Education and Social Innovation:
The Youth Uncensored Project—A Case Study of Youth
Participatory Research and Cultural Democracy
in Action

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Abstract

This article discusses social innovation in education informed by arts-based and Indigenous ways of knowing. I use the term Indigenous to refer to First Peoples' and their wisdom traditions from places around the world and the term Aboriginal to refer to the diverse First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples of Canada. The article looks at the ethical imperative for doing socially innovative work, and examines practices with potential for embedding social innovation in educational scholarship, including experiential and relational educational approaches, such as community-service learning and restorative justice; participatory action research as an allied research approach; and community arts framed as cultural democracy. It describes a research project with street-involved youth as a case study for research that moves toward social innovation through the Government of Canada Policy Research Initiative's five steps involved in a co-creative social innovation project.

Keywords: social innovation, participatory action research, cultural democracy, community arts, community service learning

Résumé

Cet article traite de l'innovation sociale dans l'éducation axée sur les arts et des modes de connaissance autochtones. En anglais, j'utilise le terme « *Indigenous* » pour parler des Premières Nations et leurs traditions de sagesse de par le monde et le terme « *Aboriginal* » en référence aux Premières Nations, aux Métis et aux populations inuites du Canada. L'étude porte sur un impératif éthique, celui de faire un travail d'innovation sociale, et sur les pratiques susceptibles d'intégrer l'innovation sociale dans la quête du savoir en éducation. Par exemple : les approches éducatives expérientielles et relationnelles, comme l'apprentissage par le service communautaire et la justice réparatrice; la recherche-action participative en tant qu'une approche de recherche connexe; les arts communautaires dans un contexte de démocratie culturelle. L'article décrit un projet de recherche réalisé de concert avec des jeunes de la rue; il s'agit d'une étude de cas pour la recherche visant l'innovation sociale par le biais des cinq étapes du Projet de recherche sur les politiques du gouvernement du Canada et ce, dans le cadre d'un projet d'innovation sociale faisant appel à la co-créativité.

Mots-clés : innovation sociale, recherche-action participative, démocratie culturelle, arts communautaires, apprentissage par le service communautaire

Introduction

The notion of *social innovation* (or social accountability, social entrepreneurship) is stirring the imaginations of community organizations, governments, and the academy in exciting ways. In the field of education, *social innovation* emerges as part of an effort for reimagining education for the public good. As a scholar in drama and theatre education, I have been moving toward social innovation through my community-engaged educational arts research over the past 15 years. I refer to my work as "moving toward social innovation" because, based on my experiences and according to literature in the area (Westley, Zimmerman, & Patton, 2007), social innovation is not something we ever entirely arrive at, but is, instead, something for which we strive.

My drama-based methods have explored the experiences of marginalized youth with students in alternative school settings, with incarcerated youth and with street-involved youth (see, for example, Conrad, 2002, 2005, 2010; Conrad & Kendal, 2009). While individual projects may have been socially innovative, employing innovative methods and leading to localized social benefit, the work needed in seeking educational justice for youth put "at-risk" is far from accomplished.

This article begins with a discussion of how I have come to understand social innovation and the ethical imperative for doing socially innovative work, followed by a look at some pedagogical and research practices with potential for embedding social innovation in scholarship in education. I will touch on implications for social innovation in education via experiential and relational approaches such as eco-literacy, restorative justice, and, in particular, community-service learning; as well, I touch on participatory action research as an allied research approach, and on community arts framed as cultural production and cultural democracy. I draw on my recent collaborative research project with street-involved youth, which we called "Youth Uncensored," as a case study for educational research that moves toward social innovation. The Youth Uncensored project partnered with the non-profit community arts organization iHuman Youth Society, which serves street-involved youth through crisis intervention, outreach, and arts programming in Edmonton, Alberta. Initiated by the community organization, the project, with youth as co-researchers, developed arts-based workshops to educate social service providers working with the youth about the youths' life experiences. I will describe the project through

the Government of Canada Policy Research Initiative's (2010) five steps involved in a co-creative social innovation project.

