Variation on a Space Divided: Marginalized Youth and their Community Centre

Felice Yuen
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada
Funded by the Centre for Human Relations and Community Studies, Concordia University, Montreal, Canada

Research Context
- Community Center, Quebec, Canada
  - ...to improve the ability of families to reduce and/or eliminate the risks associated with living in poverty through educational, cultural, social and recreational programs.
- Youth Internship Program

Youth Internship Program (YIP)
- Funded by Le Ministère de l’Immigration et des Communautés culturelles
- Up to 15 participants between 15 – 18 years of age
- Opportunities for employment training, help with school (i.e., tutoring), physical education activities, and nutrition education

Literature Review
- Leisure (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997)
  - Intrinsically Motivated
  - Perceived Freedom
- Community Centre (Glover, 2004)
  - To mold the ideal citizen through democratic processes
  - A public space where the public can influence community affairs

Oldenburg’s Spaces (1999)
1st place: Home
2nd place: School
3rd place: Public (i.e., community centre)

- Third Space (Oldenburg, 1999)
  - Informal locations where community members gather to alleviate pressures
  - Distinct from other areas of life
  - Inclusive
  - Sense of connectedness
Purpose

➢ To examine the impact of the community centre and its program, YIP, on marginalized youth.

➢ Research Questions:
  ▪ In what ways does the community centre/YIP impact marginalized youth?
  ▪ Does the community centre contribute to gang prevention. If so, how?

Participants

➢ 4 participants
  ▪ 2 males
  ▪ 2 females
  ▪ 17-19 years old
  ▪ Living with mom, siblings, nephew
  ▪ Changed high school 2 to 3 times

Research Method

➢ Focus Group
  ▪ 2 hour discussion
  ▪ 1 hour creation of a hip hop song

➢ Example of Questions asked
  ▪ What is the impact of YIP on your life?
  ▪ In your opinion, how do you think YIP affects gang prevention?

Findings

Relationship with Gangs: “The struggles and doubts”

We had family members that are part of the gang...I seen from a young age what gang relation does to you...

YIP keeps me out of trouble, it keeps my head straight...it basically shows me that my decision of never being in a gang - it's a right decision.

- Deshonna

I take classes with them. I take no part in their gang activities...Just friendship.

- Jerome

They're my friends......I know, what they do, who they killed.

- Tracy
Relationship: “She believes I can do it…”

Getting together with the other members. The games, the weird games that we play. And, finally having Jada as a friend. We bonded.
- Marcus

Support: “…So, I stand on my feet”

Tracy: Jada’s like the cool mom that we all want…if I call Jada and tell her I didn’t go to school today, she gives me hell. And if I drop out of school, she makes sure I’m in another school. A school that I can function in…If we have to go to court…Jada’s there.

Marcus: Cool mom, no. Sister maybe…I could share anything with Jada, I just don’t. Not yet. Soon!

Motivation: “Trying to overcome”

That’s [Jada’s enthusiasm and energy] what makes it good. It makes you actually want to come instead of doing whatever else.
- Marcus

Jada will text us and be like, are you coming today? …if we don’t show, then what kind of person does that make us look like?
- Tracy

Opportunity: “So that I can be King, Run to the top of the hill”

I’ve had goals but I wasn’t really chasing them before…

The thing is, I choose to be a delinquent, but she [Jada] gets mad at me every time.
- Marcus

The internship and having [the community center’s] support, my poetic skills improved a little… and [I] became a little better at expressing myself.
- Jerome
Achievement:  
“Standing tall, won’t fall”  

[In this program]...you learn how to achieve your goals. You get to a place where you can achieve your goals.  
- Deshonna

I think [the community center’s] fun! I think it’s better than me being home all day not having anything to do…I make a million and one photocopies, and sometimes I answer the phone.  
- Tracy

Learning:  
“You have helped me see”  

Your workshops helped us a lot...when we had to paste what we like on the board and they asked us all these different questions to see what kind of person we are.  
- Deshonna

I showed her [Jada] some of my poetry and she gave me some tips to become better at writing and stuff, and to like improve and stop writers block and stuff.  
- Jerome

Future:  
“Get respect, From staying in check”  

I’d like to help people with their problems...I was always taking care of somebody or helping somebody so I might as well put it into a career  
- Deshonna

She [Jada] represents that one person that cares about a lot of people...what happens in their life and...how they pursue their future.  
- Tracy
Implications: “Get into my life”

- Gang Prevention = Personal involvement
  - Workshops, internship, and tutoring sessions were peripheral
  - Relationship with adult central
- 3rd place as a 1st (home) and 2nd (place of learning and achievement) place
- Importance of a fun environment to create an all encompassing space

Future Research

- On-going study: Two more focus groups to conduct
- Further investigation into the role of the facilitator/program coordinators and the impact of programs, such as YIP, on their lives.