LAST CHANCE CLASSROOM:

HOW YEAGA SAVES YOUTH FROM THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE

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Abstract

of

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Amanda F. Mina

This study explores how instructional communication functions in a small community organization whose objective it is to pull youth out of the school-to-prison pipeline. The group consists of adult participants (ex-convicts, former correctional officers, social workers, former gang members, and former youth participants), and youth participants who are struggling with gangs, drugs or other social issues. This study consists of participant interviews and ethnographic observation of a group session. Interviews produced themes that indicate when communication is working, and the session observation presented events that indicate those themes in action. Data triangulation resulted in a glossary of theme definitions, which will be useful to future studies.

_______________________, Committee Chair

Dr. Mark Stoner

_______________________

Date
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of this graduate program, I quickly took a keen interest in the effect that education has on recidivism rates of former prisoners. My assumption at the start was that since education of prisoners has been found to lower rates of return to prison, it would be easy to make a case for more possibilities of prisoner education, or that at least I could make a case for what types of subjects would be most beneficial in reducing recidivism.

Clearly, I thought, whatever creates jobs for ex-cons on the outside is what prisoners should be learning – an easy enough argument. But as my research continued, I kept finding deeper questions about where the real problem resides, and about the bigger picture of social inequity. In my endeavor to find the stem of the problem, I came across the phenomenon of the school-to-prison pipeline, which led me to understand that recidivism is only one of the factors that make up a much larger, much more complex system of crime and punishment in what PCARE (2007) called the prison industrial complex. This complex, as its name implies, is composed of a dense network of factors that intertwine and feed into the greater structure – a mechanism so large and interwoven into American society, that it begs the term juggernaut. Then I was introduced to the Paolo Freire’s (1970) Pedagogy of the Oppressed.
My earlier questions about subjects and jobs was quickly superseded by questions concerning what education is, how knowledge is created, power, trust, outcomes, expectations, deficiencies, citizenship, and the list goes on. When I began to concentrate on the more significant questions about prisoners, education and habitus, what Pierre Bordieu (1989) called the structured and structuring structures, I became convinced that while dealing with education and recidivism is valuable, the greatest value that can be gained will come from critical examination of and a significant shift in our beliefs about education, power and trust, and our expectations of outcome.

While reading Pedagogy of the Oppressed, one of the transformational moments for me came from the idea that, once liberated, a person cannot help but to work for the liberation of others. About that time I happened to meet the founders of Youth Empowerment And Goals Association (YEAGA), a community-based program that works to free at-risk youth from the school-to-prison pipeline. One of the founders had served a 20-year term in prison and now with his partner and a group of former correctional officers, ex-cons and ex gang members, they communicate with youth in a different way - to teach them of choices they might never know they have. They graciously invited me to study the group, and a thesis was sparked.
The significance of the problem that community organizations like this group are facing cannot be understated. The pipeline is an alarming phenomenon that has been documented in research, and notably has been acknowledged by the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) in its official blog (Edelman, 2007; Firke, 2011; Murray, 2005; Raible & Irizarry, 2010; Tonry, 1999; Tratner, 2012). This is a phenomenon in which schools adopt zero-tolerance policies as a measure of behavior control, and those punishment policies begin to resemble adult social punishment strategies using control, ostracism and expulsion as methods of controlling undesirable behavior. When children are exposed to these methods on a regular basis, they come to see them as social norms. In a 2005 report from the Children's Defense Fund titled *Dismantling the Cradle to Prison Pipeline* three major risk factors were identified “that set poor young Americans on the trajectory to incarceration: (1) early involvement in the child welfare system, (2) educational failure, and (3) involvement with the juvenile justice system” (Murray, 2005).

The founders of YEAGA base their activism in the notion that honest dialogue with youth about their situations, limitations, and possibilities opens up possibilities for them that has a wide-ranging effect on what they will explore in their futures and how they will transform the social structures that cultivates such a thing as a school-to-prison pipeline. In many cases community programs offer alternative resources for youth who have rejected schooling, or who are being enveloped in the school-to-prison pipeline. In the case of YEAGA, that alternative takes the form of
ex-felons, retired prison staff and other community members who take part in frank discussions and follow-up sessions with youth about life choices and options. Their belief is that by speaking with youth honestly about the harsh realities of prison and the options available to them, they can affect a change in a youth’s understanding about choices.

By using themselves as examples of life-choice consequences, these community activists are exemplifying the “reconstruction” of what Freire (1970) called the “limiting situation” (p.49), meaning that the perception of the instructional context as a rigid, closed structure which does not change, can be altered. When perceptions can be altered, and a student desires to understand his or her perceptions, critical examination of one’s limiting situation is fostered.

By sharing their own life situations and choices, adults inhabit a communication space with their students that is different than that of the systemic educational experience. Pollard and Filer argue that “social class and gender impact on the learning careers that pupils developed within schools and on their expectations for the future” (as cited in Ashwin, 2012). Moreover, Ashwin (2012) writes of “patterns of previous outcomes of learning, interactions and experiences” (p.76), which inform students’ expectations of instructional interactions. In a space where the teacher-student relationship is more personal, truthful and based on conversation about actual life choices, those patterns enter a process of change. And,
in a space where students’ expectations are in the process of changing, it may be possible to understand the dynamic, instructional communication that leads to that transformation in youth.

With this thesis I wish to join in the conversation that is addressing the U.S. prison industrial complex by establishing instructional communication and critical pedagogy as part of the solution, and finding specific ways in which communication can be the point of transformation for an individual.

**Background of the Problem**

According to Freire (1970), the banking model of education is a process of dehumanization to which students either assimilate or reject. That a student might assimilate to this process is disturbing, but the student who rejects this system often becomes subject to zero-tolerance policies and the heavy-handed discipline strategies that over-crowded and under-funded schools rely on in order to maintain control (Wacquant, 2001, Tratner, 2012).

The school-to-prison pipeline is the system by which such dehumanization occurs. When family stress causes children to feel under-valued, and when those feelings of under-valuation are echoed in the classroom, a child is faced with having to accept or reject the messages that they receive about themselves. It comes down to minutiae - a basic interaction between adult and child - wherein the essential assumption about the student is that they bring nothing to the table – that they are
deficient in the “knowledge” which is being imparted to them, and that that knowledge is given to them and accepted by them without questions or exploration allowed (Bartolome, 1994).

This reliance on such a transfer of bits of information is what Freire (1970) called the banking model of education—a model in which the one with the knowledge has the power and therefore the other has none. The inherent contradiction that this causes between teacher and student cannot be resolved within the banking model, which values narration of information by the teacher, followed by regurgitation of information by the student over mutual exploration, discovery and meaning-making. Freire (1970) argues that such a system of knowledge banking is oppressive and dehumanizing, and is one in which “The teacher... expounds on a topic completely alien to the existential experience of the students” (p. 71). This ultimately works to distance students from their experiences of family, community and culture, and toward assimilation into the educational agenda.

There are some fundamental social and socioeconomic elements that foster such dehumanizing interactions, and which are based in the family, the community, the school, and the greater societal context. Factors such as family and/or community poverty (or under-privilege) often takes its toll on family relationships, which can then fail to nurture the strength within our youth. Meanwhile, overcrowded and under-funded schools rely on disciplinary methods of population
control over a more intimate form of problem-solving, and these same schools usually see a high turnover rate of inexperienced educators.

Equally as worrisome is the idea that many children are able to assimilate into this system, which means that on some level, or sometimes on many levels, they accept the information that they are given about their value and their contribution, and by that they accept the notions that they are deficient by default, and that their power and value can come only from how well they can regurgitate the bits of knowledge imparted to them.

The most unfortunate thing about assimilation is that in the act alone of accepting a notion of what the world looks like from a third party, means that one’s own personal determination of what it looks like is devalued, in the case of schools, from an ultimate authority figure. I say ultimate, because, unlike one’s parents, or adults in one’s home, teachers are put in such a reverent position that they are handed authority over you, by those whom you already know are in authority. At the same time that the school system entrusts teachers with the minds of children, they also underpay, undermine and undervalue them. So while the public holds teachers in rather high regard on the surface, the evidence of stressed-out and punitive teachers in the classroom can seem contradictory to a student who is deciding how react or interact with their instructor. And so the schizophrenogenic conditions (Stoner, 1993) that are created inside of the classroom when teachers, for example,
contradict the value of an exercise with the expectation of efficiency in its accomplishment, also exist on a larger systemic scale when parents and school directors ask children to learn well from teachers, but then make their jobs stressful and inadequately resourced.

But when a strong-willed youth who is curious, or needs to understand more, or is simply not getting the kind of attention they need is not addressed on a level that suits their questions, the results can be detrimental to their functioning (Azzam, 2007; Fredricks, Blumenfeld, Friedel, & Paris, 2005; Larson & Richards, 1991; Newmann, 1992). When there is no place at home for inquisitiveness, and no place at school for questions about why things are the way they are, our expectation that that curiosity should manifest itself in more studying, more behaving and more systemically encouraged successes is unreasonable.

Of course, teachers are not necessarily to blame, although it seems that they have largely buckled under the pressure of efficiency expectations and succumbed to the damaging psychological effects of low wages, and lowered social value. This leaves under-funded schools, especially those in impoverished communities that are already at a significant disadvantage, with teachers who are stressed and underappreciated and who now have to deal with students who may be actively questioning the information or the process, or who may be actively rejecting the entire proceedings.
Under a structure that insists on itself, lies an inherent power inequity that can be tough to swallow, especially for teenagers who disagree, assert themselves or find alternative meanings – because the teenage years are the time in a youth’s life when they are negotiating the transition between childhood and adulthood, and between meanings as they were and as they will be (Erikson, 1998). The inability to question reflects a power structure in which the teacher holds the control, and students are to adhere (Freire, 1970). It is at this time that youth need to find answers on their own, because they will be expected to do the same as adults – but the space to explore and create is in direct opposition to the banking model of education.

