Long-term Training in Learning and Work for Youth at Risk: Sustainability & Creativity in Policy and Execution of Youth At Risk Programs In Toronto

By

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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 provide safe productive environments for youth to gather and develop self esteem and as well as important marketable life skills for the labour force. However there is currently a disconnect between these programs and the valuable training that they are imparting to youth. The traditional training and learning-to-work transitions have not enjoyed the success that was envisioned in the early stages of these initiatives. Through interviews and observation, the research documented in this thesis 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.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

The belief that community programs are an effective preventative response to the crisis of disenfranchised racialized youth has led to calls by many social and cultural activists 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, 2005 saw a striking jump in violent gun related crime among youth in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), and 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). This disturbing rise in gun violence resulted in a public outcry for more police presence the neighbourhoods where such incidents 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” with the hope of keeping them away from criminal activity. Such programs include athletic as well as artistic choices for youth in their local community settings; many of the programs target thirteen Toronto neighbourhoods identified by the United Way of Greater Toronto’s Poverty by Postal Code report, with combination of a high ratio of poverty and lack of services to support low income families serving as a key characteristic of the designation. (United Way, 2004 ) 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 thesis is twofold: first to illuminate studies of learning-work transition, with the Toronto International Film Festival Group (TIFFG) and Regent Park focus (RPF). Secondly, it seeks to assist community leaders and workers responsible for 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. The objective is to give voice to some of the challenges facing those on the front-lines, in part, by informing funding organizations and policy makers and draw the connection between emerging and the underserviced needs as part of the development of funding criteria and program policy. Thus, the effectiveness and long term viability of community programming as a response to the problems faced by disenfranchised youth, specifically Black youth will be examined. Given the lack of employment skills that are a consequence of high dropout rates among this group, the role that community programs play in the creation of employment opportunities for youth through the provision of employable skills and thus facilitate viable transitions from learning to work is also analysed (Dei, Mazzuca, McIsaac & Zine 1997; Lewis, 1992; Royal Commission on Learning, 1994).

The final section of this thesis will focus on two specific case studies: the first is a potential partnership with the Toronto International Film Festival Group’s Special Delivery Program (TIFFG) and Regent Park Focus (RPF); the second is NIA, an African Canadian Centre for the Arts. The first case study investigates viability for a larger cultural organization to partner with a small grassroots organization to support the career development of youth in the arts, while the second focuses on the Nia Centre for Afro-Diasporic youth, a new organization. TIFFG and RPF provide examples of current
projects that are up and running while NIA focuses on an organization that is in the start up phase and has the potential to fill identified gaps within the current arts engagement project spectrum in the near future. Though TIFFG's Special Delivery Program and the RPF are established programs which fulfill particular needs among youth at risk in Toronto, neither are focused on Black youth specifically. NIA is an arts centre focused on education, self-determination and community development for Afro-Diasporic Canadian youth in Toronto's under-resourced communities. NIA's model proposes an incubator type setting for Black youth who are emerging professional artists from various disciplines. The organization is currently in its development but has the potential to provide a model for the type of organizational support that could help young people transition their interest in the arts into professional practice.

The analysis of this case study will be framed here by Critical Education theory and the recognition that there is a connection in the way institutions structure learning to meet the need of labour markets. The contributions of theorists such as Pierre Bourdieu's work on how academies can reproduce cultural inequities will be used in my analysis. Canadian education theorists including George Dei, Carl James and Celia Haig-Brown will also be used to demonstrate some of the research and thinking that has already been done on the successes and challenges that community-based educational program have had in Toronto and other parts of the world. The Imagine a Toronto; Strategies for Creative Cities report, which highlights the economic impact and potential for growth within Toronto's creative economy, will also provide context to this analysis. The core of the discussion is rooted in specific racialized, low-income communities in the Toronto area, with the Regent Park experience serving as as a key example of the
challenges facing black youth in many of the low income housing communities in Toronto. The analysis will specifically focus on the challenges facing Regent Park Focus (RPF), one of the many organizations in the Toronto area engaging youth by introducing them to work in cultural industries. Regent Park Focus (RPF) was established in 1989 as a part of a provincial government strategy to promote health in vulnerable communities across Ontario. This program was an innovative proactive approach to try and stem the culture of drug addiction and violence that health care workers were responding to in the community and is run through the Regent Park Health Centre and funded by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. Regent Park is Canada’s largest and oldest public housing community. Built in downtown Toronto in the 1940s, this lower income neighbourhood is a culturally diverse community with more than half of its population being immigrants. It is home to approximately 7,500 people. Historically over 50% of Regent Park residents are children 18 years and younger (compared to a Toronto-wide average of 30%). As the the oldest social housing complex in Toronto, this community has provided numerous lessons about community activism and organizing, with many local community organizations serving as good examples of how excellence can be attained with scant resources. Continuing in this tradition, 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 as RPF programs provide education and training in creative industries that have significant economic presence in the GTA.

RPF is a useful case study of the challenges facing organizations designed to provide opportunities for youth. These challenges include operational issues such as managing organizational growth and operational funding. Unlike project funding, which may be relatively easy to obtain, organizations such as these have had real challenges securing operational funding that allows the development of an organizational structure that is flexible and allows them to create programs that respond to and plan for emergent and changing needs of their constituency. These issues may manifest in a spike in violence within the community due to changes among the local criminal element and may require programming to be amended or increase to provide additional opportunities for youth to have safe places to gather before or after school. The short term nature of project funding often limits an organization’s ability to engage in long term planning that could provide the operational responses needed to effectively support local youth when they most need it.