As a Caucasian woman, first generation Canadian of German immigrant parents, and a university-based academic, I acknowledge the privilege that I bring to the inter-pretations I offer here. Informing my discussion throughout are my understandings from working through the arts, which bestow validity to the ways in which I make sense of the world, and my learnings from engagement with Indigenous knowledge.[1] I believe that alternative perspectives such as those presented by the arts, which value embodied and emotional experience, and Indigenous ways of knowing for recovering a more intercon-nected worldview (Sheridan & Longboat, 2014), may offer possibilities for doing educa-tion otherwise.

What Is Social Innovation?

According to the Government of Canada Policy Research Initiative presented at a 2010 international roundtable, *social innovation* was described as "responding to [social] chal-lenges that are not being addressed through conventional approaches…often requiring new forms of collaboration…[and] including 'co-creation' and 'co-production' among citizens and institutional actors" (p. 1). The roundtable summary suggests that social innovation is "difficult to describe, but you know it when you see it" (p. 4); that social innovation flourishes in an environment that is "risk attractive," flexible and yet rigor-ous, allowing for "safe" and "smart" risk-taking. The impacts of social innovation, the roundtable concluded, are "difficult to measure with existing evaluation tools" (p. 4) in that measurable outcomes are not necessarily generated. Rather, outcomes of iterative and "messy" processes are unpredictable and often take years to fully manifest; they are

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1   I taught at a Dene community school in Rádeyîlîkóé (Fort Good Hope), Northwest Territories. Since coming to Alberta, tragically, many of the youth put "at-risk" with whom I have worked, who have been pushed out of tradi-tional schools, experienced incarceration, and/or street-involvement, have been Aboriginal youth. This is symp-tomatic of systemic racism within our social institutions, which my research aims to address. In doing this work I have sought out learnings from Indigenous Elders, community-members and scholars. My current research project with colleague, Cree-Métis scholar Dr. Dwayne Donald, focuses on the educational experiences of Aboriginal youth from three communities in Alberta and the NWT.

largely local and place-based, though often leading to "significant [long-term] society wide changes" (p. 3).

Important to my understanding of social innovation is that social innovation may include, but is not equivalent to, social enterprise;[2] the contributions made by social innovation go beyond economic value to focus on social impact. In his book entitled *The Gift: Creativity and the Artist in the Modern World*, Hyde (1979/2007) conceives of art as primarily part of a gift culture, both as it emanates from its maker and as it is received by its audience. He argues that the artist's inspiration is a gift that is not commodifiable; the value of the creative process lies beyond any market value. Hyde makes a distinction between "value" applied to commodities and the "worth" of things, which are prized, but to which a price cannot be applied. The kinds of art and social innovation in which I am interested have worth beyond economic value, yet social enterprise can play a role in work for social benefit.

Westley, Zimmerman, and Patton (2007), in their book *Getting to Maybe: How the World Is Changed*, describe social innovation through the lens of complexity theory. They see social innovation as being about an intention to bring about social change, to make things happen within a complex world, without guarantees—hence "getting to maybe." It involves a vision for change along with tolerance of ambiguity and responsiveness to unpredictable events.

A strength that I bring to my understanding of social innovation comes from my grounding in the arts. Fellow community-based theatre practitioner David Diamond (2007) draws on Fritjof Capra's (1983) understandings of complex systems to situate his work, seeing a community as a living connected system. Likewise, notions of inter-connectedness inform my participatory arts practices, with the conviction that engaging groups of individuals, in expressing and critically analyzing their worlds, will have a ripple effect upon the larger community and ultimately affect social change. As Scott (1990) suggests, "The accumulation of petty acts can, rather like snowflakes on a steep mountainside, set off an avalanche" (p. 192). Community-based arts and social innovation seen through the lens of complexity theory share an understanding of the world as complex, interrelated, unpredictable, and messy, and ways of working based on imagination and

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2   I find the distinction between social innovation and social enterprise important to counter the neo-liberal attempt at the redesign of education based on a "business model," which values "innovation" only in economic terms.

intuition, the recognition of patterns and emergent, co-evolving processes with transformative potential.