The inherent power structure in traditional classrooms creates a relationship between teacher and students that Freire (1970) describes as narrative – where the teacher narrates and the students listen (Freire, 1970). Students typically sit in tidy rows facing the front of the classroom; teachers stand at the front of the room – commanding attention, able to observe all behavior. Behind the teacher on the front wall of the class is a blackboard where the teacher writes pertinent information about the material at hand. In this physical space, where ideas are written at the front – the teacher is the gatekeeper of information. That role reflects the teacher’s experiences and beliefs about the relative value of information being treated.
As a case in point, the documentary, The War on Kids, Laurie Couture, a noted child advocate and mental health counselor said, “Children don't have any say in being able to debate the validity of the curriculum. They can't say... I heard otherwise, or... I read a book that told me something different. If you do that... your name is on the board” (Soling, Carr, Fidrick, & Soling, 2009). It isn’t difficult to feel the unfairness in such an interaction, nor is it difficult to perceive of the teacher’s expectation that class goes smoothly at the expense of inquiry, exploration, or wonder. The power inequity that this produces creates a contradiction between the teacher and student that Freire (1970) asserted, cannot be resolved without a shift in how learning is understood, and how power is structured inside of the teacher-student relationship.

Needless to say, punishing a child for challenging information hinders dialogue. But punishment in some schools goes far beyond the public-shaming tactic of having one’s name written on the board. Some schools employ protocols for entering the school building in the morning that actually physically and emotionally resemble prisons. The War on Kids (2009) documents entrance protocol to one New Jersey high school and juxtaposed that video with the entrance protocol in a correctional treatment facility – they were almost identical (Soling, et al, 2009). Taking a look at the bigger picture of how these punitive measures disproportionately divide students along ethnic and racial lines, Hartnett (2011) noted that
Black and Latino students are 70% more likely than white students to be disciplined, and between 200 and 300% as likely to be suspended. Summarizing these findings, a report by the advancement project concluded that zero-tolerance means that black and Latino students tend to be pushed out of the schoolhouse faster than their white peers – zero-tolerance thus means diminished educational opportunities, and therefore hope, for children of color... The schools-to-prisons pipeline is therefore greased with policies such as zero tolerance. (p. 132; Browne, 2005)

Entry into some public schools entails walking through metal detectors, showing identification at checkpoints, constant police presence and unyielding demands that youth adhere to protocol, and a quiet consent to constant surveillance of all activity. Dr. Henry Giroux in *The War on Kids* (2009) said of this type of environment:

> What’s the lesson here? The lesson is that the most cherished institution that we have, or we have had in the past, one that speaks in the most direct way to how a society wants to invest in the future by virtue of how it feels about youth, now all of a sudden, models a prison.

Meiners (2010) found that, discipline, pedagogy, and school practices and policies often create a series of events that “function to normalize an ‘expectation’ of
incarceration” for increasing numbers of youth (p. 31). The impact of current surveillance practices that place youth at risk for punishment and exclusion is alarming.

There is hope, however, that intertwined in the juggernaut of the school-to-prison pipeline, there are conversations happening about schools, curriculum, and punishment. There are people working in small ways on many fronts to affect those who are being shuttled through the pipeline. There are community organizations that are working to affect a shift in the messages that youth get about themselves, their worth, and the options available to them. Part of the need for this shift is because schools have long been seen as the place to go to learn, while the learning that comes from the family and community has been underappreciated.

The major goal of this study is to locate instructional interactions outside of traditional school settings in order to argue for a re-conceptualization of instruction from a metaphor of movement of information bits to one of transformation. The purpose for this is to establish that transformational learning can and does happen within non-traditional environments, and the effect that those efforts have can be life-changing for youth who are succumbing to the school-to-prison pipeline. A second goal is to identify discursive patterns and markers of transformational discourse in order to facilitate purposeful and mindful use of language in this and related contexts. In order to argue for a change of this kind, we first need to explore
the ideas about how identity is formed in a dialogic process with the world surrounding us. Next, an exploration of literature about instructional communication will lead us to an examination of processes of instructional interactions and situated learning as a frame for transformational learning.
Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The introduction to this thesis discussed the need to place the phenomenon of learning outside of the traditional school classroom. The most pertinent reason for this need is that those things that are considered to be fundamental educational goals within schools are lacking in the essential idea of creating critical thinking habits in the minds of youth. Chapter 2 offers additional explorations into ideas that are at the center of identity formation in youth and the instructional interactions that can work to transform youth identities from prisoners to critically engaged citizens.

This chapter will begin by reviewing what is known of identity formation as a process of communication – through the studies of Mead, Vygotsky, Piaget and Erikson. Next, a thorough review of the literature regarding instructional interaction, which participates intricately in the establishment of youth identity and context, and will work to establish that instructional communication can take place in the classroom as well as outside of the classroom. Following, the review will establish that identity formation, enveloped in the school-to-prison pipeline (STP) functions as a contributor to the pipeline. After establishing the current state of educational affairs, the pedagogy and praxis that contribute to the instructional-based solution of the pipeline will be reviewed and will include explorations into critical pedagogy, power, and situated as well as transformative learning.
These ideas and their related literature theoretically ground this study and support the argument that non-traditional classrooms are fertile ground for meaningful learning opportunities as well as for transformation of students’ identities and knowledge. The final part of the literature review will be dedicated to exploring the most suitable methods of research for this particular study, making a case for the selection of the three most useful ethnographic methods for this study – observation, interview and survey. An exploration into the process of triangulation of those methods will be conducted to determine the best way to establish the location of the communication phenomena within the interaction.

**Identity Formation**

The existence and formation of one’s identity has been studied and theorized about since Descartes posited that the body and mind are separate. Interaction with the world is at the heart of identity formation for both sociologists and communication scholars. Interaction of any kind is, after all, a form of communication. One of the founding sociologists, Max Weber, contributed the notion that people act according to their interpretation of the meaning of their world. George Herbert Mead’s work, which explored this idea, gave rise to his theory of the self via symbolic interactionism just at about the same time as Lev Vygotsky was theorizing about the same phenomenon. Both saw the self as an emergent process that proceeded within symbolic interchanges with others.
Symbolic Interactionism

Mead’s theory of the emergence of identity out of the process of communication became the foundation of symbolic interactionism when it was introduced to American sociology in the 1920s. This theory addresses the subjective meanings resulting from interactions that are assigned to behaviors, events, and objects then analyzes society through those meanings. Blumer (1969) extended the theory to address the ways in which meanings are formed – by being attributed to phenomena, or by virtue of being a physical attachment imposed on phenomena by humans. It is our reactions to the behaviors, events and objects within our interactions that inform their meaning to us, and therefore, to our socially constructed world (Anderson & Taylor, 2009, p. 21-22).

Three activities are central to the development of the self according to Mead (1925): Language, play, and game. During language activities, children learn to engage themselves and others through “vocal gesture” which he says:

Arouses in the individual who makes it a tendency to the same response that it arouses in another, and this beginning of an act of the other in himself enters into his experience, he will find himself tending to act toward himself as the other acts toward him. (p. 271)
In this passage, Mead recognizes the importance of language interactions as the establishment of mutual action and understanding, if not the beginnings of co-creation of meaning.

To further this idea, Mead (1925) posits that during play children take on the role of the “generalized other” (p. 272) as they pretend to be other people and to verbalize others expectations. Think of a child playing the parent of their favorite doll, or taking on the role of a teacher in their improvised classroom. Their play mimics their understanding of the others’ role. The language in their classroom or in their parenting play reinforces the meanings of the roles they play.

Then there is the game, of which Mead (1925) remarks,

The play antedates the game. For in a game there is a regulated procedure, and rules. The child must not only take the role of the other, as he does in the play, but he must assume the various roles of all the participants in the game, and govern his action accordingly. (p. 269)

This speaks to the internalization of the roles of all of the others in the game. Not only does the child need to know their own role, but the rules of the game that regulate the other participants. If this game is played well, then it can be asserted that socialization into the group expectation has been accomplished. Mead (1934) describes this as “the organized community or social group which gives to the
individual his unit of self” (p. 154). In other words, by conceptualizing the
generalized other and simulating the interactions that are appropriate within the
group, the child reinforces an understanding of the social structure and, in turn, an
individual’s function within that structure. The organized reaction of the other
players to the child then “becomes... the ‘generalized other’ that accompanies and
controls his [the child’s] conduct” (p. 269). The generalized other functions as an
instrument of social control, and the identity of the child, and their self-ness, is
reified.

One of the major assertions of symbolic interactionism is that social
construction of meaning is achieved via the process of human interpretation
(Shibutani, 1961; Blumer, 1969). People’s interpretations of one another’s behavior
are what form or break social bonds. Agreement or disagreement over the meaning
of one’s behavior is the basis for acceptance or rejection from any number of social
groups. At the same time, our own willingness or willfulness to be a part of, or to
reject a group is controlled by our own behavior and within it. Symbolic
interactionism can be seen in school classrooms when, for instance, a youth who has
had positive experiences with group socialization, wishes to actively participate in
the role playing inherent in the classroom. The student can negotiate ways in which
to modify his or her behavior according to the socially constructed classroom. The
teacher’s or group’s response to the behavior of the child can reinforce the student’s
belongingness to the group, and that behavior becomes a part of the repertoire of behaviors that the child has to work with throughout their class time.

Mead viewed the existing social system as mediated by language. Individuals, he posited, are initially dependent on that existing system until they establish their own self-direction and self-conscious. That self-direction and self-conscious, then, uses the socially learned language and meanings to guide the inner processes of identity formation through meaning making.

The fluid nature of behaviors and socialization was addressed by Blumer (1969), who asserted that “meaning is a condition that emerges as a result of the interaction of group members and not an intrinsic feature of the object” (qtd. in Aksan, Kisac, Aydin & Demirbuken, 2009). “People act toward things based on the meaning those things have for them; and these meanings are derived from social interaction and modified through interpretation” (Blumer, 1969, p. 51) Meaning, then, is produced by people as an inherent consequence of interaction, in turn creating the facts about the world (Aksan, et al., 2009). Thus, “Identities are dynamic not static and revolve around situational, social, and personal characteristics that come into play in our social roles” (Bauer, Loomis & Akkari, 2013, p. 55).

Symbolic interactionism is one of the most prominent theories about identity and meaning-making within the communication field that facilitates analysis of the process within the context of discourse and interaction. Another complementary
theory, developed around the same time, social cognition, posits that language develops for two interpersonal and intrapersonal dialogue. This theory underlines the importance of communication as the central process in the ways that youth internalize the external world, and also sets a strong foundation for the idea that learning can be transformational if communication changes.