Beyond organizational and funding issues, however, this thesis will pay particular attention to the challenges facing the youth who are learning marketable skills at RPF. For community programming to be worthwhile and move beyond being a stop-gap measure designed to keep young people busy these initiatives must include a viable plan for learning-work transition from extra-curricular pursuits to forms of apprenticeships or further education and eventually paid work within the cultural industries or other appropriate sectors of choice according to the transferable skills that are identified. The hope is that policy makers and community leaders think about the
steps that may be taken to develop an overall plan for more effective transitions for work in the creative industries.

One of the desired outcomes of this thesis is to help inform policy changes and an expansion from programs that are focused on building good citizenship to programs that are practical and address the youth who make bad choices due to the short term economic gains. More recently, funding agencies such as the Laidlaw and Trillium Foundations had put a significant focus on programming – these agencies are good examples of this type of policy change that is responding to a very small segment of the youth community and leaves little room for the programming that may not be youth lead. In doing so it misses the opportunity for programming that is “youth centred” and “adult led” – programs that would provide adult leadership and mentorship for youth on the margins who do not have the capacity to deliver the level of organizational management and activism that has become associated with “youth run” projects and programming.

The result is that young people who are smart and disciplined and already have an understanding of the social and political systems and structures are disproportionately accessing the resources tabbed for "youth at risk" and they develop the programs and eventually attract youth of the same ilk. In contrast, many of the youth straddling criminal and civil society lack the necessary positive adult guidance and support to access and engage these resources. Adult-led/youth centred programming would provide the practical and emotional support and encouragement that would help expand the effectiveness of “at-risk” programming, and would recognize training within grassroots program initiatives as an option for youth who have not been successful in traditional educational settings. Positive adult role models can play an
essential role in counteracting the negative influences many youth have encountered throughout their lives. There is value in recognizing the unique dimensions of learning-work transitions that racialized, disenfranchised and ‘at-risk’ youth face as many of these individuals do not have access to conventional, prescribed pathways toward becoming a productive member of society. These role models can prove essential for those who veer toward unproductive, unsafe or criminal behaviour ensuring that the societal response does not disproportionately gravitate towards judicial punishment. Such considerations are especially relevant when presented with evidence that cultural programming can be effective in deterring youth from crime and particularly in conjunction with the substantial research that suggests that many young people become more serious criminals after spending time in jail. (Wortley, Scot. 1999, 2004)

In response to the 1992 Yonge Street Riots, the Bob Rae government (1990-1995) implemented the Jobs Ontario Community Action program, (JOY). This initiative 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 creative youth the opportunity to work and develop their skills in the discipline of their choice. Many of these young people helped to create and are now celebrities in Canada’s urban music industry. The Fresh Arts program created the environment for youth to develop as professional artists and the aforementioned artists were given the opportunity to write and produce their own music and later went on to successful careers in the industry based on their training. Consequently, funders and policymakers such as Canadian Heritage, Canada Council and Laidlaw are not being asked to test initiatives that have not been already proven in Canada. The Fresh Arts experience
provides a home-grown example that has been tested and proved successful. Yet, as economic climates change and governments and foundations make spending choices and identify their priorities, a key question emerges: what is the cost of not employing a funding model that is more focused on education and training for youth in culture? One has to wonder if you calculate the cost of the JOY program and compare it to the cost of the effects of 2005’s excessive violence in GTA, in lives lost and the money spent in the courts and on incarceration if proactive investment would not have been the better fiscal option.

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. Smyth’s assertion 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” simply fails to acknowledge that this will not be the experience or transitions of many youth, disenfranchised or not (Smyth 2003; Taylor, 2005.; Staff & Mortimer.; Wentling &Waight, 2002). As Looker and Dwyer (1998) argue, this model, perpetuated by non-governmental organizations such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) is problematic and, 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.

This predominant focus 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 skill sets and qualifications will be molded within the education system in response to the “market.” The notion of using macro economic trends as a determinant for how and where OECD nations focus resources for education and training is flawed on several levels and will be discussed and examined in further detail here, as it may be related to or influence federal funding policy. This leaves little room for innovation and creativity, either within our education and training institutions or within the broader economy. This 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 engaging with community arts programs focused on in this thesis. 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.

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. The next sections will include the following: background on the social and political circumstances in Toronto that led to a marked and deadly increase in gun violence among Black young men in Toronto in 2005; followed by an analysis of Critical
Educational theory as the theoretical framework for this thesis; and finally, the methodology and objective of the RPF and TIFFG case studies will be discussed. Doing so will provide insight into the ways other such partnerships can be formed to assist grassroots programs in their supporting youth learning and work programming and motivate other large cultural organizations toward such collaborations as they see the benefits for them internally and externally.

**Political Context and the Role of Social Crisis in Understanding/Learning Work Transitions**

It is important to note the role played by the Ontario Conservative government’s policy and program changes in the mid-to-late 1990s, 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. Co-editors Russell and Wideman (2000) 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 cultural industries – to make it economically beneficial to assist in bringing those skills to the
marketplace. How these relationships will work, 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.