Social Innovation Is an Ethical Project

At its core, social innovation, in responding to societal challenges, is an ethical project. Of intrinsic value in this work is the promotion of human and non-human flourishing (Heron & Reason, 1997), which entails attention to personal responsibility, relationality, connections to other living beings and specific places, the land, and spirituality, consistent with Indigenous sensibilities (Bourriaud, 2002; Weber-Pillwax, 2004; Wilson, 2008). Working toward social innovation takes vision, courage, and commitment. It is not without struggle and risk, and there is always so much more to do. As Westley, Zimmerman, and Patton (2007) describe, social innovation is "a juxtaposition of despair and possibility" (p. 189) through its inevitable successes and failures. Despair, they say, is the shadow side of social innovation.

John Paul Lederach (2005), practitioner in international conflict transformation and peace-building, uses the metaphor of the artist to describe how peace-builders need to reimagine their work with passion and intuitive insight, as creative acts addressing the complexity and humanness in conflict situations. Social innovators facing despair might be advised to do likewise.

Jonathan Lear (2006), in his book *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation*, offers the story of Plenty Coups, the last great chief of the Crow Nation. As Lear (2006) relates, at the end of his life, Plenty Coups was said to have stated, "When the buffalo went away the hearts of my people fell to the ground and they could not lift them up again. After this nothing happened" (p. 2). When faced with the cultural devastation of his peoples' way of life, Plenty Coups followed the teaching he gained from his vision as a young man—to follow the way of the chickadee, which guided him to cooperate with the white man for the preservation of his people. His actions are contrasted with those of Sioux chief Sitting Bull who was killed in an outbreak of violence. Of Plenty Coups's decisions, Lear (2006) concludes,

> Plenty Coups had to acknowledge the destruction of a telos—that the old ways
> of living a good life were gone. And that acknowledgement involved the stark

recognition that the traditional ways of structuring significance—of recognizing something as a happening—had been devastated. For Plenty Coups, this recognition was not an expression of despair; it was the only way to avoid it. One needs to recognize the destruction that has occurred if one is to move beyond it. (p. 152)

Referring to Plenty Coups's maintenance of the Crow Nation's Sun Dance tradition despite the devastation of his culture, Lear (2006) suggests, "It is one thing to dance as though nothing has happened; it is another to acknowledge that something singularly awful has happened—the collapse of happenings—and then decide to dance" (p. 153).

Buddist monk Thich Nhat Hanh (David Suzuki Foundation, n. d.) echoes this sentiment in his conversation with David Suzuki, where he suggests that what is needed to avoid despair is to accept that the destruction of our civilization by us may be imminent. Only through this acceptance, he insists, can we attain peace and hope and thereby have the strength to become better workers for the future.

Ethical understandings such as these offer hope, as we negotiate the complexities of moving toward social innovation, for addressing current challenges in ways that attend to ethics in our human and non-human interactions.

Implications for Education and Social Innovation

Social innovation requires transdisciplinarity (Leavy, 2011) for working across and beyond the disciplinary divides of education, social work, public health, design, environmental studies, development studies, human ecology, business, political science, law, and sociology. Socially innovative initiatives centre on identified social problems, challenges, or needs rather than disciplines. It could be argued that all of the pressing social issues of today, whether related to poverty, health, security, diversity, or environmental sustainability, affect education. Education is strategically positioned at a confluence of disciplinary ways of knowing, and has a contribution to make to thinking and working innovatively. Certainly, the challenges facing education today (e.g., student disengagement, school violence, diversity, inequity for Aboriginal students, advances in technology, globalization, environmental devastation) demand innovative responses. Social innovation in education can occur in formal educational settings such as schools, in informal community-based settings, and in virtual settings.