**Social Cognition**

Lev Vygotsky was a contemporary of Mead, but was more interested in cognitive and affective development. His concentration, like Mead, lay in the idea of active internalization – the “novel variations” in the way that a person imitates social behavior – thus adding to individuality (Deters, 2011, p. 40). But Vygotsky’s (1978) social cognition model further posited that culture and social interactions are imperative to cognitive development – as he stated,

> Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological), and then inside the child (intrapsychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relations between human individuals. (p. 57)
In this theory, he posited that the social development of meaning is due in part to our judgment of our own behavior in comparison to the behavior of others. While language, objects and acts are initially artifacts of our interactions; we eventually see ourselves as the object of our own language and actions and judge ourselves in action.

For Vygotsky (1962), language begins as an external instrument appropriated for interaction but with age develops into two phenomena – the external dialectical tool, used to communicate with others, as well as an internal tool for self-regulation of behaviors and interactions. Our interactions with those around us, sitting in the classroom with us, inform our self-talk, in turn, facilitating our regulation of our own behaviors in comparison with how others act in their roles. The idea of language as a dialectical tool was augmented by Per Linell (2010), who wrote that, “...language is simply only one of the semiotic means by which humans are in dialogue with their environments” (p. 33). As we participate and internalize observations, “...we develop an inner sense of the collective regard society is likely to have for our performances...the collective sense that we gradually develop from those who evaluate us” (Holland & Lachicotte, 2007, p. 2). This means that the formation of our individual identities is based on our interpretations of the generalized other’s evaluation of us and of the expectations of us.
These interpretations that pave the way for our individual identities begin in infancy between parent and child, increase within family structures, community and school, and continue to develop throughout adolescence. In essence, each new meaning we create for ourselves is founded in a dialogic process with previous experiences and with the meanings that we have formed from socially structured messages. While this is an ongoing and fluid process in which each new meaning carries into the next, some theorists identified stages of development that signified different levels or complexities within the process of identity formation.

**Stages of Identity Formation**

It is essential to note the different events, reactions and behaviors that take place throughout the formation of one’s identity in order to understand how reactions are formulated, but it is also important to note that there are significant developmental stages at which differences in reactions are likely to occur. Erik Erikson and Jean Piaget worked toward identifying critical stages of development and the differences in experiential interactions during stages of development. Piaget worked from a developmental psychology point of view and Erikson, from a psychoanalytic standpoint. Both agreed that developmental stages are of the utmost importance, but where Piaget (1954) posited that a child’s cognitive development cannot be rushed, Erikson (1950) said that it should not be rushed.
Central to Piaget’s studies were the cognitive and intellectual development of children. He theorized that there were four stages of development: Sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete, and formal (1965). During all these stages, children develop “schema” – sets of actions and responses with which to master interactions with their environment. Moreover, Piaget (1954) contended that these schemas are carried through to adulthood and progress in sophistication as the person ages, and are sensitive to experiences. Piaget (1971) stated that, "Any piece of knowledge is connected with an action ... to know an object or a happening is to make use of it by assimilation into an action schema ... whatever there is in common between various repetitions or superpositions of the same action." (pp. 6-7)

Assimilation and accommodation are the terms that Piaget uses for the process of trial and error in socialization. When a child uses their existing schema in a new situation, for instance in a new classroom, and it works, then they can assimilate to the situation and make sense of the events – the new information fits into already existing cognitive schema, perceptions and understandings. If the child finds out that his or her schema does not work in this new environment, attempts must be made to accommodate it – revision of existing cognitive schema, perceptions and understandings is necessary in order to make the new information fit. The schema change over time and develop from reflexive, action-based schema to schema designed around language and abstract thought (1971).
While Piaget noted the four stages central to interactional learning, Erikson (1950) posited that there are eight crises or turning points in psychosocial stages that help us to develop our personalities throughout life. Five of those stages happen from birth to adolescence – the resolution of each crisis setting the groundwork for the next stage. At any of these stages adverse outcomes can possibly develop, resulting in a negative self-image. The five crises that are of interest for the purpose of this review are: Trust vs. mistrust (0-18 months), autonomy vs. shame (1 ½ - 3 years), initiative vs. guilt (3-5 years), industry vs. inferiority (5-13 years), and identity vs. role diffusion (13-21 years). These stages are set in terms of oppositional resolutions, the first stage, for instance, trust vs. mistrust, says that the infant will either gain a sense of parental trustworthiness, or will establish the feeling of mistrust of the parent. The crisis, in whichever way it resolves, can affect the next stage and will inform in this case, the child’s sense of trustworthiness of others.

In the autonomy and initiative stages, the foundational experiences introduce children to their role in the immediate family, the extended family and the household. In the second stage, autonomy versus shame, a child begins to choose his or her own behaviors. The behaviors of household members, relationships to objects in their immediate surroundings, and the events that a child witnesses are interpreted and explained by parents or others. Through these interpretations and explanations, children gain the initial sense of how the world operates when parents and family
members share their perspectives, understandings, and ultimately their cognition with the child (Erikson, 1950, p. 221-24).

The fourth stage, industry versus inferiority, happens throughout elementary school when the child is ready to become productive, as Erikson (1950) stated, “he develops industry... He can become an eager and absorbed unit of a productive situation” (p. 224), which would bring the child a sense of completion – or the contrary, if the child has a sense that he or she cannot participate with others because of the tools and skills they possess, the need to identify with peers may be abandoned. To this stage, Erikson (1950) noted that:

It is at this point that wider society becomes significant in its ways of admitting the child to an understanding of meaningful roles in its total economy. Many a child’s development is disrupted when family life may not have prepared him for school life, or when school life may fail to sustain the promises of earlier stages. (Erikson, 1998, p. 73)

It is important here to note that the critical role of the teacher and the classroom in the environment of the child introduces them to this wider social interactions.

The fifth stage of Erickson’s developmental model is the resolution of an identity crisis – ego identity versus role diffusion. The resolution of this stage is of utmost importance to the formation of identity, because, while identity is in flux during this period, adolescents try out various roles that society offers. They try on
those roles to incorporate what was learned in childhood (Erikson, 1950). As Rosenthal, Gurney and Moore (1981) noted, it is at this stage when,

...The usefulness of identification as a mode of adjustment ends and identity formation proper begins. If the adolescent does not succeed in forming a strong identity-rooted in family, race, or ideology-adulthood becomes very difficult, with genuine intimacy being almost impossible and stable long-term relationships unlikely. (p. 526)

It is at this fifth stage when all of the youth’s life experiences and practice in identity formation are put to the test. As Erikson (1968) put it, "From among all possible imaginable relations, [the adolescent] must make a series of ever narrowing selections of personal, occupational, sexual, and ideological commitments" (p. 245). Identity diffusion results when such choices remain unresolved.

So far the dialogic process between the individual and all that surrounds them has been established through symbolic interactionism, social cognition and the ideas about stages of growth. The common thread running through all of these is meaning development. Identity formation is ultimately an increasing depth-of-field vision where what we know interacts with what new object comes into view, and where we place it in relation to what is already in the picture. This developmental phenomenon is critical in adolescence when youth are struggling to accommodate or assimilate to
the meanings they begin to discover in their roles as up-and-coming adults both in school, home and community environments.

Keeping in mind those struggles that adolescents encounter, we will next focus on the role of instructional communication and the part that it plays in co-creating meaning with youth, specifically inside of non-traditional classrooms. We will also explore how transformational instruction functions in order to form the basis for the argument that such transactions can and do happen in community organizations, and that those non-traditional settings can be locations of instructional communication processes.

**Instructional Communication**

Understanding how instructional communication functions as an educational tool is key to making the case that it may be used in analysis of non-traditional learning spaces. Because the goal of this study is to locate instructional communication phenomena in a non-traditional environment, this section will look at relevant theories about learning, communication and how teaching-learning experiences proceed. When thinking of educational communication, it is important to take into account each actor in the process. For the scope of this section, we will focus on messages from schools and from teachers to students, as well as the finer details of teacher-student interactions.
Considering the culture of schools and how cultural expectations are transmitted to students, Bernstein (1975), in *Class, Codes and Control*, focused on the ways in which schools work to transform the identities of students, which, he posited, was a measure of the students’ response to the school. He identified two orders of complex behavior and activity, which he called the expressive and instrumental orders. The expressive order, he said, “…attempts to transmit an image of conduct, character and manner, a moral order which is held equally before each pupil and teacher” (p. 38). The instrumental order, on the other hand, has to do with the acquisition of specific skills. This, Bernstein notes, can be divisive on the social level when the tactic is used to “assist the development of specific skills in some” (p. 38). Taken as one, these orders of symbolic behavior communicate to students multiple levels of expectations and assumptions.

**Codes, Choices and Habitus**

Bernstein (1975) also presented a theory of codes, introduced initially in the context of curricula denoting the boundaries between the contents of the lesson and their level of relation to one another. From this he posited that there are open and closed codes of language, the former being more inclusive (or non-restrictive) to new members, and the latter being more exclusive (or restrictive) and open to a group.

This idea of open or closed codes has since been adopted by a multitude of academic fields from psychiatry to economics who use the term to mark some sort of
compliance with a set of agreed meanings or procedures (Young, Zonana, & Shepler, 1986; Zollo, 1998). But for the purposes of this thesis, it is important to note that codes are everywhere, adults and youth alike are daily confronted by codes of inclusion and exclusion based on behavior, dress, etc. In school, youth might navigate through multiple codes and code types from classroom to lunchroom, while adults might struggle to learn the closed code of their new employer. Those codes, whether open or closed – especially in an educational setting – can be a choice. Instructors can choose codes of inclusion or exclusion in the setting of the class, in their choice of words, and in multitudinous other ways.

Code choices are the greater contextual setting for what Bernstein (1996) would term the Pedagogic Device. The term device reflects a power relationship between societal structure and teaching, of which Bernstein (1996) notes, “...pedagogic communication is often viewed as a carrier, a relay for ideological messages and for external power relations, or, in contrast, as an apparently neutral carrier or relay of skills of various kinds” (p. 25). There are three rules controlling the pedagogic device: distributive, recontextualizing, and evaluative. Those rules basically denote what information is available, how the information is to be shaped for pedagogic discourse, and how and when it is distributed. The example that Bernstein (1990) uses to explain the pedagogic device is that of teaching physics in secondary school. The pedagogic device in this instance functions by the selection of ideas within the field of physics that are to be delocated from universities and
recontextualized to a middle school comprehension level, the final rule is the evaluation of those ideas and how they are to be organized pedagogically for students (p. 185).