At the same time, however, government policy directions do not give a full picture
of the context, indeed a crisis, which has led to the need to take a closer look at the role
of targeted community programs. 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 factor
was demonstrated in the influence the Boxing Day 2005 shooting death of Jane Creba
had on policy and politics. Creba, a young middle class white woman murdered in the
crossfire of gang conflict on Toronto’s busy Yonge Street, played a key role in the
federal election campaign that was being waged at the time of the incident, and also
resonated in the provincial and municipal politics of the day. But the manner that public
uproar 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.

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, Amon Beckles, 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 (presumably middle-class) White woman over that of a young disenfranchised 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 tenure are responsible for the challenges of youth that came of age during the Harris years, (1995-2002), and lends further credibility to critical education theory which is reviewed 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, 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 may 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 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. However, before proceeding to this research, it is important to take a moment to outline the theory and research that can inform this deeper understanding.
Chapter 2

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 & Way, 1998). It is this observation that provides the initial framework for the forthcoming analysis. Such systems tend to support the status quo and reinforce the inter-locking nature of racist and capitalist power structures that make it difficult to initiate societal change. In her 2005 doctoral dissertation education scholar Plastaras analyses the difficulty in challenging the capitalist power structure is the United States in response to the education crisis of African-American students. The author’s analysis is particularly interesting as it points to how capitalism is benefiting from the diversity in the United States, as American students are being prepared to be leaders in the global market. However, that success does not translate to providing 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 interesting one 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 a select group and does not truly provide access for all people. Toronto is constantly 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 one may find that tensions are present that speak to
the need for re-defining of the power structure to impact decisions and outcomes not only for the issues outlined in this thesis but also 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) all 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; 2004?) and James (1993; see also James and Haig-Brown 2004); James (1993) taking issues of Black youth transitions to employment as a core focus. 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. The hope is that this thesis will encourage further scholarship in this area of study to shine light on the influence community programs are having in relation to the barriers within the 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 previously mentioned body of 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 thesis our argument extends 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 the background 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 we look at the specifics of the
RPF 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, 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 thesis, 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 Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of how schooling contributes to the reproduction of cultural inequality in society (Plastaras, 2005).

The work of educational theorists 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 those youth already disillusioned with the academy, 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, 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 & Taylor 2003). However, despite the inclusion in this new vocationalism school of thought about 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 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 – opens the opportunity for public discourse on providing a broader range of opportunities for the disenfranchised. A crisis and political reaction, however 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 now move to highlight the case study of RPF.

Urban community programs that focus on introducing youth to careers in the cultural industries fill a vital role in expanding learning-work transitions to meet the needs of those so often pushed outside of fulfilling and productive pathways and the unique challenges, such as the ones introduced above, that they face in carrying out their work. An analysis of the prospect of developing a transitional program where youth would go from training within an arts-based community program to working in one of Toronto’s largest cultural organizations, The Toronto International Film Festival Group (TIFFG) will be done to get a sense of some of the challenges and benefits that such a partnership may face. The study will also consider the impact that work experience would have on the youth. This case study will look at the impact such a pilot project can have on influencing others to host these youth to continue their training.

Disenfranchised youth highlight societal failures to provide for the most vulnerable. Smyth’s (2003) assertion 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” fails to acknowledge that this will not be the experience of many youth, disenfranchised or not (Taylor, 2005; Staff & Mortimer, 2003; Wentling & Waight, 2002). As such, the policies and practice ignore different ways of knowing for our youth, and thus normalizes exclusions that are predictable as well as inequitable. 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 helping participating youth move through ATEA, this transition may even include further education before settling into paid work.
Chapter 3
Methodology and Objective: RPF AND TIFFG CASE STUDY/STUDIES

This section includes the analysis of interviews and observations conducted with senior youth at the Regent Park Focus (RPF). Also included are interviews with Emily Scheer, the Manager of the Youth Outreach Program, Special Delivery, at TIFFG. The interviews with the senior youth at RPF were done at a local school in Regent Park. Both young people were asked the same set of questions about how they came to know about RPF, what the program has taught them and their future aspirations’. The Manager of the Special Delivery program, Emily Scheer, was interviewed at her office and she was asked questions about her role at TIFFG and her knowledge of RPF. She was also asked about the likelihood that TIFFG would consider hosting youth who have completed training at RPF to gain some work experience. Pseudonyms are used for the youth identified in this study.

The objective of this section is to give some preliminary insight into how an arts organization or a business in one of the creative industries and a community cultural training facility might work together to transition youth from its community arts program into employment, thereby setting a precedent for their respective sectors. The study was conducted with the goal of serving those who are on the frontlines of the development and delivery of arts and cultural programs to engage and educate disenfranchised youth in many of the low income communities in the greater Toronto area. The objective is to give some practical perspective on ways programming may be structured to best provide valuable work experience for youth in culture once they have completed their training. Another objective is to provide valuable insight for government funders and policy makers to see where they may be able to provide support to
employers, community organizations and youth, as all play a key role in the transition from learning to work.