We know there is much room for innovation within our current outdated educational model. Scholars have been addressing the need for educational paradigm change (see Robinson, 2010) for some time (e.g., John Dewey's [1916/1966] progressive education; Paulo Freire's [1970/1993] vision of popular education; Ivan Illich's [1971] de-schooling of society; William Pinar and Madelaine Grumet's [1976] reconceptualization of curriculum as "currere;" Jacques Rancier's [1991] ignorant schoolmaster; Ted Aoki's [1991] inspiriting curriculum; Maxine Greene's [1995] emphasis on imagination and creativity). Recent alternative educational projects involving experiential and relational approaches offer promise. The provocative work of Michelle Fine in *Revolutionizing Education* (Cammarota & Fine, 2008), links education and youth participatory action research focusing on amelioration in the distribution of power and resources (distributive justice), unjust policies and practices (procedural justice), and respect for all (justice of recognition). Marie Battiste's (2013) *Decolonizing Education* calls for the displacement of cultural imperialism in our dominant education systems. Educational practices such as ecoliteracy at Fritjof Capra's (1983) Centre for Ecoliteracy (see Goleman, Bennett, & Barlow, 2012), restorative justice approaches such as that described in Brendtro, Brokenleg, and Van Bockern's (1990) *Circle of Courage* (see also Conrad & Ungar, 2011; Zehr & Toews, 2004), and experiential education initiatives with Indigenous community schools (O'Connor, 2010) have been taken up as models for re-envisioning education based on human and non-human relationships, connectedness, and context.

Community-service learning (CSL), a growing trend in education, is an exemplar of collaboration between institutions and citizens. An experiential approach with socially innovative potential, its intention is to equally benefit students' learning and communities' needs through promoting the notion of service (Furco, 1996). It "combines 'real world' experiences and academic learning, encourages moral development, promotes citizenship, and facilitates a sense of social responsibility" (Kajner, Chovanec, Underwood, & Mian, 2013, p. 36). Moreover, Kajner et al. (2013) call for a *critical* CSL, advocating for social justice as an outcome through analysis of root causes of systemic inequality, critique of privilege and power inequalities, and reflection upon one's positionality within the social system. Similarly, Westheimer and Kahne (2004) call for justice-oriented citizenship education through service learning, which is directed toward critical analysis of the structural roots of injustice and oppression (social, economic, and political), and collective participation for systemic change.

Through critical CSL with a justice-oriented view of citizenship, understandings can be achieved of the effects of structures, discourses, norms, and spaces that enable or constrain action, including strategies for exercising productive power to create possibilities for social action (Gaventa, 2014). CSL acknowledges that education as social innovation can occur in informal community-based settings and/or in collaborations between schools and community groups with young people and community members alongside educators, professionals, governments, and/or business.

In recent years I have been able to integrate CSL into my undergraduate drama teacher education and graduate-level participatory research courses, as well as developing a CSL study abroad course on facilitating performing arts for social justice.[3] I have found engaging with community an effective way to make a critical pedagogical approach relevant and tangible for students.

Socially innovative approaches to education offer possibilities for addressing the pressing educational issues of today and guiding us toward transformative paradigmatic change in the way we enact education.

Participatory Action Research

Freire's (1970/1993) vision of popular education developed alongside a complementary community-based research process known as participatory action research (PAR), which aligns well with social innovation aims. Freire's (1988) early article on PAR entitled "Creating Alternative Research Methods: Learning to Do It by Doing It," sounds much like social innovation in action.

As a "new paradigm" research approach (Heron & Reason, 1997), PAR is described as a means of producing knowledge, a tool for community dialogue, for education, consciousness-raising, and mobilizing for action (Park, Brydon-Miller, Hall, & Jackson, 1993). It develops practical knowing in pursuit of worthwhile human purposes and practical solutions to pressing community issues (Reason & Bradbury, 2006). It is research *for*, *with*, and *by* participants accentuating the inherent human capacity to create knowledge based on experience (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991). PAR aligns with

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3   The CSL study abroad course was developed with colleagues Jan Selman and Jane Heather.

Indigenous research methodologies (Weber-Pillwax, 2004; Wilson, 2008) in focusing on relationality, respect, reciprocity, and relevance.