The student, Bernstein (1990) postulated, has internalized rules of recognition and of realization. From the ideas presented, the student derives inferences about what meanings or ideas are legitimate and what ideas might be put together – recognition. While the recognized ideas might go together, the realization of those ideas has the student combining the concepts at hand to produce new texts – in other words, synthesizing new meanings from previously separated ideas. What Bernstein called recognition and realization was echoed in Bloom’s (1956) taxonomy, which categorized the types of reasoning activity levels required to accomplish learning tasks in classroom activity. Bernstein’s realization is what Bloom termed synthesis – a higher-order activity that requires students to use given facts in order to create theories or to make predictions.

If we are to note the parallels in theories dealing with identity formation and instructional communication to this point, we can see similarities in the path of input and movement. By this I mean that as objects (physical or verbal, or in the case of Bloom, facts), feelings (as in Erikson’s crises), or actions are presented to us, we compare, evaluate and assemble them into something new leading to a transformation from what we understood before to what we have just newly
interpreted. As we participate in this dialogic building process of social and personal construction, whether cognitive or affective, we build ourselves to suit the meanings that we share with those around us, and so we adopt those meanings to ourselves. Building into one’s surroundings speaks to Bourdieu’s (1990) idea of habitus, which he defined as,

The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce habitus, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them.

(p. 53)

That is to say, the information with which we begin constructing our own meanings is made of the information available to us (other peoples’ meanings that are relayed to us along with our interactions with objects). Eventually, that information becomes the foundation of all that we build on it and of it. Understanding the concept of habitus is significant in understanding the contextual environment that youth bring into a new learning environment with them as well as how a new environment is constructed with them.
It is necessary now to refine the focus of our examination of instructional communication theories from those that have been comprehensive, contextually oriented and abstract, to those that focus on the nature of functions of symbol systems used in instructional interactions. This level of focus will include the theory of situated learning and how it sets the stage for a transformative learning, as well as the actual process of dialogue and interactions in various settings.

**Situations, Transformations and Projects**

Working further toward an understanding of learning in non-traditional environments, Lave and Wenger’s (1991) theory of situated learning posits that the newcomers to a community of practice participate in that community first as passive participants, then as their interest, learning and practice in the field grows, their participation levels increase. As Karalis (2010) explains it,

...it is the acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes by the newcomers as directed mainly from the older members of the community. During this process of gradual entrance into a community of practice, newcomers are ‘authorised’ in practice by the experienced professionals of the domain to carry out increasingly complex projects, based on the rate at which they accept and absorb the knowledge of the community of practice. (p. 17)
If we use the example offered by Bernstein (1996) of a middle school physics class, a child who is taught in middle school about physics is a passive participant until he or she takes an interest in the subject and begins to explore ideas about the subject, at which point they transact with the ideas within physics (p. 34). In time, they begin to participate in the conversation within the physics community through study, talk, and writing in depth about the subject and they become legitimate peripheral participants (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

For the purposes of this study, the community of practice is the group of adults who gather around a common interest to dialogue with youth about their collective and shared situations, and to transform their thinking. By talking to youth participants about their experiences and their own change in thinking from their past to the present, they are exemplifying a transformative learning experience. When adult participants verbally and emotionally express their interest in a youth’s situation and experiences, and when they demonstrate by their own stories that they were able to transform a problematic frame of reference into a more reflective and functional one, they invite youth participants to practice viewing their own situations differently. As a youth participant reflects on previous experiences, he or she can gain critical perspective about the available choices and about his or her abilities. This reflects Lave and Wenger’s (1991) assertion that learning is an “integral and inseparable aspect of social practice” (p. 31), because the adult models the practice
of thinking critically about the youth’s issue, and invites the participant to share in the meaning-altering thought.

YEAGA has several members who began attending as at-risk youth, and who have become part of the core group of adult members – these participants share an important bond with their more senior counterparts – that of praxis and accountability. Wenger (2010) noted that

The regime of competence of a community of practice translates into a regime of accountability— accountability to what the community is about... to the quality of relationships in the community, to the accumulated products of its history... Becoming accountable to history also enables the student to discover the learning edge of the practice, the places where a contribution makes sense and is possible. It is this double accountability to the past and the future of the practice that equips the student to contribute to its evolution as a full participant. (p. 6)

This notion echoes what Freire (1970) wrote of the nature of liberation – that a person who has been liberated through critical reflection and is able to transcend the perception of their situation, practices that liberation only by liberating others (p. 54). In other words, they become accountable for the history and future of their critical community of practice.
Being a participant in the community of practice of YEAGA, therefore, requires that a youth practice, at least on some level, expressing their view about their situation, and then transforming their perspective. Mezirow (1981), writing on transformative learning, speculated that such a perspective on transformation

...is the emancipatory process of becoming critically aware of how and why the structure of psycho-cultural assumptions has come to constrain the way we see ourselves and our relationships, reconstituting this structure to permit a more inclusive and discriminating integration of experience and acting upon these new understandings. (p. 64)

Although Mezirow studied and theorized specifically about adult learners, the idea of perspective transformation applies to constraining assumptions about our self-view, which is precisely the view that YEAGA works to affect in youth. So for the purposes of this thesis, transformative learning as both concept and process will be applied to both adults and youth participants.

Having now established that situated learning leads to opportunities for transformative learning, it is important to restate that many of the processes within this type of learning happen within dialogue. Discourse happens in what Linell (2006) referred to as communicative projects – the dialogic interactions in which information is relayed from one participant to another and then is resolved between
them in order to move to the next task or topic. Linell based his projects on the work of Schütz and Luckmann (1962). How a task is accomplished within a project is an important concept to establish when identifying what communication events look like within the context of YEAGA group sessions, and how transformation might appear within those projects.

In order to set the stage for the exploration of communicative projects, Linell (2006) begins with dialogical theory based on Bakhtin’s (1981) work as it relates to monologism. Monologism is based in terms of subjectivity and objectivity – the world around having causal impact on individuals who initiate speech acts on their own (p. 34). Dialogicality, by contrast, is based in dynamics (active problem-solving), interactionality (exchanges with others), and contextuality (situated discourse interdependent with context) (Linell, 2002, p. 2). Discourse, Linell (2006) argues, reflects the multi-dimensionality of its social organization. Each communicative project is a constituent part of one or multiple larger projects intended to jointly accomplish a goal or goals of varying size.

As an example of such a project Linell (2009) offers this small excerpt from two people sitting in a café:

A: “Shall we leave?”

B: “No, I have got more coffee in my cup”
From this simple excerpt, he says, “The utterances end up as part of an overall project of regulating the time for breaking up” (p. 189). Basically, an idea is presented for discussion and the response signals the accomplishment of the task. This can of course consist of more utterances, but the key is the resolution of the current subject followed by a transition into the next. The question and the reaction are both contextually situated within of the relationship of the two people, and nested within the entirety of their communicative project in the course of their café conversation.

According to Linell (2010), communicative projects can be characterized by their dynamic progression, asymmetrical participation, collective accomplishment, nestedness, variation in size, and multi-functionality. Dynamic progression emerges “in the flow of participants’ action, interaction and migrating attention in communication, where they originate, develop, and are brought to completion” (pp. 38-39). The term completion does not necessarily imply the terminal point of a project, but rather an open-ended conclusion of a particular idea within the conversation in order to progress to the next idea. By asymmetrical participation and collective accomplishment, Linell asserts that naturally flowing conversation does not necessitate a 1:1 ratio of input by both parties, rather one may do more of the talking, but usually both make mutually complementary contributions. Nestedness, size variation and multi-functionality speak to the complexity of communicative
projects that exist within other, successively larger projects. They can be small (as in the above café exchange) or expansive, and serve multiple purposes (pp. 38-39).

For the purposes of this study, it is important to note differences in the progression of communicative projects – specifically, in the ways that indicators of transformation might be noted. While Linell’s (2010) explanation of communicative projects focuses on speech utterances and their contributions to one or more larger tasks, there is a specific type of change in language that one might expect when a transformation in understanding is at hand. Such a change might be seen in language that transforms from exclusive to inclusive – they to we – or in what Rothman (1996) describes as going from single-loop reflexivity, which is reactive and akin to blaming, to double-loop reflexivity, which is a “slowed-down and self-conscious analysis of the interactive nature of reactions (for example, ‘Hey, what is going on here that I care about so much? Why is it getting such a rise out of me?’)” (p. 348). While reflection and reflexivity are of the same ilk, reflection can be seen as the praxis of contemplating oneself in action, while reflexivity is a more immediate dialogic action, and one that would indicate that something has changed in a person’s thinking. This is a crude treatment of the nuances involved with both terms, but for the purposes of this study and for the need to identify changes in language stance, it will work to inform the type of change to be identified.
One way that a transformation of understanding might become evident is in the use of self-descriptive words. Studies by Campbell and Pennebaker (2003) and Petrie, Booth and Pennebaker (1998) have found that “specific patterns of language use are associated with various aspects of physical health” (as cited in Arntz, Hawke, Bamelis, Spinhoven & Molendijk, 2012). For example, Arntz, et al. (2012) note that people with symptoms of depression tend to use more first-person singular pronouns than non-depressed people. In this instance, word use is indicative of a clinical diagnosis, but more importantly, they note that:

...word use has been shown to evolve as psychological status changes, whether naturally or over the course of psychotherapy. For example, in the days after the death of a classmate, students were found to transition from writing primarily about the physical aspects of the death to writing more about social implications and show signs of greater emotional and cognitive processing during the natural grieving process (Margola, Facchin, Molgora, & Revenson, 2010). (p. 192)

This passage denotes that a change in a level of processing during grieving is reflected in language use. This claim of language indicating change is further supported in a 1989 relationship and language use study by Duck and Pond, who found that language in relationships can be indicators of relationship status, maintenance, or change (as cited in Sillars, Shellen, McIntosh & Pomegranate, 1997).
Taken as a whole, all of the research explored up to now in this chapter elaborates the close relationship between the social and contextual nature of identity, language, learning, and transformation. In order to embrace the organic nature and flow of the concepts explored in this literature review, the following study will employ Pearce and Cronen’s (1980) theory of Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) as a tool to identify patterns in the dialogical processes of transformative effort that take place within YEAGA.