3a Defining Assisted Transition to Employment in the Arts (ATEA) and Its Challenges

Firstly, an assisted transition from community training to paid work is where a bridge is built to connect these youth with some training in the market. The impersonal sorting device of ‘the labour market’ is simply too segregated and has too many cultural barriers to place any faith in a laissez-faire, free market approach capturing these talented young people. Part of what this transition would entail is an examination of the type of assistance that would be effective in enabling youth to achieve regular employment in the arts and cultural sector with reasonable prospects of progressing with their chosen field, in a relatively cost-effective way. Secondly, the prior condition in the circumstances examined here with various disenfranchised youth is mixed and includes a host of conditions, such as: youth who are high school drop-outs, youth with post secondary credentials, employed or unemployed while some may have been engaged in minor criminal activity. However the common denominator is that they are participants in RPF or a similar community program which has given them access to explore and develop talents and interests in the arts. Moreover a very important fact is the community agency and community leaders whose programs these youth engage with provide them with some initial opportunities for self-development through training that can make an assessment of who is best suited for this assistance that will facilitate this move into further job training in the arts. ‘Work’ means paid work, regular employment with an arts organization or creative business, and prospects of advancement within the field or entrepreneurship. Thus the term, ATEA.
By framing my analysis between one of Toronto’s largest cultural organizations and a low-income community organization, an example is provided for how organizations and businesses with the capacity may partner with grassroots organizations to provide valuable ATEA for youth. Also, another desired outcome of this bridging is to aid in policy changes that encourage the recognition of training within grassroots programming as another option for youth who have not been successful in traditional educational settings. A cultural player such as TIFFG may be in the position to give value to the skills that are being learnt by youth in community programs. By hosting youth for short apprentice programs the possibility arises that the knowledge these youth are gaining at the community level may be validated, which in turn could impact policy makers as they see one of Canada’s cultural giants finding value in the skills these youth bring to their organization. RPF is one example of the many of community organizations in the Toronto area that are introducing youth to work in cultural sectors. Many of these organizations are creating the next generation of Canadian artists with very little support from the public funding bodies or private corporations. RPF also provides examples of the challenges facing organizations that are trying to provide opportunities for disenfranchised youth. Managing organizational growth and finding stable operational funding are chronic challenges facing RPF and its’ sister organizations in Toronto. But beyond delivering a quality program to the participants, these agencies are facing another formidable task for which funding has thus far been lacking: how can they assist these youth, as they graduate from the community program, to find employment that is relevant – that can give them voice,
enlist their passions, make use of their skills and keep developing them with on-the-job training, apprenticeship or mentoring arrangements.

Project funding is more readily available, however these organizations need to plan for their constituency’s needs which are often unpredictable and as such require stable operational funding with flexibility to allow for the most appropriate response to issues that may arise. Beyond organizational and funding issues, however there is a need for attending to the challenges facing these youth who are learning marketable skills at RPF and have no place to go to further their skills development in their area of interest. Policy makers and community leaders must begin to think about the steps that may be taken to develop an overall plan for effective youth transition into the creative sector. If we are seeing the potential for the next generation of Canadian artists and cultural workers to emerge from these grassroots programs, then support for their skills and talents in their transition to employment in the arts must be in place to ensure these young people have the option to work in culture or take the transferable skills they have into another occupations.

Such considerations are especially relevant where documentation exists to show that cultural programming has been effective in deterring at-risk youth from crime and assisting their positive developments in the arts. The Jobs Ontario Community Action program initiated by the Rae-lead NDP Government (1990-1995) as a response to the 1992 Yonge Street Riots is a good example of how cultural programs can equip youth with skills that enable them to pursue a career in an area of the cultural sector. For example, Fresh Arts gave youth the opportunity to work and develop their skills in arts. The program was a creative source, fostering the rise of the urban music industry that
exists in Canada today. It introduced many of the young people who are now celebrities in Canadian popular music to the business and creative sides of the music industry. Youth were given the opportunity to write and produce their own music at a local studio, providing real world experience that gave them a peek into what a career in music would really be like. Award winning artists Jully Black and Kardinal Offishal are examples of successful Canadian entertainers who were exposed to the possibility of a career in the Music industry through Fresh Arts. The positive impact of cultural training programs on Canadian society is proven every time they score another hit song.

<3c> TIFFG and RPF

An organization in Toronto that may be able to impact perceptions within ATEA is TIFFG. TIFFG is comprised of several dynamic initiatives but it is probably best known for the Toronto International Film Festival, now in its 35th year. The festival is widely recognized as the most important film festival after Cannes and the most successful public film festival in the world. TIFFG also has programs such as the Cinematheque Ontario which is a year-round screening programme of the classics of world cinema and contemporary art-house films. The Film Circuit is a grassroots, community-driven network of more than 160 cities, providing Canadian and international films to formerly under-serviced areas. The Film Reference Library, houses more than 16,000 book titles and 60,000 film-related files. Reel Talk features monthly sneak preview screenings of films followed by interactive, informal discussions with film critics and professionals. Canada’s Top Ten celebrates Canadian cinema through the selection of the best Canadian films of the year. TIFFG’s Industry Initiatives serves their constituency year-
round with specialized industry programming and project development. Finally the Sprockets Toronto International Film Festival for Children, presents films for family and school-aged audiences. The Special Delivery program is a year round component of the Sprockets children’s film festival.

The Special Delivery program is most relevant to our discussion as it involves outreach into underserved neighbourhoods in Toronto. Special Delivery takes films and filmmakers to community centres and other community organizations, providing access to TIFFG for children and youth who otherwise would never have access. It is most significant that a large and influential arts organization like TIFFG recognized the need to bring film to youth outside of the school system. Many cultural organizations in the greater Toronto area do community outreach to schools but very few with the profile and stature of TIFFG take the extra step needed to reach youth outside of the school. This type of outreach requires the vision, an awareness of, and an ability to assess the grassroots organizations that are working with youth who have an interest in bringing film-making as a cultural medium to those young people. The ability of leaders in TIFFG to see the value of work at the grassroots in this unique way was impressive and prompted their inclusion in this study, as this organization demonstrates a unique approach with the potential to help quantify the real value of the training that is taking place in many grassroots organization in Toronto.