Community engaged work necessitates an ongoing analysis of power, privilege, and oppression—a mediation of power differentials and a questioning of what work is needed to sustain collaboration in terms of ownership, inclusion, accountability, and responsibility. In positioning myself in relation to my PAR work, which has quite explicitly been aimed at addressing challenges experienced by Aboriginal youth, I appreciate a statement attributed to Lila Watson, an Indigenous activist from Australia in the 1970s: "If you have come to help me you are wasting your time, but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together." I understand that injustice, wherever it exists, is ultimately dehumanizing to us all. While true that some in our society suffer from injustice more than others, those who occupy more privileged positions can and should make use of our privilege toward amelioration of wrongs. Moreover, some of the pressing issues of today challenge us all as inhabitants of the planet.

Using a PAR approach, academics can fulfill scholarly mandates and engage with the larger community to contribute to social innovation. This positions academics, as "specific intellectuals," as Foucault (1980) describes, intervening in local, specific struggles (p. 129), and as "exchangers," occupying privileged points of intersection (p. 127). From these positions they can produce socially innovative, impact-oriented research beyond the peer-reviewed journal article (see, for example, Shanley & Lopéz, 2009).

Educational scholarship using a PAR approach, as Cammarota and Fine (2008) have demonstrated and as Kapoor and Jordan (2009) promote in *Education, Participatory Action Research and Social Change*, has the potential to work toward educational justice. Noteworthy, PAR projects are increasingly utilizing arts-based methods for engaging community, commonly incorporating alternative methods and cultural forms that are already part of a community's life as meeting spaces for cultural exchange (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991).

Community Arts as Cultural Democracy

Applied theatre[4] has served as the basis for my ongoing work (Prentki & Selman, 2000), which specifically draws on Augusto Boal's (1974/1979) techniques described in *Theatre of the Oppressed*, developed in response to countryman Freire's popular education movement of the 1960s. Boal has called his theatre work rehearsal for future action; for him, all art is transformative by nature. He says, "The act of transforming [through creating art] is in itself transformatory. In the act of changing our image, we are changing ourselves, and by changing ourselves in turn we change the world" (Boal, 2006, p. 62). Diamond's (2007) *Theatre for Living*, his adaptation of Boal's work, understands that individual and community health is vitally dependent on peoples' capacity to imagine.

Such popular arts forms are based in an aesthetics of cultural democracy, which reframe art as cultural production—a part of everyone's everyday life, and so, also central to education (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013). Cultural democracy is about providing access to the means for cultural production and decision making (Evrard, 1997; Goldbard, 2009; Graves, 2004). It expresses localized culture, the cultural diversity of a community, through which art becomes a forum for community engagement. Cultural democracy calls for direct public participation in the arts for creating a vibrant, living, and responsive culture and an integration of art and life. This notion of cultural democracy is evident in conceptions of community art and in art education with the assertion that the arts conceived in this way are integral to social justice.

For Kenny (1998), from a First Nations' perspective, art is related to coherence, authenticity, health, and spirituality. Kenny (1998) sees expression as fundamental to healing and the arts as life-enriching and life-sustaining. For First Peoples, she says, "art is not a separate language, but rather the way we live" (p. 77). The "sense of art," she describes includes, but is not just about, creation of art forms; it is a way of experiencing and expressing the qualities of life.

Goldbard (2009), a veteran in community cultural development, turns cultural democracy into cultural action, claiming that "community cultural development projects

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4   Applied or popular theatre has served as a method for generating, interpreting, and representing my research. This approach aligns well with PAR using arts-based methods (see Conrad, 2004).

are laboratories for engaged citizenship" (para. 12). She sees a role for the arts in new paradigm thinking:

> The old system treats everything like so much material that can be weighed, measured, assigned a number and dismissed. The new system is grounded in human stories, recognizing abundant diversity and the power of relationship. In the old system, art and culture are dismissible as nice, but not necessary; in the emergent system, culture is the crucible for all positive development. (para. 2)

Mackey (2010), professor of film and media at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, believes culture is the way human beings create meaning from their experiences, that "vernacular culture," as he terms it, is about making culture rather than consuming it. He says:

> Cultural activities form the necessary bridges between aspirations and lasting renewal. Any change must be imagined first. Art stimulates and exercises individual and collective inventiveness, thus promoting the experimentation and adaptation necessary for people to adjust to constantly changing conditions. (p. 241)

This makes cultural production a vital part of social innovation. As Matanovic (2002), a long-time community arts organizer, says, "The idiosyncratic gifts of the artist, with all their uncertainties, may be exactly what we need to create a more humane, sustainable, and beautiful world" (para. 17).