**Coordinated Management of Meaning**

CMM is a complex model for understanding the way that meaning is tied to action, as well as for how change takes place within context dependent and socially constructed realities (Cronen, Johnson & Lannamann, 1982; Cronen, Pearce & Changsheng, 1989). At the heart of CMM is Pearce’s (1989) idea that communication is “...a recurring, reflexive process in which resources are expressed in practices and in which practices (re)construct resources” (p.23). Practices, in this sense, are the actions by which communication occurs, while resources are the constituents that inform those practices. A fundamental idea within CMM that reveals the practical nature of the theory was stated by Cronen, et al. (1989) in comparing Searle’s (1969) philosophy of speech acts, in which they say:

Searle’s philosophy is... the idea that language is the activity through which individuals refer to states of affairs in the world... [in short]
‘Language is about the world.’... [But] there is another way to think about the relationship of language and the world... ‘Language is in the world.’...In CMM theory we think of communication as the fundamental form of activity in the world... Even the games of describing the world are, for us, episodes in the world aiming not to penetrate to the reality of it, but to create more useful ways to live in it. (p. 3)

The creation of more useful ways to live in the world echoes a bit of Freire’s as well as Bordieu’s philosophies about understanding the system that we live in and must function within. Transcending the limitations imposed on us by that structure is achieved in large part through critical thinking praxis.

According to CMM, social meaning is hierarchically organized in a manner that each level of meaning is understood within the context of other levels that come before and after – a concept that Linell (2010) called nestedness (p.39). Although the term hierarchy implies a ranking of units of measure above or below others, Cronen, et al. (1989) note that “In CMM the unit of analysis is more holistic. We usually represent it as a serpentine movement through multiple malleable contexts expressed in and reconstructed by patterns of conjoint action” (p.8). Within this serpentine movement, each of the levels are equally important, and are hierarchically related in the sense that one unit constitutes the context for understanding the
previous and subsequent unit (Montgomery, 2004; Pearce & Cronen, 1980). The effects of the various levels can be seen in terms of their contextual or implicative natures. Contextual effects, which work from higher meaning levels, are stronger than implicative ones, which are weaker. Montgomery (2004) illustrated of these effects when she wrote that,

...A single episode of a father using foul language toward his child might not change the child’s understanding of the loving relationship between him and his father or the father’s view of himself as a lovable person (the relationship is the context of their interpretation of the episode, and the episode only has an implicative effect on the relationship as such). If, however, the episode is repeated many times, these episodes may become a context of a changed view of the relationship and can have a more profound effect on the way that the child sees himself and his father. (p. 351)

In working with youth through the YEAGA program, the adult participants attempt to reconstruct the resources that youth operate under through the practice of recontextualizing their understandings in conjoint dialogic action. By sharing their own histories, adults in this group demonstrate their own transformations and exemplify to youth that possibilities exist outside of their present interpretations.
Given the research examined throughout this literature review, it is clear that there are important transformational and dialogical phenomena that are instructional in the sense that learning through praxis is encouraged, and which can also help to re-create meanings for youth who are caught up in the school-to-prison pipeline. It is also clear that many of these dialogical and transformational phenomena take place outside of traditional classroom learning environments.

**Research Questions**

The following study pushes the boundaries of instructional communication by building the case that instructional communication, which involves dialogue, meaning-making, and transformation happens within what Freire (1970) noted as “Critical and liberating dialogue.” This, he said, “presupposes action, [and] must be carried on with the oppressed at whatever the stage of their struggle for liberation” (p. 65). In this case, “the oppressed” are students caught in the traps of low income, chaotic home and school environments, as well as drug or alcohol abuse, often exacerbated by public policies that offer few options to these children.

With these conditions in mind, the following study will attempt to answer these questions about how YEAGA functions:

1) How does instructional communication proceed in YEAGA?
2) What instructional patterns facilitate the re-creation of student identity from prisoner to citizen?

3) What constitutes transformational interaction in YEAGA?
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

The current study was an investigation into the dynamic communication patterns that emerge within small group communication sessions held by a community organization that aims to help youth-at-risk learn how to make constructive life choices. Due to the complexity of the learning context and its irregular nature, this study uses a mixed methods approach to data gathering about YEAGA sessions and participants in an effort to employ the most complete data available for understanding how this unique learning process works. The first method used was semi-structured interviews, conducted by the researcher, with youth and adult participants of YEAGA. The second method consisted of an ethnographic observation of YEAGA group meeting. Using the gathered data from participant interviews, a thorough analysis was conducted in order to find any emergent themes. With the observational data gathered from the group session, several thorough readings were done in order to identify passages that held evidence of communication patterns that facilitate transformation and that help to answer the research questions set forth in chapter two. The final step in the analysis was to match up both data sets in order to triangulate, isolate and describe the events that answer the study’s research questions.
Qualitative and Ethnographic Methods

Qualitative research methods help to establish the existence of phenomena and are also useful in defining the characteristics of the found phenomena. Ethnographic methods, as Dollar and Merrigan (2002) noted, “are intended to provide researchers with means for collecting data that can be used to construct a descriptive account of the phenomena being investigated” (p. 60). Of the qualitative approaches available, ethnography best accommodates the variety of data that are fundamental to this study. Additionally, the descriptive and interpretive nature of ethnography is suited to describing complex phenomena within group communication as they appear prior to and following significant communicative events. In interviews, group participants stated that they identify when communication is working by a youth’s display of any of a variety of changes. Those changes that they described were physical, physiological, verbal, or what was called personal connection changes. Ethnography by nature allows an observer to note such fluctuations in behavior where other methodological approaches to describing the event would fall short.

Ethnography can be guided by a variety of research paradigms, but for the purposes of this study, a constructivist/interpretive approach was used as opposed to positivist or critical approaches. A constructivist/interpretive approach holds that beliefs, symbols, meaning-making and therefore learning are participatory, socially
constructed and situated within actions (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). Positivism is a cause-and-effect approach in which “truth” is determined via quantitative means such that hypotheses are supported or rejected. The highly structured nature of such an approach would be unsuitable for this study. A critical approach is similar to a constructivist one, but the focus of such an approach is based in advocacy and social justice, and so lies just outside of the scope of this study. Thus, a constructivist, empirical approach is best suited to this study of instructional communication.

To offer further support for the use of the chosen methods, Dollar and Merrigan (2002) argued that qualitative studies can confirm and extend existing communication theory as well as problematize conventional wisdom (as cited in Lindlof & Taylor, 2010, p. 19). Ethnography is useful when seeking to understand the dynamic nature of a communication group, and as Geertz (1973) argues, can offer a “thick description,” of behavior within, or culture of a group (p. 6). Because the discovery of, and exploration into, the nature of communicative phenomena is fundamental to this study, qualitative and ethnographic methods are the most suitable for this type of endeavor.

**Research Design**

Because this study pushes the boundaries of instructional communication by attempting to establish that important learning opportunities exist within a very non-traditional instructional setting, it was necessary to employ multiple methods of data
gathering and analysis in order to triangulate where and how learning phenomena exist. The following sections explain the foci of each data collection method as well as the analysis approach used.

**Method One – Interviews**

Six adult-participant interviews were obtained for use in this study. Adult interview questions sought to examine participants’ experiences within group sessions, specifically in terms of the group’s perceived intent and strategy, as well as to discover perceived differences or similarities between traditional classroom instruction and instructional processes within YEAGA. Also targeted were indicators of personal transformation as experienced by those who have been “successful” within YEAGA in terms of witnessing or experiencing a change in understanding about themselves or others.

Interview questions were semi-structured and targeted interviewees’ perceptions of how YEAGA sessions function, what is happening when communication within a session is working (what indicates that a youth is being affected within a session), what benefit(s) the interviewee experiences from sessions, and perceived differences between what traditional school offers and what YEAGA sessions offer. Semi-structured interviewing uses a set of pre-developed questions that are derived from the research questions, and this semi-structured nature of the interview allows for deeper exploration into any answers of interest or examples
offered that arise out of the conversation. As an example, one planned question that interviewees were asked was, “What is it that you are trying to teach youth in YEAGA sessions?” In one instance the answer given involved a description of empowering youth to make informed decisions. This answer triggered the follow-up question, “What do you think it is that happens in a group session that empowers a youth?” In this case, semi-structured questions led to a deeper exploration into the nature of the communication within group sessions.

Interviews were conducted in a variety of locations, some over the phone, some in participants’ homes, some before and after the observed session. These interviews were digitally recorded on a handheld field recorder with enough capacity to store all interviews, and were later transcribed into question and answer format.

Answers were analyzed in search of evidence indicating patterns of communicative interaction. Of particular interest to this analysis were passages or statements that suggested a pattern related to any of the major foci from the literature review in chapter two; symbolic interactionism, social cognition, identity formation, coded language, situational and transformational learning and/or communicative projects.

In addition to the six interviews with adult participants, one interview was conducted with a youth participant following the session observation. This interview
arrangement was the only youth interview granted, and was used along with the findings at the end of the study.

**Method Two – Session Observation**

An observation of one YEAGA group session was conducted. I peripherally participated in the session, which meant that I sat with the group in the circle of chairs, and introduced myself, and my reason for attending, but did not participate in any verbal interactions outside of introductions – with the exception of a few times when one young participant who sat next to me would smile at me and comment on the notes I was taking. During the session, copious, handwritten notes were taken in a paper notebook. These field notes first described the setting of the session and the pre-meeting preparations. Once the session began and introductions had concluded, I concentrated on noting what was said, by whom, and with what inflection or expression. I also made a point of noting any significant body language, especially of the youth who was the subject of the immediate dialogue. In the interest of creating as rich and thorough a record of the session as possible, I transcribed my notes as soon as I returned that afternoon.

For clarification, it is important here to describe how YEAGA sessions generally proceed. Sessions are generally attended by four to six youth and between five and ten adult participants. After introductions, the group’s focus rests on one youth participant for a period of time. The time spent on any particular youth can be
from 30 minutes to an hour. During this time, a great deal of effort is shared on dialoguing with the youth. After a breakthrough, a resolution, or an impasse, the group’s efforts are gently focused onto the next youth. This format allowed me to focus my notes on one youth’s actions, reactions and responses – which was fortunate. Less fortunate for my note-taking was that any number of adults engage with the subject youth during their part of the session, which made observations of the adults’ actions and reactions much more difficult, but had little affect on the noted dialogue.

