

Youth Perceptions of Violence, Safety, and Schooling in One Gentrifying Neighbourhood in Toronto

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1. Rationale & Potential Policy Relevance

Context: The School. In 2008, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) launched its speciality high schools initiative that offered focused programs on subjects like dance, drama, science, sport, and the International Baccalaureate (IB) program. One of the key consequences of these specialty programs is that students are no longer limited to their local school and can apply to attend these specialized schools across the city. This has resulted in young people living in one area, choosing to attend school in another area, and perhaps taking on a part-time job in a third area. This phenomenon is consistent with Qadeer & Kumar's (2007) research on neighbourhoods and social cohesion where they contend that the "typical urbanite" moves between multiple neighbourhoods to engage in a variety of life's different functions. This movement of youth across a wide variety of distinct neighbourhoods in Toronto covers designated improvement neighbourhoods, gentrifying, and affluent ones. Within the context of our proposed research, the TDSB also has in place an "Optional Attendance" designation for high schools that have space to accept students outside their catchment area. Monarch Park Collegiate Institute (hereafter referred to as Monarch Park) is a school that attracts students from across the city for its specialty courses and its optional attendance program. It is a "specialized (IB)," an "optional attendance" high school and it has the distinct designation of "Global School." It is located in the Greenwood-Coxwell neighbourhood of Ward 30 (Toronto-Danforth). The TDSB definition of a Global School:

Monarch Park Collegiate is a 'Global School'; with this philosophy, we focus on Human Rights Education, Peace Education, International Development, Environmental Education and Multiculturalism. This philosophy is supported by the fact that our students and staff represent over 70 different countries and speak almost as many languages. Our multicultural community is encouraged to pursue excellence and lifelong learning. Our program also supports this philosophy in individual subject areas and in our International Baccalaureate Program. We pride ourselves on our welcoming, safe and supportive school community. Students find their place in the world at Monarch Park.

(http://www2.tdsb.on.ca/MOSS/asp_apps/school_landing_page/pdfs/web/5535_4pageLayout.pdf)

In a school that explicitly prioritizes multiculturalism and belonging, we wish to consider how such 'philosophies' and ambitions are experienced and reflected upon by youth themselves in this neighbourhood that seems to have not kept apace with such ideals of diversity, racial harmony, and belonging. Research, to date, has not considered this urban experience of floating or transitory neighbourhoods for youth, which is, increasingly, the norm in young lives. *How are these regular movements through increasingly socio-economically and otherwise polarized neighbourhoods traversed and understood by youth?*

Context: The Neighbourhood. Designated Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs) such as Black Creek and Glenfield-Jane Heights in northwest Toronto are over-researched for issues of violence. On the

other hand, Monarch Park Collegiate as a “global school” (TDSB, 2014) is located in a largely gentrifying neighbourhood. The term gentrification (first introduced by Glass, 1964) largely refers to “the production of space for – and consumption by a more affluent and very different incoming population” (Slater, Curran, & Lees, 2004, p. 1145). It typically involves the systematic displacement of low-income residents into more undesirable neighbourhoods (Filion, 1991; Murdie & Teixeira, 2011; Slater, 2004). The Coxwell-Danforth neighbourhood, where Monarch Park is located, has seen a considerable shift in its demographics over the last 15 years in line with Toronto’s demographic shifts in ethno-cultural diversity. Yet a comparison of the 2011 census with the 2001 census reveals that the population has dropped by 5.9% while urban development has increased significantly (City of Toronto, 2014; 2004).

Violence: A Preliminary Mapping. In May 2015, during data collection for another research project, Monarch Park was exposed to a shooting very near to its location. Another September 2015 stabbing at *Central Technical School* left us wondering how much violence takes place around school locations and does the data reveal any patterns. What are youth perceptions about these critical incidents? Given our familiarity with Monarch Park, we mapped out violent incidents around the school for a period of 18 months (March 2014 – September 2015). For the purpose of this mapping exercise, we focused on fatal and non-fatal shootings, stabbings, and beatings of young adults aged 15-35 years old, and adopted a radius of 2.5 km around the *Monarch Park* official address (1 Hanson Street, Toronto). We chose this particular distance because it offers the closest approximation to school catchment boundaries (See Figure 1). Our research revealed the following (See also Figure 2):

According to the mapping, this neighbourhood has had 7 homicides in the last 18 months alone, whereas between 2004-2011 (a 7 year period), the Greenwood-Coxwell neighbourhood saw only four homicides in total. According to a report in the *Toronto Star*, (Spurr, June 16, 2015), the aforementioned homicide record for the neighbourhood indicates a paradox: gentrification results, in part, in better property values, increased income, reduced crime – all indicators that point to a “better” quality of life for the incoming residents. However, the spate of violence complicates the community revitalization plan that has been underway in recent years. Eleven males have died from shootings and stabbings in or around the stretch of area between Woodbine and Greenwood Avenues (Doucette, July 23, 2015). According to Doucette (2015), “No other street, or neighbourhood, in the city has seen so much