Case Study: The Youth Uncensored Project

Figure 1. Youth Uncensored T-shirt Design

Design credit: Naureen Mumtaz & iHuman youth

The PAR project, Youth Uncensored, for which I was principal investigator, offers an example of educational research moving toward social innovation. The project was innovative from an educational perspective in that it engaged with a youth population often deemed "high risk."[5] These youth had, for the most part, been pushed out of traditional schools, and through the project, they were repositioned as educators of social service providers. This allowed service providers, including educators, to see the youth differently and also gave the youth opportunities to see themselves differently.

The project fit with the Government of Canada Policy Research Initiative's (2010) five steps that are involved in a co-creative social innovation project, which are:

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5   The Alberta government defines high-risk youth as youth aged 14–22, whose drug/alcohol use interferes with daily functioning, whose decisions may jeopardize their safety, who lack healthy adult connections, and have experienced multiple residential placements and multi-generational child protection involvement (Smyth & Eaton-Erickson, 2009). Based on our experiences with the Youth Uncensored project, I would add that struggles with mental health, involvement with the criminal justice system, experiences with racism, and negative experiences at school leading to being pushed out or dropping out, makes these youths' survival precarious. While not all the youth displayed all of these characteristics, tragically, they were common amongst the group of youth who engaged with the project.

> 1) Identifying and resolving to address a given problem; 2) understanding the
> nature of the problem including its causes and patterns; 3) engaging all relevant
> stakeholders to develop a prototype for a solution; 4) implementing the solution;
> and 5) evaluating its impact. (p. 4)

Below, I discuss each of these steps.

(1) Identifying and Resolving to Address a Given Problem

I had already spent time establishing a relationship with iHuman Youth Society (http://ihumanyouthsociety.org) based on our mutual interests in the role of arts in youths' well-being. We had discussed possibilities for research collaboration, when in the winter of 2009, Wallis Kendal, veteran outreach worker and co-founder of iHuman, approached me with a research proposal. He identified a need based on his experiences. He and Peter Smyth, then director of the High Risk Youth Unit, Edmonton and Area Child and Family Services, were facing challenges in getting youth the help they needed. Wallis felt that social service providers (including educators, health care workers, law enforcement, social workers, etc.) did not understand the youth well and many even feared them.

Wallis, Peter, and I agreed to pursue a PAR project aimed at educating service providers with youth as co-researchers. At the end of summer 2009 we decided, without any definite plans or funding in place, to convene a meeting at my Canada Foundation for Innovation–funded Arts-based Research Studio at the University of Alberta. Interested iHuman youth were invited to join.

(2) Understanding the Nature of the Problem Including Its Causes and Patterns

Twenty youth attended our first meeting. We continued to meet each week for the next two years with 10–25 youth attending each session. In total, 50 different youth participated,[6] with considerable turnover from session to session. In the fall of that year we received funding from the City of Edmonton and, later, some funding from the

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6   I'd like to give credit to all the youth who participated in the project. It would not have happened without their commitment.

university.[7] This allowed us to hire a program manager and research assistants, and plan for evaluations of the project. We were also able to provide youth with honoraria; we paid them $15 per hour for 1.5 hours per week, which I saw as a major benefit of the project. We also provided youth with food and bus tickets at each session, and provided childcare as needed. Our meetings for the first several months involved sitting around our big table with the youth identifying and discussing issues and telling stories of their experiences with service providers.