**Data Reduction and Analysis**

As soon as data collection began, the process of analysis began as well. This was a recursive process during and after fieldwork. It was also a heuristic, reflective and situated process, as I was learning what to look for and how to identify things as I went about looking for and identifying them. Patton (1987) noted that analysis achieves multiple purposes; it allows for the organization and reduction of data, and allows that data to form itself into themes and patterns.

Because my goal with this study is ultimately to uncover how learning proceeds in YEAGA sessions, it was my hope that interview data could be organized and reduced into markers of learning, and that observational data could begin to evidence patterns of learning. With this in mind, I performed a close contextual
Through close, contextual readings of the interviews, themes emerged that indicated what, why, and how communicative events work within group sessions. The questions that were planned for interviews were: 1) Is there something that you feel YEAGA offers to youth participants that you didn’t get when you were young? 2) What is it that you are trying to teach? 3) How do you know when the session works? 4) What if anything do you learn from YEAGA sessions? Again, these were semi-structured questions that allowed for researcher or interviewee to expand on any answer.

Analysis of the answers revealed that most interviewees offered multiple indicators of how, when or why communication works within sessions. All answers given were used to create three categories: How it works, why it works, and when it works. Table 1 summarizes the themes found under each of the categories.
Table 1

*Categories and Themes of Working*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How it works</th>
<th>When it works</th>
<th>Why it works</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sharing personal experiences</td>
<td>Repeated attendance</td>
<td>Searching for identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offering options</td>
<td>Personal connection</td>
<td>Aloneness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening/Personal attention</td>
<td>Body language</td>
<td>Seeking approval</td>
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<td>Honesty</td>
<td>Verbal language</td>
<td>Group cognition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trust/Safety</td>
<td>Facial expression</td>
<td>Sharing transformation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love</td>
<td>Crying</td>
<td>Empathy</td>
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</table>

From the observational data, I was able to extract two remarkable youth-participant sessions. Those two cases were analyzed for communicative projects through the lens of CMM, focusing especially on projects that produced a change in the youth participant’s body or verbal language or expression – indicators of when it is working. I also examined data for instances of reconstructing resources, encouraging learning through praxis, and helping to recreate meanings – I pulled out communicative projects from the overall project that could serve as strong examples of working communication within the session. Participant interaction data were grouped together and these events were analyzed for evidence of communicative intent within the nature of the project, the question asked or the statement made by either adult or youth participant. Also, questions asked by the adult participants were
analyzed in hopes of uncovering a communicative intent within the larger project that pointed toward a technique, however ambiguous, that the adults share.

In an effort to be as thorough with the data as possible, I worked the other way; scouring through the observation transcript for any possible indicators of significant moments and then carefully revisiting the interview data for any missing pieces. This proved to be unnecessary due to a lack of additional useable data.

When I was convinced that I had been as thorough as possible, I began the process of triangulating the data. Lindlof and Taylor (2010) note, “If the data from two or more methods point toward the same conclusion, then validation is enhanced.” (p. 274). This process, then, was a matter of using the categorized markers of how, when, and why communication works within YEAGA sessions and comparing those to passages of transcript within the observation. I then had to find what type of learning was being pointed to before unpacking the dialogue around those moments to find significance in process.

**Study Organization**

This thesis is organized around two case studies. The need for this arrangement became evident immediately after the group session observation. In that session there were five youth-participants. I decided not to analyze the data collected from three of the youth-participants sessions; one was due to an overabundance of very sensitive legal information that could not be affected by the
group and was outside of the scope of this study; the other two were due to the participants’ ages and the types of issues addressed, which were also outside the scope of the study.

For clarity, it is important to state the common procedure of YEAGA meetings. Group sessions are conducted organically – there is no stated timetable or outline of how a session functions. PB, the group’s executive director has extensive experience conducting youth group sessions of this type, so he takes on the role of the organizer within sessions – choosing the order of focus as the session proceeds. Each youth participant in a group session is the focus of the group’s efforts, and is given as long as needed, or as possible.

The two case studies that I present are the strongest examples available for this study of what YEAGA does. I have kept the arrangement of the two cases in their original order. Major excerpts from the transcripts will precede the analysis. Within the analysis, I will offer quotes from the interviews that help to explain what was going on or what interviewees’ perceptions of the moment might have been.

YEAGA in Context

YEAGA began in 2005, in Roseville, California, a large, urban community on the outskirts of Sacramento. PB, the group’s executive director had served an extensive prison sentence that began at San Quentin and ended at Folsom State Prison. He took an interest in a youth diversion program in San Quentin called
SQUIRES when he was there, and he went on to help establish diversion programs of his own at other facilities – the last one out of Folsom State Prison – which YEAGA takes their youth to one or two times a year.

YEAGA is a community organization with a small contingent of five adults who work to keep it running. MB, the group’s coordinator works as a school counselor in the area, and as such, she offers the group as a resource to parents with youth who are at risk. Youth who attend the program come from a variety of backgrounds; many are exposed to or involved in gang activities. Most of the adult interviewees spoke of gang affiliation as the catalyst for misbehavior in their own youth.

Participants

The participants who took part in the study did so through one-on-one interviews, as part of a group session observation, or both. In order to secure interviews, YEAGA’s coordinator, MB, kindly obtained permission from willing participants to share their contact information with me. I then made arrangements to meet with them to conduct the interview. MB, who was familiar with the goal of this study also worked diligently to put me in contact with former youth participants who take part in YEAGA as adults.

Prior to the start of each interview, participants were informed of the subject of the research. An emphasis was put on the communicative process within group
sessions and the perceptions of the interviewee. Because of the semi-structured nature of the questions, I was able to hone in on interviewees perceptions of the communication phenomena within group sessions.

**Researcher Bias**

With an interpretive approach to data analysis, a discussion of researcher bias is necessary. I am admittedly a strong supporter of what YEAGA does for youth, and I want them to continue their work. My own biases toward the group might skew the data analysis and prevent negative connotations from affecting my findings. To remedy any bias that might appear, I made a concerted effort to nullify such bias through careful method design and systematic application of that method. My intention with this project is simply to reveal how instructional communication proceeds in YEAGA sessions, to formulate a strong argument for the importance of this type of learning, and to point toward future research. While my connection to the mission of YEAGA may have a slight impact on this study in terms of objectivity, I feel that my existing affinity towards the group’s work offered me a more informed perspective.

Although I am interested in the success of YEAGA and groups like it, I do not have extensive experience or contacts within the group. One year before the study began, I met both the Executive Director and Coordinator of the group and began to take an interest in the work that they do. In early 2015, I attended two
group sessions in order to get a feel for the type of data that could be collected, and around the same time I chaperoned a group of youth participants to Folsom State Prison to attend the Youth Diversion Program there. The initial two contacts that I made continue to be the strongest connection within the group. I consider myself an informed researcher, but not deeply embedded within the context of the group or of the community of participants.

Confidentiality

Human studies research approval was granted by California State University, Sacramento’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to the start of this study. Each adult participant in the study signed an approved research consent form. Each youth participant received a parental consent form as well as a youth assent form – both approved by the IRB. Confidentiality within the scope of the study was guaranteed to all subjects. Because of the sensitive nature of the information gathered during observation and interviews, all names have been removed and participants have been given a coded identification.

For further confidentiality, I have redacted information of a sensitive, personal nature such as medical diagnoses or household situations that I deemed unnecessary to the study. There was also some personal information that would, if disclosed in the transcript, hinder the confidentiality of the participants by making them easily identifiable. By redacting certain information I am maintaining IRB
confidentiality but also am honoring the high level of trust that YEAGA holds with their youth participants.
Chapter 4

CASE STUDIES AND ANALYSES

Introduction

This chapter is comprised of a setting description of the YEAGA group session that was observed, followed by the presentation of two significant case studies from that session. Each of the case studies is presented in its own sub-section, and is analyzed in three to four significant parts throughout that segment. In both case studies, passages of dialogue that contain events that relate to the themes found in Table 1 are presented. The significance of those themes will be explained in the context of the event and will be defined next to the theme title. Multiple passages and analyses (marked Part A,B,C, etc.) will be presented in succession, and the sub-section will conclude with an diagram and overview of the communication proceedings found in the analysis using theme titles.

Please note again that sensitive personal or medical information disclosed within the dialogue has been redacted from the transcript, as has any information that can be used to identify a youth or adult participant. Each instance of this type of disclosure is noted with “[Redacted].”
Setting and Group “Rules”

As stated in the previous chapter, YEAGA group sessions last about six hours on one or two Saturdays per month. Group sessions begin at 9 a.m. On this occasion, one hour before the session start was dedicated to setting up the room for the meeting – chairs were set in a circle and tables were pushed aside in order to facilitate the group discussion. During that hour the group’s coordinator, MB, also ensured that food and drinks were provided and available for everyone for the duration of the session. Additionally, she made “wake up and get here” calls to any participants who were not present, but who were expected to attend. During the session, the door remained open because there was no other activity on the small high school campus, and in case someone else showed up. All participants were encouraged to eat, drink and use the restroom freely and at any time during the session.

Once the 13 participants were settled in their chairs, a welcome was given by PB and “rules” were stated as follows:

What is said in the room stays in the room. Because of that, we want you to tell us the truth. The point of being here is not so that you just say what you think we want to hear. Even though we may not like what we hear, we can work with the truth.

There was another “rule” stated at the beginning of Case Study 2, which is important to present now as it speaks to the confidentiality and trust that is part of the group’s
culture. In order to maintain a high level of trust between adults and youth in YEAGA, youth participants are asked not to disclose any offenses or transgressions except those that they have already gotten in trouble for. In essence, this is YEAGA’s “fifth amendment” wherein students are not to self-incriminate. The reason for this is that there should never be a question in the youth’s mind that an adult spoke about a youth’s actions with authorities. By this, adults in YEAGA attempt to create an environment in which youth can talk openly without the threat of punitive recourse.

**Case Study 1: Participant P1**

The first meeting under analysis started late because P1 was unable to find a ride to the school. She called the MB, who went to pick her up. They returned shortly after 9 a.m. P1 entered the room and sat down for introductions. She was wearing an ankle monitor. During the introduction, she stated that she was there because she gets in trouble for drugs. The group immediately wanted to engage with her, but the discussion was tabled until introductions were over.

The following is an analysis of P1’s session time. A transcript of the full session can be found in Appendix A with case studies identified.