Figure 1 Monarch Park Collegiate Catchment Boundaries

Date	Type of Violent Incident	Location/Closest Intersection	Gender	Age
2015/09/22	Stabbing (Injury)	Keystone Ave	Male	35
2015/07/22	Shooting (Injury)	Danforth & Coxwell	Male	28
2015/05/19	Shooting (Homicide)	1530 Danforth Ave	Male	21
2015/02/28	Shooting (Homicide)	1735 Danforth Ave	Male	25
2014/09/27	Stabbing (Homicide)	Danforth & Greenwood	Male	34
2014/09/08	Stabbing (Homicide)	2844 Danforth Ave	Male	22
2014/09/08	Stabbing (Injury)	2844 Danforth Ave	Male	
2014/05/24	Shooting (Homicide)	66 Walpole Ave	Male	20
2014/05/24	Shooting (Injury)	66 Walpole Ave	3 people	
2014/03/19	Shooting (Homicide)	2222 Danforth Ave	Male	21
2014/03/19	Shooting (Homicide)	2222 Danforth Ave	Male	22

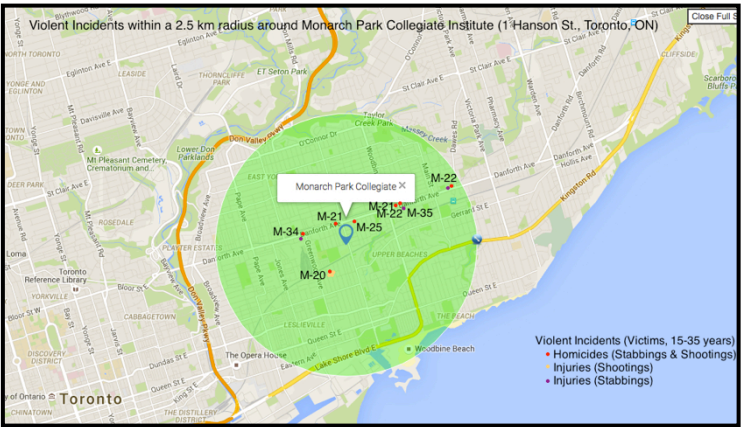


Figure 2 Violent incidents within 2.5km radius of MFC

carnage during that same time frame.” Dubbed the “danger zone,” this area falls precisely on the Bloor-Danforth Subway line and is the major thoroughfare for Monarch Park students who use transit to commute between school, home and work. [Year-to-date statistics](#) maintained by Toronto Police Services confirm this fact (Toronto Police Services, 2015).

Three newspapers, *National Post*, *Toronto Star*, *Toronto Sun*, have reported on the violence in this neighbourhood in which they cite politicians, business owners, and adults (parents, etc.) but conspicuously absent are the voices of youth. Why are so few youth voices invited into debates about the meaning of gentrification despite being mobilized as the prime recipients of its desired effects? In light of this contradiction, how do the diverse youth of Monarch Park understand this violence, this neighbourhood, and their school? How do they negotiate the spaces of the school and related choices to travelling to/from this neighbourhood daily? What strategies do they adopt to counter the often-deficit narratives regarding youth lives and neighbourhood violence?

2. Research Questions

Research Question: **How do youth perceive questions of violence, safety, schooling and belonging in one gentrifying neighbourhood in Toronto?**

- 1) How are youth experiencing the contradictions between processes of gentrification and being a 'global' school alongside signs of youth unsafety and school conflict?
- 2) How do youth understand and negotiate their student identity in a neighbourhood context of insecurity and lack of safety?
- 3) What understandings can be gleaned about the diverse neighbourhoods that young people navigate daily (home, school, work, extra-curricular) and their sense of civic belonging and engagement.

3. Specific Fit with the NCRP Objectives & Research Questions

We are interested in the socio-spatial perspectives of youth with respect to violence, safety, and security and how it may affect their access to opportunities, resources within schools and beyond. We are specifically interested in examining the spatial movements of particular youth who “float” between neighbourhoods as they navigate important life functions. Such a study offers implications for civic belonging and engagement at both a neighbourhood and municipal level.

4. Research Design & Methods

Quantitative Analysis: Through the Neighbourhood Change Research Partnership, we have access to the TDSB Student Census data set. Specifically, we are interested in questions surrounding students' perceptions of safety, security and belonging. Dr. Gillian Parekh, a TDSB employee will serve as a consultant to the project. Dr. Parekh presents an extensive knowledge of the TDSB data set having most recently worked as a Research Coordinator at the TDSB. She has worked with both the 2006 and 2011 student census data as well as has assisted in the development of large-scale surveys employed by the TDSB, such as the School Climate Survey. The next implementation of the student census is scheduled to be administered in 2016-17 with preliminary results most likely available in 2017-18. Both data sets will yield us an important longitudinal analysis that attends to our research questions and allows us to explore the specific case study of Monarch Park Collegiate Institute and the Greenwood-Coxwell neighbourhood.

