Neighbourhood Change Research Partnership

The Temporary Neighbourhoods of Homeless Youth in Shelters:
Their perspectives on and the implications of social-spatial polarization

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Community Partners	Project: Humanity; Youth Without Shelter (Rexdale)

1.   Rationale & Potential Policy Relevance

Designated as a priority neighbourhood, Jamestown/Rexdale is undergoing significant neighbour-hood change. In this inner suburban community in north Etobicoke, 25% of families live below the poverty line and the school drop-out rate is 50%. In trying to develop a more nuanced under-standing of the consequences of income polarization for youth populations in this Toronto inner suburban neighbourhood, we turn our focus to youth being housed in shelters. To understand more fully the ways in which youth conceptualize and experience 'neighbourhood' we propose partnering with a theatre company to conduct drama workshops in a Jamestown/Rexdale shelter that houses homeless youth. It is estimated that in Toronto, between 1500 and 2000 youth are homeless and this represents 28% of the homeless population in the city. Although poverty is not the only cause of homelessness, we would like to understand more fully its consequences for youth being housed in shelters. This is of particular interest to us because it is estimated that only 60% of homeless youth have completed grade 11 and 65% leave school before graduating.

In Jamestown/Rexdale, Youth Without Shelter (YWS) www.yws.on.ca works to intervene by providing shelter and a variety of programs to alleviate the challenges faced by shelter youth. Of particular interest to us is the 2007 YWS expansion that created 20 new beds for its Stay in School Program offering longer-term stays for youth focussing on their education. Our second partner is a theatre company. Working with Project: Humanity *www.projecthumanity.ca* - an acclaimed theatre company committed to socially engaged theatre- we propose collaborating with a group of shelter youth at YWS and through the use of drama techniques, explore issues and experiences of spatialized inequality in the neighbourhood and neighbourhood schools. Methodologically, drama would be employed as means for the youth to give creative expression to their experiences and offer NCRP access to youth stories about their neighbourhood, socio-spatial inequality and the negative attributes of localized poverty. Video recording this series of ten workshops, the digital data would then be analysed for themes and issues arising from youth experiences of neighbourhood poverty and the local interventions of both the shelter and the theatre company.

Following a program of workshops (10) will give us a deeper and sustained engagement with the youth. In our experience, slow, sustained and careful work with young people is essential for the building of a group and contributes to successful working relations that allow for important unrehearsed research conversations and reflections. The relational aspects of drama are one of its strengths; such work cannot be rushed or truncated. Working with homeless youth, in particular, would require this kind of investment of time as they likely have less reason to trust.

This research will add a valuable *youth perspective* to the NCRP project that will include the young people's thoughts on the neighbourhood in which the shelter is located, the neighbourhoods in which they previously lived, and the role of income inequality as it has manifested itself in their schooling, their daily lives, and hopes for the future.

2. Specific Fit with the NCRP Objectives & Research Questions

Interested in the consequences of socio-spatial inequality and how they have affected youth life chances, employment opportunities, mobility, access to resources, and social attitudes, we are interested in examining interventions (housing, programming such as theatre workshops, school strategies) with youth at the neighbourhood level to see whether such interventions 'make a difference' and/or allow them to more effectively participate in Canadian society.

3. Research Questions

1) What does a neighbourhood mean to these youth?
   - How are conceptions of, and relationships to, neighbourhood affected by living in temporary accommodation in a shelter?
   - What do young people need/expect from a shelter, and to what extent and in what ways is its location important?
2) How did the youth experience neighbourhood before becoming homeless and how has this changed?
   - To what extent has income inequality and polarization had consequences in the neighbourhoods from which they've come?
   - How did they become homeless?
3) To what extent have their levels of educational attainment and engagement in school been impacted by their SES and by income inequality in general?
   - How have their experiences of schooling contributed to their sense of neighbourhood and social belonging?
4) What characteristics do they think make a strong, viable neighbourhood?
   - What changes would they make in their neighbourhood to improve the infrastructure and wellbeing of the residents and create a more welcoming community?

These questions emerged from the NCRP set of research questions. This research inquires into the consequences of socio-spatial inequality with particular focus on a vulnerable population, youth in shelters. As with other NCRP research projects, we have a participatory and community-based approach to the research. Our two lead partners:

- Project: Humanity, a not for profit organization that raises awareness about social issues through the arts and
- Youth Without Shelter, an emergency shelter for homeless youth ages 16-24, located in Jamestown/Rexdale.

With our partners we will conduct workshops with experienced, professional theatre artists who have engaged shelter youth populations for several years. The data gathered will benefit the shelter, the theatre company, the NCRP and engage the shelter youth population in critical reflection on aspects of income and social inequality that have shaped the educational, work-related and social dimensions of their lives.

4. Research Design & Methods

Drama methods: We plan to observe the artists from Project: Humanity as they conduct drama workshops with shelter youth. These workshops will focus on issues of spatialized inequality and localized poverty specifically and build on what our previous research has learned through interviews with shelter youth about feeling unwelcome in the neighbourhood of the shelter, in various social institutions (schools, theatres, workplaces) and the stigma attached to the shelter address when they attend job interviews. Effective use of drama methods will elicit stories regarding youth experiences of homelessness and its impact on their educational outcomes, employment opportunities, and attitudes through improvisation, physical movement and verbatim theatre. Project: Humanity specializes in verbatim theatre having presented a full-length

professional production, *The Middleplace,* that was built exclusively from interviews with shelter youth. We would like to clarify that the intention of these proposed drama workshops with youth is not to culminate in a performance but to offer an opportunity for youth to engage with each other and build stories collectively from their individual experiences and insights.