Before discussing the interview with the Manager of the Special Delivery program, we will look at RPF’s operation. It, too, is a leader among its peers with the potential to push the boundaries, influence other community agencies, and have a broader impact in the Toronto area. RPF was established in 1989 as a part of a
provincial government strategy to promote health in vulnerable communities across Ontario. This program’s operation 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 bounded by Gerrard Street East to the north, River Street to the east, Shuter Street to the south, and Parliament Street to the west. Comprised predominantly of immigrants, Regent Park also possesses a young population, with over 50% of its residents 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, with the majority of families classified as low-income – 68% of the population live 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 (280,000m²) which comprise the community. Toronto’s municipal government developed a plan to demolish and rebuild Regent Park over the next ten years, with the first phase having started in 2005. The additions of market-value 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 the new Cabbagetown and Corktown) in order to end Regent Park's physical isolation from the rest of the city.

RPF is one of several community programs offered in Regent Park for underprivileged children. This community has many lessons to teach others about
community activism and organizing (Carter 2007). RPF is a good example of the level of
community excellence possible with very little resources. The organization provides a
free facility for new media, video production, music and photography skills training.
Youth are also given the opportunity to learn radio production for an on air local station
as well as publish a community newspaper. In a number of cases, with the support and
guidance of the senior volunteer youth and staff at RPF, young people have gone on to
enter post-secondary institutions and eventually the labour market. One of the keys to
RPF’s success and the success of other similar programs across Toronto is the
commitment and strong leadership of the adult staff that operate the program. These
men and women engender respect, convey solid values without being preachy; and –
most remarkably – avoid burnout and persevere to keep programs going. Program
Director Adonis Huggins has been a member of the RPF staff for 15 years. For many
youth, adults like Adonis provide strong mentorship and parental support in absence of
having such key figures in their personal lives.

How might these two organizations forge a partnership to transition youth from
learning to work?. A look at the challenges facing two of the youth at the senior stage of
training with RPF will provide some insight. These are young people who are ready to
make the transition to work or further education. The hard skills imparted at RPF and
the sense of optimism and hope that these youth feel about their future and their ability
to achieve employment in their dream jobs comes across in the interviews. The
following testimonials were documented through interviews with a senior student and an
employee who was formerly a trainee at the program (pseudonyms are used for all of
the youth referenced in this thesis.) Some findings are also based on site visits and informal contact with program participants.

17-year-old Michelle lived in the neighbourhood until she was six years old and then moved a short distance to St. Jamestown, a low-income community at Wellesley and Parliament, a 15 minute walk from Regent Park. Michelle found out about RPF after taking part in the YMCA’s leadership program. When asked how the program had impacted her life so far, Michelle said:

“It gave me hands-on experience to what I can look forward to if I’m a journalist. Like interviewing people…”

With a career in journalism as her goal Michelle chose the program for the opportunity to write for RPF’s publication, ‘Catch da Flava’. She described the approach she took with an article about cleaning up graffiti in Toronto.

“Did you hear about clean up Toronto, they wanna like clean up everything with the graffiti, but at Queen Street West there’s like a whole bunch of like beautiful graffiti murals, whatever like that and they want all that like gone too. But my angle was you can’t just clean up someone’s art, some people do it because they love it, that’s everything coming out, other people just do it just to do it, right. So you don’t have to clean up everything.”

One of the things RPF does very well is have youth create work that has a socially conscious theme. The youth are required in all their work to think about an issue or questions that are important to them and then they can go off and explore though whatever artistic medium is available to them at RPF. The organization gave Michelle the opportunity to practice her craft as a writer and publish her work. It became clear in our interview that she was confident and believed she would eventually become a print journalist once she finished school. It was clear that the peer mentoring aspect of the RPF program played a significant role in the development of her confidence, a process
that had her to work with younger students and symbiotically develop their knowledge while solidifying her own.

Michelle is a good example of the kind of young person who can take advantage of the support RPF has to offer and use it to help her excel. RPF Program Director Adonis Huggins often speaks about the youth who gain an advantage over their peers by developing their skills and work-habits through the program, then go on to college or university. Although she grew up in low-income neighbourhood with many disadvantages, Michelle has the firm belief that she can go on to a fulfilling career in her area of interest. It is my impression that the large percentage of the young people participating in similar community cultural programs are from racial minorities and low-income households. If a significant portion of them, like Michelle can gain the training and self-confidence through participation in such programs, then these initiatives will have proven their worth even as work is still required to fully quantify their fiscal and social value and recognize it in the funding and policy processes.

Evan found out about RPF after telling a mentor in a local community centre that he wanted to be a filmmaker:

“As a young person I went to this community centre, Eastview Community Centre, and basically I’d been telling my mentor there that I wanted to do film, I wanted to learn how to make film... [T]hey didn’t have anything like that so the guy’s name is.......he knew Adonis and one day he brought me to the summer program, actually it wasn’t the summer program it was actually in September and they were showing the stuff they did over the summer. So that inspired me and then I talked to Adonis and Adonis said yeah you can come and volunteer and we’ll teach you what we’re doing and you can do video production, radio production whatever”

Evan dreamed about making film from the time he saw his first feature film, Indiana Jones on the plane from Southern Sudan to Canada.
“Regent Park Focus has inspired me a lot. For a very long time I’ve been wanting to make films right, like ever since I got on the plane to come here. I come from Sudan, Southern Sudan. So coming up here we saw, on the plane we saw Indiana Jones … I was inspired. I wanted to know how to do that. So Focus gave me that, the chance to learn how to do video professionally. Right now that’s what I’m doing I’m making professional videos. They’re not making me money, I’m just doing it because I have the passion to do it.”