From those early discussions, seven themes were identified that needed further exploration, including relations with law enforcement, educational issues, access to healthcare, the social services system, worker–client relations, family dynamics, and other youth experiences that influenced their encounters with service providers, such as racism, substance use, and personal relationships. Our aim was to develop workshops specific to each of these themes to educate service providers about youths' experiences. To this end we developed a structure and curriculum materials for each workshop. Since our common interests involved the arts, we naturally opted to create arts-based materials, including dramatized scenarios (which became our primary medium), as well as identity collages, stories, poems, raps, zines, drawings, a giant board game, and we photographed and video-recorded many of these. Following is an example of a youth's poem exploring her evolving experience of addictions:

I got drugs in my pocket

by Nikki Webb[8]

I come to you for comfort
and all you give me is
cocaine sunbeams
chasing shards of broken dreams
cleverly manifesting

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8 Nikki gave me permission to include her poem in this article and asked that she be acknowledged for her creative work by name. She was involved with Youth Uncensored for three years and is currently in a Bachelor of Child and Youth Care Program at a local university.

into life lost on ecstasy streets
I run
I try to hide
only to find
clear ketamine creeks
and bloody heroine rainbows
to slash my wrists

and say goodbye to all this tragedy.

(3) Engaging All Relevant Stakeholders to Develop a Prototype for a Solution

A few months into the project, working with Evaluation and Research Services, Faculty of Extension at the University of Alberta, we sent out a survey to gauge service providers' interest in attending workshops, their prior experiences with high-risk youth, the topics they felt needed to be addressed and workshop times that best suited them. The survey results suggested there was interest in the workshops we were proposing, and helped us to refine our plans.

In summer 2010, with curriculum materials and a structure in place, we decided to invite an audience for a pilot workshop. The first workshop was attended by iHuman staff, social workers, psychologists, university students, and youth and was met with positive response. The workshop opened with a few youth presenting their songs and poems, then those youth who were interested in performing presented, forum theatre style,[9] a few scenarios depicting negative interactions between youth and service providers. We engaged audience members in identifying points of tension and coming onto the stage to enact alternative interactions trying for more positive outcomes. The workshops ended with an opportunity for candid face-to-face dialogue between the youth and service providers.

(4) Implementing the Solution

Following our successful pilot, we advertised our workshops to service provider groups throughout the city and managed to book some engagements. Whenever possible we charged groups a nominal fee to pay youth and recover our costs. Between summer 2010

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9   Forum theatre is one of Boal's "theatre of the oppressed" techniques.

and spring 2012 (when our funding ran out), we conducted a total of 26 workshops for service providers at the following organizations: Edmonton Public Library; YouCan Youth Workers Program; the Canadian Liver Foundation's HepC & Art project; Calgary Youth Criminal Defense Office; and Native Counseling Services. As well, we presented for a number of university courses in school psychology; youth mentorship; social work; and youth culture. We also presented at conferences, including conferences on or for community service learning; homelessness; harm reduction; curriculum; Aboriginal education; international week; anti-racism; graffiti; and the Global Youth Assembly. We travelled with youth to Red Deer to present for the Alberta School Boards Association, reaching 100 school officials and trustees, and once to Yellowknife for an Aboriginal research storytelling workshop.

During this time we continued to meet with youth each week to develop and refine our curriculum materials and workshop structures, with sessions added to rehearse for forthcoming workshops. In 2011, the Youth Uncensored project won an award, sponsored by an Edmonton law firm, for innovation and creativity for a non-profit organization, and was featured on local CBC Radio and in an Edmonton newspaper.

(5) Evaluating Its Impact

From December 2010 to August 2011, during the early phase of workshop implementation, with Evaluation and Research Services (2011) we conducted an evaluation of outcomes for service providers who attended our workshops. We conducted exit surveys, follow-up surveys, and a focus group, and produced a report of findings. Service providers stated that their views of youth had been positively altered. Many claimed that they would thereafter be more comfortable working with this youth population. Through experiencing youth telling their stories and engaging with them in dialogue, "they learned to be more understanding, accommodating and flexible, and to remember that each youth is different and has his or her own story…to listen to youth with more patience and compassion, to avoid labels, and…the importance of establishing a rapport and mutual trust with high-risk youth" (ERS, 2011, p. 8). They saw the youth as having strengths, talents, and well-founded, valuable opinions; they learned that youth wanted both assistance and independence. Service provider participants also felt the arts/drama approach was effective and refreshing in the experiential and expressive engagement it offered. They noted

that the dramatized scenarios allowed the youth to portray the reality of their experiences and created a safe space for reflection and meaningful dialogue.