For all following passages in this case study, P1 is the only youth in conversation; all other s (Jm, GG, MB, A, J, JA and PB) are adult participants.
Part A

Transcript for analysis.

1 Jm: “Why do you like it?” [referring to previous reference to drugs]

2 P1: “I was diagnosed with [Redacted]. But mostly because I just like the way it makes me feel.”

3 GG: “Your friends do it too?”

4 P1: “Some. And I don’t listen to the people at drug court because I don’t like the way they talk to me - like I’m stupid or slow or something.”

5 MB: “Maybe you can teach them how you want to be approached. You know, some of the people who work at drug court want to help you, but they don’t know your experience and where you’re coming from.”

6 Pause

7 MB: “They don’t know how smart you are; maybe they assume that you’ve fried your brain on drugs.”

8 Another pause as MB watches P1, who is gazing past her.

9 MB: “How do you want them to approach you?”
P1: “I’d prefer it if they were blunt and told me what I need to know without talking to me like I’m a baby.”

MB: “Okay then, maybe if you try to tell them that. You know, there are some people who work there who really want to help, they can’t know what you know unless you tell them.”

P1: Agrees with a silent nod – looking down.

GG: “If you don’t speak up and tell the people who want to listen where you are – you can be pretty sure of where you’re going to end up. And you know it, don’t you?”

P1: Agrees with a quiet “yeah.”

A: Relates to her drug use through his own experience before he came to YEAGA. He knows how it feels and how it gets progressively worse. “It starts with just a little weed at a party or something, and then you get something for yourself, and you use a little everyday, then it’s not enough – you try something else to get high – and it keeps going and going.”

MB: “I know it too – I knew it was getting bad, but I didn’t have the tools to help myself – you need to find the things that work for you to help you solve your situation.”
**Analysis.** Up until this point in the discussion, P1 had been answering questions simply, or not at all – especially when she was asked if she wanted to get clean or stay clean. The lack of a reply to that question lead one of the adult participants to say, “Just keep it real, you don’t have to lie to us – maybe you don’t want to get clean.” This signaled several interesting events within the dialogue that speak to processes of social cognition, and arguably, of an invitation to be more than a passive participant in the community of practice that is YEAGA.

**Event 1.** This event enacts the themes of *offering options* and *listening/personal attention*. The question of whether P1’s friends do drugs too (line 4) made her uncomfortable enough to change the topic immediately (line 5 – 6), and point out that she is forced to talk to people at drug court who think she is stupid.

*Offering options.* In line 7, MB immediately began to offer a creative way to deal with P1’s stated problem. In her interview, MB noted the importance of paying attention to what is being said – “I tell our members... pay attention to your client [the youth]... pay attention to whether you caught that child... if not, then listen to what’s going on with them again... don’t just keep talking.” Her solution for P1 was an effort to reconstruct resources, a marker of CMM discussed in chapter two, page 38 (Pearce, 1989, p. 23). In this case, the resource can be seen as people who want to help, and reconstruction was attempted by suggesting that P1 tell them how she would like to be approached (lines 7 – 19).
**Listening/Personal attention.** In lines 7 – 19 of this event, MB also demonstrated the importance of listening by not glossing over what P1 said in the interest of continuing the conversation about drugs. At the end of this transcript passage, lines 31 – 32, MB returned to the project of personal attention – “...you have to find the things that work for you to solve your situation.” This statement acknowledged the personal and individual nature of P1’s situation. RM spoke to the need for this kind of personal attention by saying “YEAGA is different because we meet our kids on their own levels... We let them drive – we don’t tell them where they need to go. What works for one kid might not work for another.”

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<th>Glossary entry</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Offering options:</strong> proposing the reconstruction of a youth’s point of view about their situation from one that is hopeless to one that is constructive.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Listening/Personal attention:</strong> paying close attention to how a youth is presenting her own situation; offering solutions shaped to students.</td>
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**Event 2.** This event enacts the theme of *trust/safety.* Immediately following MB’s resource reconstruction, GG attempted to reinforce the importance of practicing that new resource by saying, “If you don’t speak up and tell the people who want to listen where you are – you can be pretty sure of where you’re going to end up. And you know it, don’t you?” This statement, found in lines 21 – 23, served multiple functions – an indicator of a communicative project’s nestedness within
bigger projects (Linell, 2010). One of the statement’s functions was to reinforce this new way to speak to people who might want to help – to offer this new insight.

*Trust/safety.* Also in lines 21 – 23, and tightly tied into the purpose of reinforcing what was said by MB; GG enacted the trust/safety theme; another task of reiterating that the adults in the group who were sitting around her were those people “who want to listen.” This was an attempt to establish trust with P1 and to recontextualize with her what it means to talk with people in the group about herself.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Glossary entry</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trust/safety:</strong> framing the discussion group as one in which a youth may speak about him or herself freely and without threat of rejection.</td>
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**Event 3.** This event enacts the theme of *sharing personal experiences.* Participant A started another thread in the conversation by relating to her from his own, lived experience. This demonstrated the flexibility within this conversation to move in and out of topics, which is also a key marker that CMM is functioning in its serpentine pattern.

*Sharing personal experiences.* Of note in this event is that A began attending YEAGA as a high school student, and in his interview he said that one of the things that was valuable to him about YEAGA is that “You’re able to learn from the O.G.s – the elders and what they’ve gone through.” By sharing his personal experiences
(lines 25 – 29) and relating them to P1’s experience he communicated a shared experience and meaning with her.

**Glossary entry**

**Sharing personal experiences**: relating to a youth’s experience through sharing of a similar personal experience – a precursor to sharing transformation as well as to establishing a personal connection with a participant.

Within this transcript passage were several items that contain some of the indicators of how communication works within group sessions. I have shown evidence of four of these indicators, all of which have been categorized under how it works. The following excerpt happened after several participants attempted to dialogue with P1, but were unsuccessful – she mostly shrugged and said “I don’t know.” It is important to reveal for the following excerpt that JA is an ex-convict on lifetime parole as well as a former gang member. Prior to this excerpt, JA had stayed silent except to ask P1 how she afforded her addiction.

**Part B**

**Transcript for analysis.**

1. JA: relates that his was the same drug of choice – he speaks in detail about how he’s been clean for so many years but he still has a physiological reaction when he sees that particular drug in a movie or if someone even says
the word. He says his nose tingles when he thinks about it, so he practices
making the choice not to use drugs everyday - constantly. He says that before,
all of his focus was on getting and using drugs, and wherever your focus is
that’s where you go. He offers an example – “If you’re walking down the
street and there’s an accident at the side of the road and you are focusing on it,
that is where your body will go. You can’t look one way and walk another –
not for too long, anyway. He asks where she’s going to focus her energy
when the ankle bracelet comes off.

P1: looks uncomfortable now – her right leg is crossed over the left, and her
foot is twitching up and down energetically – her left hand is in her lap and
she’s scratching her nails together. She is looking intently toward JA with a
furrowed brow, but doesn’t answer.

JA: continues that he has to stay clean for his kids – he wants to be there for
them and he doesn’t want them to get in trouble like he did. He talks about
his parents and how they tried to help him. Then he talks about himself as a
parent trying to teach his children.

P1: as JA talks, her left leg starts twitching nervously to the point that her
whole body shakes with it – she tears up but doesn’t cry.
Analysis.

_event 4_. This event enacts the themes of _sharing transformation_ and _group cognition_. JA discussed his personal and intimate knowledge of the experience that he and P1 have in common, which revolves around drugs.

_Sharing transformation_. In line 1, JA relates his own experience to P1’s current situation, he exemplified the possibility of transformation (line 6 and 16-19) and reached out to P1 (lines 9-11) through their shared meaning. In sharing the transformation that he has made in his own life, he illustrated to P1 that her future is not determined by her current situation.

_Group cognition_. Additionally, this entire excerpt (lines 1-21) displays a strong indicator of social/group cognition. In an interview with PB, Executive Director of YEAGA, he said that he learned through experience (he helped to start several youth diversion programs while imprisoned) that “...if you see that someone is saying something that is working, it means that you need to sit back and listen and let it happen.” This excerpt houses two of the longest, uninterrupted passages in the entire transcript – both spoken by JA – as P1’s body language transformed (lines 12-15 and 20-21). The rest of the group sat silently and watched P1 and JA. Both sharing transformation and group cognition are indicators of why it works.
**Glossary entry**

**Sharing transformation**: exemplifying the possibility of transforming one’s current circumstance by sharing a personal experience of transformation; linking a previous thought or action pattern to a substantially different pattern.

**Group cognition**: a situational awareness displayed by the group of participants who are actively seeking ways to connect with a youth; this can entail actively engaging in or refraining from immediate dialogue.

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**Event 5.** This event enacts the themes of *body language, facial expression,* and *crying*. One of the indicators of when it works that became evident throughout interview analysis was a change in P1’s body language, a change in facial expression, and crying (in this case, tearing up).

*Body language*. Lines 12 – 14 and 20 – 21 shows the transition from sitting casually with one leg crossed to shaking the whole body by twitching a foot, which conveyed to the group that she was hearing what was being said.

*Facial expression*. Her change in facial expression showed in lines 14 – 15– a furrowed brow – indicated the same type of emotional change.
Crying. Line 21 shows the kind of change that several interviewees look for to know when dialogue is beginning to work. When PG, a former youth participant who is now an adult was asked how he knows when communication is working, he said, “You see it in their face when they’re about to break. Their eyes will start getting all watery and that one tear comes down, and a lot more follow. Everyone breaks.”

**Glossary entry**

**Body language**: a change in physical demeanor displayed by a youth that reflects some connection with the group’s dialogue; or by an adult participant to emphasize an idea.

**Facial expression**: a change in facial expression displayed by a youth that reflects some connection with the group’s dialogue.

**Crying**: a physical expression that indicates that group dialogue is having an effect on a youth.

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**Part C**

**Transcript for Analysis.**

1  PB: “Why are you here?”

2  P1: “For community service hours. I know it’s disrespectful to you all and I know that it’s wrong, but that’s why I’m here. I don’t want to just say it
because I don’t want to make everyone here feel bad that you can’t help me and get all mad at me, even though you should.”

PB: “Why should we be mad at you? You’re telling us the truth just like we asked you to. Maybe you should be mad. Why aren’t you mad?”