This young man came to Canada dreaming of becoming a filmmaker and was finally able to see that this may be possible because he found RPF. Evan’s is another case that demonstrates the need for quality community programs of this type. The program gave him the opportunity to learn some of the basic skills and gain the exposure he needed to see that he has the potential to work at his dream job. However, there are limitations as to how much grassroots organizations can teach youth. RPF does not have the most up-to-date technology from the film and television industry so Evan has learned all that he can from the program.

“I know how to produce videos professionally right. But, um. what I’m missing if I want to go to the TV industry or whatever, what I’m missing is the experience in terms of using the equipment, ‘cause they’re using a different camera than what I’m using right now even the editing suite is different so, ah, I don’t have, I wasn’t given a chance to learn how to use that.”

The chance to learn how to use the equipment that is used by the television industry is the reason that Evan feels he will have to go to school so that he can get the training from an industry professional. His dream is to work as an independent producer for City TV in Toronto. He wants to document the stories of Canada’s Sudanese community and he wants to work in a collaborative and multi-racial environment. When asked if he had a choice between working as an independent filmmaker or with an organization, Evan did not hesitate to say he would work with a company because he enjoys working with people. He loves the collaboration that is a part of working in the film and television industry.
Although Evan is willing to go back to school he has not been comfortable in school environments he has experienced in the past. He spoke candidly about being looked at funny and not feeling comfortable so he dropped out of George Brown’s Theatre program. He said the teachers and student were always looking at him weird and he was the only black person in the class. He also talked about going to look at other schools recently and not finding there was a very multi-cultural representation on campus. His family has recently moved to Hamilton and he has looked into going to Mohawk College but has not observed the degree of racial diversity that he experienced in Regent Park and this has been discouraging to him. Evan has visited the City TV stations and he really liked the diverse makeup of the staff and the many young people who worked collaboratively in these environments. In speaking to him I got the sense that he really just wants to go to work; if he could get an opportunity to learn on the job I believe he would prefer to learn in a hands-on setting over being in a classroom.

The interview with Emily Scheer, Manager of the Special Delivery program at TIFFG, focused on determining if they would be open to hosting a young person to gain some work experience. Some of the young people who would finish the program at RPF have no desire to pursue further schooling and would like to work and continue with hands-on training in a professional environment. The possibility that TIFFG could provide these youth with some work experience was a first step toward developing a partnership that could benefit both TIFFG and RPF, but above all the youth who have immersed themselves in the RPF program, who have gained skills and self-confidence essential to their social, economic and emotional maturity, and are now ready to move on to another stage of learning. Due to the many very qualified people who try to work
or volunteer for TIFFG annually I was well aware of the important opportunity that could potentially be provided to these youth upon completing their training with RPF and the invaluable precedent that could be set for youth engagement through culture in Toronto. RPF has had youth who have gone on to work in their field of choice after going on to further their education post RPF, but youth who were not ready to consider the school system could gain some valuable work experience with TIFFG and continue the necessary development of their confidence and skills. The program manager’s comments provided much optimism that TIFFG would be willing to host youth after they had completed their training at RPF:

“I think it would be a great initiative to do and I think it’s possible. I think what needs to happen at the outset is that it’s very clear what that position would involve. I would not necessarily be as hands on as compared to what they would do at Focus, but if they were prepared for that, prepared for maybe a broad based experience, it could work.”

The manager went on to talk about the need for available funding to provide the appropriate support for the youth that would come into a department at TIFFG. She even recognized the advantage the youth from RPF would have over the typical high school co-op student who had no technical knowledge of film to bring to employment at TIFFG.

“We do have an events production department like our theatre department or technical so if there was that hands-on skill….and they had four years of working in it to back it up, I think that gives them an added advantage to an average high school kid who wants to do a co-op or an intern”

A young man like Evan from RPF would be ideal for a work experience at TIFFG. He has not had good experiences with the school system and enjoys working with people in a hands-on environment. With the proper funding in place the opportunity to move a
pilot project forward and develop a program that both organizations can benefit from is quite possible.

Another group of youth with the potential to benefit from such an arrangement 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. These young people are often less confident in their abilities because they have been unsuccessful in the school system (Curtis, Livingstone, Smaller 1992). 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. As a result, success in this new informal learning environment provides a much needed boost to their self-esteem. RPF alumnus Kevin is a high school drop out and former drug dealer who came to the program in 2004 and participated for one year. He is a rapper who wrote and produced his CD at the music studio onsite and was able to gain admission 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. Adonis Huggins, RPF’s Program Director pointed out that he was not surprised that Kevin was not successful at George Brown because he was always adamant that school was not for him and he just wanted to work. Adonis 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 contends that the choice they make as agents of their own destiny is preferable to blind obedience.