By spring 2011 we could see that the project was not only benefiting service providers but also the youth participants. Through positioning the youth as researchers, educators, artists, and performers, the project was having transformative effects on their lives. We applied for and received another grant to conduct an evaluation of outcomes for youth.[10] Beginning in fall 2011 through February 2013, we worked with a group of 6–10 youth who chose to create a T-shirt design and a video as their arts-based evaluation outcomes. Among the benefits the youth identified were fun activities, financial and other support, a sense of belonging and a safe space, relationships with other youth and with adult mentors, and a better understanding of their life challenges. The project aided in their recovery, it helped them develop a positive self-image and confidence. They felt a sense of accomplishment, had opportunities to challenge themselves, felt listened to and respected by service providers, and had a chance to give back to their community by helping other youth. In the video, one young woman reveals how nervous she was coming to Youth Uncensored for the first time. She explains how the non-judgmental environment and supportive community gave her the confidence to get up on stage to tell her story, which motivated her to make further changes in her life and want to help others. A young man describes his many experiences of being degraded by police and how the project gave him an outlet to speak out to tell police about what they had done to him. Another youth tells of how Youth Uncensored supported him in his recovery and inspired him to undertake a cross-Canada bicycle journey to raise awareness about addictions. Another young woman expresses the support that the project provided her to finish high school and go on to college. Another youth explains how Youth Uncensored, through allowing her to voice her experiences and challenge herself on stage, helped her better understand why she was addicted to drugs. She acknowledges the support from mentors she gained through her participation with the project. The evaluation video is available online (http://arts-basedresearchstudio.ning.com/group/uncensored) along with other Youth Uncensored materials.

In winter 2013, for our final project activities, we worked at staging and video-recording a number of our scenarios for service providers, which we also posted to the website. iHuman has since continued to elicit opportunities to present workshops with a graduate student, who also worked as a research assistant, as their lead facilitator. iHuman and I are pursuing the possibility of developing Youth Uncensored into a sustainable social enterprise to generate income for the organization and for youth. The research process served to confirm the feasibility of such an initiative and is thus, perhaps, moving toward social innovation.

Imagining Education Otherwise

In conclusion, I evoke new paradigm thinking, drawing on traditional wisdom to ponder the possibilities for social innovation as an embedded practice in education. In doing so, I turn again to the work of Lederach (2005), specifically a story he tells about an experience at a meeting of a peace initiative in Kenya in 2011, where he encountered an alternative conception of time. Describing his common Western conception of time Lederach (2005) states:

> It was not just that I saw time as a commodity. I saw the flow of time as moving forward, toward a future goal that I could somehow control if enough skill and planning could be brought to bear. The present was an urgent fleeting moment that somehow must be taken advantage of and shaped. (p. 132)

African philosopher John Mbiti's (1969) alternative conception of African time moves from the present toward the past and "contrasts with much of how Western planning and evaluation of any social endeavor are conducted" (cited in Lederach, 2005, p. 135). Lederach (2005) relates how one participant at the meeting explained this conception of time described to her by her elders as "the past that lies before me and the future that lies behind me. [The elders] point ahead of them when they talk about the past. They point back when they refer to the future" (p. 135).

Acknowledging the significance of the past as that which we have seen and know, which has led up to the present moment, is consistent with other Indigenous ways of knowing (Cajete, 1994; Sheridan & Longboat, 2014). If we accept the wisdom offered by this alternative view, how do we then imagine education as we walk backward into an

unseeable, unknowable future? Can education and social innovation be a dynamic force for moving toward the change that we would like to see in education?[11]

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11 Adapted from a quote attributed to Gandhi.

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