be involved in petty crime, but who are increasingly being engaged by community arts education programs that may deter them from further criminal activity.

ESTABLISHING STANDARDS FOR COMMUNITY EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROGRAMS

Partnerships are needed between community program deliverers and employers for providing opportunities to young people that engage them in non-formal and informal learning environments. These partnerships may be an effective way of determining some standards for the myriad of cultural training programs popping up across Toronto and other major cities across Canada, or elsewhere. Such standards would be invaluable in providing indicators to strengthen the linkages between the program being delivered and employment opportunities, by ensuring that the programming is truly preparing youth for the work environment or imparting skills that lend themselves to

good citizenship whichever road their career path may take. In much the same way as there is a comprehensive approach to preparing youth for work in the skilled trades, a similar approach for the cultural industries would serve to give a clear indicator as to the value of working in the creative economy. As well as outline paths that led to enhanced skills development or recognition of the skills that are transferable to another sector of the economy.

On this point, it is useful to share some of the findings from the Imagine a Toronto report which was published after a team of cultural leaders and policy makers in Toronto and London (England), came together to study the potential opportunities that existed in the creative economy of their respective cities. The report provides some key data about the value of working in the creative sector. The report was launched in July 2006 and provided a summary of the research findings from the Strategies for Creative Cities Project that informed the strategic opportunities articulated in the document. The project team studied a range of creative activities and interventions used in cities around the world. The report grouped these areas of study into five broad categories: People, Enterprise, Space, Connectivity and Vision (Imagine a Toronto, 2006).

The section on Enterprise is particularly relevant as it acknowledges that "creativity often produces economic opportunity and that cultural entrepreneurs start and grow creative business. Commercializing creative talent enhances wealth and employment generation…" (Imagine a Toronto, 2006, p. 8). The report also provided statistics that compared the economic growth within the creative sectors in Toronto with other more traditional sectors such as finance and information technology, showing that between 1991 and 2004 the creative industries grew faster than financial services and was catching up to information technology. Within the creative sector the fastest growing industries in Toronto are Performing Arts Companies (at 7.1%), Motion Picture and Video industries and the Sound recording industry (at 5.4%) and finally the Broadcasting (at 4.6%) (Imagine a Toronto, 2006, p. 17–18). Indeed, such figures show the growth potential that is often used by policy makers to encourage workers into certain fields, and make a compelling argument for support of grass roots community

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 essential now. If there is not a systematic response to the issue of disenfranchised youth who have not been successful along the paths that society has set out we will simply increase the pool of marginalized people facing broken transitions from learning to work; a societal context of turbulence, destabilization and injustice in which the loss of innocent life (of all colours) will become less of an exception. "An increasing number of young people are diverging from the white middle-class pattern. Educational institutions and workplaces must adapt to changes in the youth population. Education and workplace training that are typically effective with advantaged youth will not necessarily enable disadvantaged youth to reach their full potential (Wentling and Waight, 2001, p. 72)

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 Arts[7] 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 began 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 in 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 stopped dabbling in petty crime if he saw another way to make money that did not involve the risk of incarceration?

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 photographers from Milan came to Toronto to take part in the July 16 exhibition, to visit with famed Toronto photographer Michael Awad and to travel throughout the GTA. Selections from the winning photographs were published in a book in the fall of 2008. The winning photographs are posted at www.mobilecityphoto.org. The Mobile City was a joint initiative of the Italian Chamber of Commerce of Toronto, the Chamber of Commerce of Milan, the City of Toronto: Toronto Culture and Toronto Economic Development, the City of Milan, and the Province of Milan (with the support of the Region of Lombardy).

3   The Ignite C.Y.A.N. (Canadian Youth Arts Network Youth Arts Forum) took place June 12 & 13, 2007 in Toronto. The purpose of the forum was to advance policies and practices that support youth arts practitioners in Toronto. The forum also sought to:
    Provide networking opportunities for youth arts practitioners to get/stay connected, share resources, review best practices, talk to policy makers and funding bodies.
    Provide the policy community with the research and evidence to support investment in youth-relevant cultural activities and programs and identify other policy areas where targeted support could leverage further benefits in this area.
    Shorten the gaps between "on the ground" experience of youth-relevant and youth-led cultural activities and researchers, policy makers and funding bodies.

4   Jane and Finch is a neighbourhood located in the North West area of Toronto centered around the intersection of two arterial roads, Jane Street and Finch Avenue. The community is commonly referred to as the most ethnically diverse of all of Toronto's communities, with 120 nationalities and ethnic populations and over 100 languages spoken. The community is also home to Canada's largest concentration of gangs. The community has been stigmatized as one of those Toronto neighbourhoods that has long had a reputation for violence, drugs and racial tensions.

5   Pseudonyms are used for all of the youth referenced in the paper.

6   In 2001 under the Ontario Progressive Conservative Government of Mike Harris a zero tolerance safe schools act was introduced. This act outlined strict rules and consequences for students breaking the rules. The act was brought before the human rights commission due to the disproportionate number of students of colour and students with disabilities who were suspended and expelled under the act. In 2007 the Liberal Government introduced changes to the safe schools act to eliminate the zero tolerance approach and instead introduced a progressive discipline policy.

7   Under the **Fresh Arts** program youth were paid to work on various arts projects in the summer, the programs ranged from the fine arts such as visual art and theatre to creative industries such as film and music. Fresh Arts was administered by the Toronto Arts Council (TAC), the program gave rise to musicians and poets who went on to create an urban music scene that did not exist previously in Canada. Toronto hip hop recording artist Kardinal Official is one example of an internationally successful artist who was introduced to the possibility of becoming a professional at his craft after acquiring the training and support in the Fresh Arts summer program. The Fresh Arts program was a public private partnership, the TAC worked with local business to give youth time in a recording studio with producers to develop their work.

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