Drama Methods: Other research we are carrying out at the school has allowed us to look at the 'real life' of Monarch Park students using a particular genre of theatre-making called verbatim theatre (word-for-word translation of 'real' life). The use of such a genre allows for students to creatively explore the relationship between their actual experiences and their imagined ones. In the fieldwork of our other research project, stories of violence and the suppression of such experiences of violence emerged, leading us to consider that Monarch Park's “global mission,” may stand in contrast to the reality right outside the front door. Exploring in particular the spatial elements of these video-captured stories, we will consider how youth come to understand and articulate their 'real lives' in relation to their sense of place, mobility, social position and safety.

Qualitative Methods: To capture further youth meaning-making, we will re-connect with these particular youth (who have now graduated from the school) to interview them about their particular experiences of violence and security in their school neighbourhood, as well as their experiences of transitions between neighbourhoods of living, working and school. Furthermore, we will use our analysis of the TDSB data set to allow these students to “talk back” to our preliminary findings (Fine, 1994).

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 creative processes and performance data. The interviews and observational field notes will be organized and coded using NVivo software.
- Engaging with the census materials from the TDSB, specifically data on questions about school safety, security, and belonging. We will see in what ways these larger data sets compare to, or offer further context for, our qualitative data.
- Alert to youth perspectives on the neighbourhood of Greenwood/Coxwell, we will mine data for a fuller and more nuanced picture of poverty and gentrification, and the efficacy of local interventions, such as those of the Danforth Business Improvement Area (BIA).
- Working with the particular youth of the study, we intend to reach out to other community organizations or religious affiliations, which they signal as significant to their neighbourhood experiences and engagements.
- 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

Monarch Park Collegiate Institute: Monarch Park Collegiate Institute is our main community partner in this project. The school, through its drama program and classroom, will facilitate access to youth in this study. School staff will also inform the study about the relationships with the neighbourhood and its community and cultural organizations.

The Toronto District School Board: The Toronto District School Board (TDSB) is the largest and one of the most diverse school boards in Canada serving more than 232,000 students in 591 schools. TDSB initiated a student and parent census survey in 2006 and since repeated the data collection in 2011. While comprehensive in nature, the student and parent census is a confidential, not anonymous, survey through which student program, achievement and experiential data can be correlated. This quantitative data set contains important questions about school safety, security, belonging and care that will inform this study at both macro and micro levels.

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

Student research assistants will coordinate consent forms and equipment; collect data: digital video footage of the workshops and daily observational field notes; conduct video and audio recorded interviews; transcribe interview data; organize and analyse data through NVivo and Studio code; write findings; create media outputs and knowledge mobilization that serves all partners and the larger NCRP project. These could take the form of scholarly journal articles, community reports/newsletters and potentially radio documentary, or documentary film sequences, time and budget permitting.

7. Schedule

- Preliminary analysis of Census Data, Video Data collected (Feb 2016 – May 2016)
- Student and Neighbourhood Interviews (May. 2016 – September 2016)
- Preliminary analyses to be shared with youth (November 2016)
- Analysis (December 2016 – February 2017)
- Publication, report outputs (March 2017 – June 2017)

8. Outcomes / Deliverables

- 1) Journal articles, book chapter
- 2) Conference presentations
- 3) Other outputs to be determined with community partners and the NCRP.

9. Budget Explanation (and fill in separate budget worksheet page below)

This project's budget requested from NCRP is **\$20,600** mainly for graduate research assistants, TDSB consultant, and some for honoraria, local travel, and supplies.

- ☐ Sent to the NCRP's Research Advisory Board for comment: date _____ deadline: _____
- ☐ Funding approved by the NCRP's Board: \$ _____ date _____

SSHRC Budget Worksheet

	Amount requested from NCRP	Contributions (In-Kind / Cash)	Contribution source	Total Project Cost
Personnel costs				
Student salaries and benefits/Stipends				
Undergraduate *				
Masters *				
Doctorate *	620 Research Assistant hours @ \$25/hr (\$15,500) + 15% MERCS (\$2,325) \$17,825.00			\$17,825.00
Non-student salaries and benefits/Stipends				
Postdoctoral				
Other	40 Consultant hours (Dr. Gillian Parekh, TDSB) for Quantitative analysis of the TDSB Student Census data 2011 @ \$50/hr: \$2,000.00			\$2,000
Travel and subsistence costs				
Applicant/Team member(s)				
Canadian travel	PI & students travel by car to research site [Example: 7.5 kms x2 = 15 kms per round trip: MPCl- OISE. 10 trips/month x 6 months = 900 kms. Mileage at UofT rate 47 cents/ km. 900 x\$0.47= \$423] \$423.00			\$423.00
Foreign travel				
Students				
Canadian travel				
Foreign travel				
Other expenses				
Non-disposable equipment (specify)				
Gallagher Drama Research Lab Space and Software		StudioCode video-analysis software \$70,000	Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning (OISE)	\$70,000.00
Other expenses (specify)				
Youth Honoraria	\$250.00 (10 youth x \$25=\$250)			\$250.00
Printing Supplies	\$100.00			\$100.00
Total	\$20,600	\$70,000		\$90,600