Creating more choices is the reason RPF is assessing the potential for 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. At the time of this research RPF was 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.” The goal is for youth to receive career development opportunities in new media and digital production through a training program that will see the participants 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 formal post-secondary education. 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.
Chapter 4  
Standards for Community Cultural Training Programs  

The partnership discussed here between RPF and TIFFG is one example of the types of partnerships that are needed between community program agents and employers for providing opportunities to young people that transition them from the non-formal and informal learning environments to work experience. These partnerships may help develop a set of standards for the plethora of cultural training programs popping up across Toronto and in many major Canadian cities. In Toronto, there is currently no benchmark for effective cultural program delivery so programs are using a series of approaches to engage youth through arts and culture in a safe and positive manner. These range from drop-in programs for street youth where the only requirement is that they show up on time and see a project through from start to finish. One of the program coordinators at ‘Beatz To Da Streetz’ Mario a.k.a. Thevoyce, sums it up in a City of Toronto video:

“We know the world out there…you have to present yourself professionally. We’re saying to them when they come to Beatz To Da Streetz, here is the rules of engagement…don’t come high…come to focus…come to work hard…”

The youth worker goes on to point out that these are principles essential to a strong work ethic and discipline that these youth need to develop if they are to go on and be successful in a variety of endeavours. Many of these organizations are teaching these principles to youth that society has given up on. A number of these organizations are supporting the next generation of Canadian artists, and others are teaching youth skills that will be transferable to other occupations or lead to entrepreneurship. Establishing standards for these organizations would be invaluable in providing indicators to strengthen the linkages between successful program delivery.
and employment opportunities, ensuring that the programming is truly preparing youth for the work environment. We see this model currently with the comprehensive approach to preparing youth for work in the skilled trades and a similar approach for the cultural industries would serve to give clear indicators as to the value of working in the creative economy.

The importance of the work being done in arts education at the community level is highlighted in the findings from the Imagine a Toronto report published by the University of Toronto. The document provides data about the value of working in the creative sectors in Toronto through quantitative and qualitative findings. The report shares the findings from a study of a range of creative activities and interventions used in cities around the world to grow their economies in the 21st century. The report grouped these areas of study into five broad categories: People, Enterprise, Space, Connectivity and Vision (University of Toronto, 2006). For our purposes, the section on People is most relevant because it points to the talents of artist and cultural workers who keep driving economic growth through their talents and skill despite the scarcity of available resources.

This section points out that “….creative disciplines must be promoted as providing economic opportunity and viable career paths.” (University of Toronto, 2006, 15) This promotion is seen as a way to ensure the next generation of creative workers continue on in the sector to drive its growth and economic impact in cities. 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 1997 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 (7.1%), Motion Picture and Video industries and the Sound recording industry (5.4%) and Broadcasting (4.6%) (University of 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 can be used to make a compelling case for support of community programs that are introducing vulnerable young people to work in culture (Carter, 2007).

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 section on Enterprise is also 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…” (University of Toronto 2006, p.8). The notion of commercializing creative talent can be a contentious one within fine art circles. However, making the case for the economic impact of culture is important even for those artists and cultural activists who believe that art is for the public good and should be publicly funded as it is important in enhancing the value of life in a city and country.

Tchibozo’s notion of hedonistic variant is a concept 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 school-to 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, where by 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 choose 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 (Tchibozo’s 2002). 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. But 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 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 that points accurately to the shortfalls of the current school systems. Yet, the policies and structures that guide mainstream schooling persist in spite of 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 those without 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 have further intensified these dynamics and contributed to a rise in the expulsion of Black students, and to dropout rates specifically among this demographic. 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 drop out 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 interviews, the data reported here also shows that not all of the youth who come to RPF have given up on the formal school system. Many still recognize the value of educational credentials and would be willing to re-engage with formal learning if systems were in place to allow for an effective transition. 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. Now at the Academy of Design and Technology after three years at RPF, Robert detoured from the credential path and spent time on society’s periphery. His experiences at RPF granted him the opportunity to explore in a pressure free environment, allowing him the chance to learn new things and augmented his educational development through exposure to a leadership role where he helped younger RPF participants develop the skills he had acquired. This tailored learning/training further re-enforced his knowledge and built his confidence by helping to validate the knowledge he had gained. RPF keeps records of the students that have been through their programs and Huggins 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 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. This further highlights the effective work that is happening at the community level to provide youth with the personal and professional development and growth.

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 and 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. This project is working to address such gaps in research and practice.
Establishing Standards for Community Education and Training Programs and other Conclusions for Moving Forward

Partnerships are needed between community program agents 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 useful standards for the myriad of cultural training programs emerging across Toronto and other major cities across Canada. Such standards would be invaluable in providing indicators that would help strengthen the linkages between intervention programs and ensuing employment opportunities, ensuring that the programming is truly preparing youth for the work environment or imparting skills that lend themselves to good citizenship whatever 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. In addition, this approach could also help to outline paths that lead to enhanced skills development or recognition of skills that are transferable to another sector of the economy.