Drama methods rely on a certain amount of exploration that cannot be easily pre-determined. This may seem contrary to good social science research but experience shows that this kind of approach can unearth nuggets of perspective and information on what may or may not be affecting young people and their place in our city. If we go in with too narrow a focus or manipulate the sessions too severely, there's a chance that we won't go as deep or find as many surprises.

Ethnographic Methods: Complementing these drama methods would be ethnographic interviews designed to inquire into aspects of youth experiences of homelessness as a consequence of income polarization and inequality. The exact number of interviews will be determined by the number of youth who choose to participate. The questions would come from our readings of their shared stories and presented dramatic scenes as well as from the youth themselves. We will involve the youth in the creation of interview protocols, as well as seek input from our community partners. Daily observational fieldnotes would be recorded in addition to the recording of digital video.

Analysis: To analyse these data we, will use the following software programs and strategies:
- Studiocode (a newly acquired digital video analysis software) will be used to code and analyse the video recordings of the drama workshop data. The interviews and observational fieldnotes will be organized and coded using NVivo software.
- Engaging the census materials from the TDSB, we will see in what ways these larger data sets compare to, or offer further context for, our qualitative stories?
- Alert to youth perspectives on the neighbourhood of Jamestown/Rexdale, we will mine data for a fuller and more nuanced picture of poverty and the efficacy of local interventions.
- Extending the participatory nature of NCRP, we will include community partners and youth in the analysis of the data, to ensure its accuracy and relevance to their community initiatives.

5. Role of Community Partners

Youth without Shelter will provide space for the workshops. They will approach youth housed in the shelter to explain the purpose of this research and invite them to participate in the weekly drama workshops.

Project: Humanity will provide expertise in workshop planning and implementation with particular focus on spatial inequity and local issues of poverty.

The OISE team will collect data: digital video footage of the workshops, video and audio recorded interviews and daily observational field notes. Data analysis through NVivo and Studio code will follow. Finally, the OISE team will formulate and create research outputs and knowledge mobilization that would benefit all partners and the larger project: NCRP. These could take the form of scholarly journal articles, community reports/newsletters and potentially radio documentary, or documentary film sequences, time and budget permitting.

In-kind support: We wish to note that both community partners are offering considerable in-kind support to the research in terms of hours dedicated to the preparation of the workshops, the workshop delivery, the donation of workshop space, and the facilitation of our communications with the shelter youth.

6. Role of Students / Research Assistants and Contributions to Training

Organize consent forms and equipment; Prepare ethical review; Prepare drama workshops with community partners; Organize and analyse data; Write findings; Create media outputs and knowledge mobilization that serves all partners

7. Schedule

- Meet with community partners (June 2013) & complete Uof T Ethics (Oct. 2013)
- Videotape participant observation of workshops (Oct.-Dec. 2013)
- Artist, shelter youth and staff interviews (Nov. 2013-Jan. 2014)
- Preliminary analyses to be shared with shelter youth (Jan. 2014)
- Youth analysis and policy forum for generation of ideas and advocacy actions (Feb.-Mar. 2014)
- Publication, report outputs (April-June 2014)

8. Outcomes / Deliverables

1) Journal articles, book chapter
2) Newsletter report for community partners and other outputs to be determined with community partners and the NCRP.
3) Preliminary methods, questions, findings built into SSHRC Insight Grant application.

9. Budget Explanation

This project's budget is $20,000. From the NCRP SSHRC grant we are seeking $13,400, mainly for graduate research assistants, with some for honoraria, local travel, and supplies. Our community partners will contribute the remainder.

approved by NCRP Board 18 November 2013

SSHRC Budget Worksheet

	Amount requested from NCRP	Contributions (In-Kind / Cash)	Contribution source	Total Project Cost
Personnel costs				
Student salaries and benefits/Stipends				
Masters *				
Doctorate *	Research Assistant 300hr x $28.50/hr + 15% MERCS **$9900**			9900
Non-student salaries and benefits/Stipends				
Postdoctoral				
Other				
Travel and subsistence costs				
Applicant/Team member(s)				
Canadian travel	PI & student travel by car to the shelter 23.2 x2 km = 46.4 km round trips / week x 20= 928km Mileage at UofT rate 47 cents/ km. 928 x.47= **$440**			440
Students				
Canadian travel				
Other expenses				
Non-disposable equipment (specify)				
Professional / technical services (specify: includes partner staff time contributed to or paid for by project, translation, editing)				
Youth Without Shelter	$500 for assistance and space	Workshop Space and administrative support for recruitment and youth communication In-kind value: $2145		2645
Project: Humanity	$1000	Project: Humanity will contribute to our research, in-kind, well beyond the $1,000 honorarium (listed below). Two professional actors will prepare 2 ten-week sessions and 2 company volunteers will also offer many hours. 110hrsx2actors = 120 actor/facilitator total hours and volunteer hours 80x2= 160 total hours, in-kind value $4,400		5400
Other expenses (specify: includes honoraria, data purchase, field costs, printing, supplies, etc.)				
Youth Honoraria	$1,250 (15 youth x $50= $750)			1250
Printing Supplies, Costs for newsletter publication	$250			250
Total requested from NCRP	**$13,400**			
Total Project cost including contributions				**$20,000**