Ideally, the scourge of gun violence should not be the impetus for policy makers to recognize the need to make changes that would support non-traditional transitions into working in the creative sectors; in many ways these events have served a contradictory function in this regard. Unfortunately, even though the increased awareness has generated increased funding and attention on the issue of marginalized youth, the responses have predominantly come in the form of approaches that fail to result in the expansive, long-term support that is required for the desired outcomes, they
lack the recognition of alternate methods of knowledge transfer and fail to acknowledge
the challenges of school-based marginalization. The fact remains that long before the
risk there was a desperate need among youth in Toronto – particularly young Black
males – for creative alternatives to help develop their potential. These youth cover the
range of the spectrum, with some looking for a new start after encountering some
dangerous and potentially deadly detours in life, while others have not yet reached such
extremes but are on the cusp of making decisions that could irrevocable impact their
lives. This urgency is made painfully clear by the tragic loss of so many young lives in
Toronto in 2005 and reinforce the need for concrete changes to provide a range of
meaningful opportunities to help young people become productive citizens. Without a
systematic response to the issue of disenfranchised youth the pool of marginalized
people facing broken transitions from learning to work will only increase, with a ripple
effect of societal turbulence, destabilization and injustice that will not remain limited to
low-income communities but have ramifications on society as a whole:

“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)

**TOWARDS A CONCLUSION**

This paper began by stating that the aim was to provide analysis that is useful to
both policy makers and practitioners. Using the historical and theoretical conditions and
the present-day practices demonstrated by RPF and TIFFG as context, there is an
opportunity to chart a way forward with the tools these experiences provide. Toronto
has many community arts organizations and social service agencies that are providing
support to youth in different ways and at different points in their personal development. However, the city is in need of an organization that understands the power of the arts as a tool to engage youth while providing the social services support to truly make a positive difference in their lives as they move from adolescence to adulthood. There are collaborative partnerships in Toronto where organizations can work together to provide services to assist youth at various points in their development. RPF is a part of one such partnership which had been geographically located in the Regent Park neighbourhood. RPF was actually the envisioned by the Regent Park Health Centre. The Health Centre recognized that they had an opportunity for prevention. If the youth they were treating for drug addiction and other health issues had access to programs to keep them off the streets they would not be at the health care system with preventable medical issues that are related to high risk life styles. The Health Centre also initiated *Pathways to Education*, a program created in 2001 to support young people to help them successfully graduate from high school and continuing on into post-secondary programs and then into successful career development. Pathways mandate has manifested successfully through academic tutoring, mentorship, financial support and advocacy. The Regent Park Health Centre has proved that the support for youth as risk requires a collaborative and multifaceted approach.

The Pathways programming falls short in its support for youth career development. Career development is only linked to the youth who have been successful in the current education system, but provides no avenue for those who have not been successful in traditional learning environments. The young artist emerging from RPF lacks the support needed to take their artistic training and talents into a
professional career and Toronto lacks a complimentary organization that can house many of the social elements that are currently collaborating in neighbourhoods like those in Regent Park, with social, cultural and career development services working together in one place. There is evidence that this type of coordinated approach would provide the comprehensive support youth may need to develop the potential they possess and provide them with the opportunity to help create healthy fulfilled lives.

The arts and cultural sector in Toronto is in need of an organization that can provide a range of services for youth and can coordinate the support services that may not be otherwise accessible. Such an organization could also advocate for these youth and provide the required guidance as they navigate the various systems that are equipped to assist them in their transition. This initiative would provide support that would recognize the need to engage participants in their environments and work with them as they move to take advantage of the economic and educational opportunities that may be available to lead them toward becoming productive members of society.

The Nia Centre for the Arts is a new organization that is proposing to work with youth on the margins in this way, providing hope that this gap may be closed. Nia is an initiative that emerged from the Youth Challenge Fund (YCF). YCF is a United Way member organization charged to administer funding from the province and private donations in response to the 2005 increase in violent crime among youth in Toronto. The Nia Centre is a youth lead project that is aimed at establishing an Arts Centre focused on education, self-determination and community development for youth at risk in Toronto's Black communities. Using the arts as its vehicle, Nia will target Black youth in Toronto's most under-served communities to provide these young people with the tools to combat
and overcome the social barriers that have historically hindered their social and personal growth. Toronto has a long history of African based arts and artists and many do some element of youth engagement through the arts. However, the Nia approach attempts to house some of the successful practitioners under one space for youth to access a range of artistic, social and cultural programming and services. This combined approach has never been executed and I am optimistic about its potential for success, building on the successes of organizations that were able to collaborate in communities to meet the neighbourhood’s needs. Nia’s challenge will be to house all of these services in one spaces and then to be a point of access for Black youth in Toronto from across the African Diaspora at varying levels of crisis.

Nia will draw on many of these resources to develop a successful model for how the arts can be a tool to support youth who are living on the margin of society. The organization plans to support the development of its constituents through artistic, entrepreneurial, cultural and social development services in one location. This one stop shop for youth looking for services and support is based on four principles, education, continuous learning, artistic engagement, active citizenship and community. The organization believes that art can be used as a tool to develop life skills as well as increase the self worth of racialized youth in Canadian Society.

The preliminary research is only a glimpse of the research needed to properly develop this field. There is a need for intensive analysis here in Toronto and possibly in other major Canadian cities where the arts are used as as a tool to engage youth in the broader strategy to combat youth crime. The data that has come from the interview in Regent Park Focus and Toronto International Film Festival Group to date,
demonstrates that where broader learning initiatives – as demonstrated by community organizations with existing programming that are successfully engaging youth at risk, and large cultural organizations with the capacity to assist the youth from the grassroots community organization partnerships – can work to the benefit of both youth interested in formal education and those who want to enter the workforce after high school. As such, I propose policy makers create funding for two streams of program initiatives. These initiatives involve, but are not limited to, funding for career education and mentorship programs that are linked to youth programs that can show they are developing youth with interests in careers as professional artists. The experiences of RPF and Nia provide a useful example and interesting tools that can be expanded from their current focus in the Black community to address challenges facing other disenfranchised groups who do not fit neatly into the traditional/outmoded outreach programming strategies.
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