P1: I don’t want to get all mad and act up – it’s stupid to throw a fit. I know I shouldn’t just be here for hours taking up your time, because you guys want to help me and I don’t want you to. I don’t want to be disrespectful, but I don’t want help either. I know I’m a piece of shit – my parents tell me that all the time and...” crying.

PB: shifts in his seat so that he’s facing her and leaning in trying to make eye contact. “Let me tell you something, and it’s important – no matter what you say, I am here for you. You’re not a piece of shit, no matter what anyone says – and to prove that you’re not a piece of shit – everyone in this room is here for you and believes in you.”

P1: trying to hold back her tears.

PB: “You’re processing a lot right now, and we don’t want you to feel like we’re tearing you up, so we’re going to go on to someone else and get back to you. You just sit with that for a while.”

P1: nods.
Analysis.

Event 6. This event enacts themes of *honesty, trust/safety* and *verbal language*. P1’s declaration in lines 2 – 5 that she did not want help to stop her drug use indicated a couple of interrelated phenomena within the conversation.

**Honesty.** P1’s statement in line 2 that she was only attending for community service hours challenged the bond that the group was attempting to create with her. A major claim of social interactionism explored in Chapter two is that acceptance or rejection from a group is dependent on people’s interpretations of others’ behaviors (p. 16). Her willingness to be honest is a further indicator of socialization into the group.

**Trust/safety.** P1 restated in line 10 that she did not want the group to help her, but she didn’t want them to be mad either. Instead of getting mad, PB asks her why she isn’t mad in lines 6 – 7, again reinforcing the discussion group as a safe place to talk without the threat of being rejected. I also see in this part of the event that PB could have been challenging P1’s understanding of who is allowed to be angry, in essence acknowledging her feelings of anger whether she expresses them or not.

**Verbal language.** P1’s disclosure on lines 11 – 12 marked a significant change in her verbal language. Up until this point in the dialogue her answers had been polite and factual, but she had not talked about her feelings. Her statement here indicates a turn inward toward from all previous statements.
**Glossary entry**

**Honesty**: willingness to engage in truthful dialogue about one’s circumstances, feelings or understandings.

**Trust/safety**: framing the discussion group as one in which a youth may speak about him or herself freely and without threat of rejection.

**Verbal language**: a change in utterances that reflects a change in an actor’s perspective or a different level of dialogue.

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**Event 7**. This event enacts themes of *listening/personal attention*, *body language*, *verbal language*, *personal connection*, and *seeking approval*.

*Listening/personal attention*. Of note in the above excerpt is that the group collectively stopped to listen to P1 as she confessed that she felt herself disrespectful (line 2 – 5). PB underlined the importance of this kind of listening when he said, “They [youth] don’t need you to agree with them, they just want to know that you can hear them.”

*Body language*. Of particular interest, seen in lines 13 – 14, was PB’s reaction to P1’s disclosure in lines 11 – 12 about her feeling of self-worth. He shifted toward her in his seat – closing the physical gap between them. This marks a change from an indicator of a youth’s connection with the dialogue to an adult intention with the dialogue.
Verbal language. There is another change from youth connection to adult intention found in lines 14 – 17 when PB says, “I am here for you... everyone in this room is here for you...” which in turn, began to reconstruct the habitus of the group, now to include her.

Personal connection. Through PB’s use of body and verbal language, lines 14 – 17 were an attempt to establish a personal connection with P1.

Seeking approval. PB’s body language, verbal language and personal connection established that the bond with the group continued unbroken (see Event 6), and, in fact, that it had been strengthened because she told the truth, in essence, offering approval for her honest disclosure.

Glossary entry

Listening/Personal attention: paying close attention to how a youth is presenting their own situation; offering solutions shaped to students.

Body language: a change in physical demeanor displayed by a youth that reflects some connection with the group’s dialogue; or by an adult participant to emphasize an idea.

Verbal language: a change in utterances that reflects a change in an actor’s perspective or a different level of dialogue.

Personal connection: the bond established between a youth and an adult or adults by means of any method.

Seeking approval: maintaining an unbroken, personal and group connection with a youth by continually putting forth the effort to connect with them; framing the group as an alternate source of support.
Conclusion

Throughout P1’s session time, she challenged, and was challenged by group participants. These confrontations and their resolutions seem promising for P1 if we take into account the indicators of transformation (or of working) that became evident. The fluid nature of CMM, and of the small and large communicative projects that comprise the dialogue, have carried various phenomena inherent to identity formation and instructional communication from the beginning of the dialogue through to the end of this particular communicative project.
Case Study 2: Participant P2

The second case study involves a young man, P2, who was brought to the group for the first time on this day by A – a former youth participant. In his introduction, P2 stated that he has been involved in a gang, but he wants out. Nobody in the room had met P2 before this session except for A. PB selected him for discussion after P1 and two other youth had talk time. He sat quietly and payed attention to the previous participants’ engagement, but did not participate.

Part A

Transcript for Analysis.

1 GG: “What are the benefits for you of being in a gang?”

2 P2: “I thought that I’d be cool, really, that was it, but then one of my friends got me really messed up.” He is sitting forward with his elbows on his knees and looking at his hands.

3 JR: “You know that all those homies will turn on you – sometime.”

4 P2: “Yeah. I know – I know it. I want out but I keep getting harassed. I mean, I get good grades, I take advanced classes.”

5 GG: “Then why are you dressed like that?”

6 P2: “I’ve always dressed like this. These are my clothes.”
GG: “You’re dressed like a gang member. If you want out, don’t dress like you don’t.”

L: “I was in the same situation as you, you know. I was taking AP classes, and trying my best, but everyone kept trying to mess with me. It was hard to ignore them, but I kept trying, and eventually, they just forget about you.”

Analysis.

Event 8. This event enacts themes of aloneness, searching for identity, and seeking approval. In this case, P2’s aloneness and his search for identity are closely related and happen together. From interviews, these particular themes were discussed in relation to gangs. In his interview, former gang-member and ex-convict, JA said,

I know that teens are trying to find themselves, and usually – especially some of the kids we see – feel like everyone (or every adult anyway) is fighting them and wants to hold them back, and it makes them feel alone. When you’re alone like that, it’s natural to try to seek the approval of others, and if those others are kids who will get you in trouble, then you do that.

Aloneness. In line 5, JR brings up the idea that P2’s “homies” will eventually betray him – acknowledged by P2 in line 6 – forcing him to face his aloneness. The
theme of aloneness was established as a reason why group sessions work. In the above quote, JA acknowledges that youth can feel alone as they struggle for identity. Thus far, themes of how it works have established the ways in which this group offers youth a sense of trust and safety. At the same time, one of the larger projects that the group maintains with any youth is to construct the group as an alternative to that aloneness.

Searching for identity. In lines 8 – 11 P2’s search for identity was challenged by GG. GG noted the incongruence between what P2 said he wants (out of the gang) in relation to his action (the way he dresses). In chapter two, I examined identity formation through the theory of symbolic interactionism. The symbol, in this case P2’s clothing, is reconstructed by GG from the point of view of the gang who P2 notes in line 6 is harassing him.

Seeking approval. Lines 1 – 11 reflected a larger communicative project that entailed challenging how P2 gained approval from his peers previously, and framing the group as an alternative to the kind of approval that gangs offer.
Glossary entry

**Aloneness**: offering group resources as an alternative to youths’ sense of isolation during stages of identity formation.

**Searching for identity**: offering group knowledge as a tool for youth to construct meaning about themselves.

**Seeking approval**: maintaining an unbroken, personal and group connection with a youth by continually putting forth the effort to connect with them; framing the group as an alternate source of support.

**Event 9.** This event enacted themes of *sharing transformation*. This theme was enacted in one statement found in lines 12 – 14. To offer a bit of insight into the significance that this statement might have carried for P2; participant L was only about three years older than P2 and they shared the experience of taking advanced placement classes. In his introduction, L said that he started in YEAGA a few years ago when he was struggling with peer pressure and gangs and that he has now been accepted to a local university and has won a scholarship.

*Sharing transformation.* By relating that he had been in a similar situation as P2, L’s statement served as immediate, relatable evidence to P2 that YEAGA might be able to help him to transform his difficult situation. I further argue that the alignment made by L with P2’s experience was encouragement for him to fully engage in situational learning with the group.
Glossary entry

Sharing transformation: exemplifying the possibility of transforming one’s current circumstance by sharing a personal experience of transformation; linking a previous thought or action pattern to a substantially different pattern.

This larger project (lines 1 – 14) served the purpose of testing and challenging P2’s cognition or reasoning about his situation. Additionally, this larger project served to communicate the group’s relation to and understanding of the complications that gang affiliation imposes. I argue that this series of small projects (questions/statements and responses) were nested within a larger project that was intended to establish the foundation of P2’s relationship to the group and vice versa; in essence, making a connection between him and the group.

Part B

Transcript for Analysis.

1 PB: “What else is going on with you?”

2 P2: Explains that he has problems at home. [REDACTED]

3 The group sits quietly and listens while P2 explains his complicated home-life [REDACTED] Clarifying questions are asked about various household
situations and dynamics. Once everyone agreed that they have some level of clarity on P2’s situation, a question is posed about how he gets into trouble.

PB: “What is your trigger?” (what frustrates him to the point that he wants to act out)

P2: Explains that his triggers are stepdad’s mistreatment and/or his mom’s illness [REDACTED]. He also says that he has been to counseling for a lot of stuff and has learned some coping mechanisms for when he gets triggered.

P2’s stance, verbal inflection, facial expression has been monotone throughout his statements. He sits in the same position with his elbows on his knees. He rarely shifts in his chair. He looks at his hands or at the floor. He makes fleeting eye contact, but does not seem to establish a connection with anyone. All of his statements are followed by a shrug and a toss to the side as if it is being discarded.

PB: Acknowledges his intelligence and insight and then leans toward P2 in his chair and tries to establish eye contact, but is unable to. He asks, “How do you see your situation?”

P2: “Really, I just don’t care about much right now.” No shrug this time, but still monotone.

PB: still leaning in – “That’s really serious.”
Other adults lean in toward him now.

Analysis.

**Event 10.** This event enacts the theme *listening/personal attention*. Lines 1 – 6 offer evidence that the group wants to understand P2’s situation.

*Listening/personal attention.* The group expressed a clear interest in, and made efforts toward understanding the complicated home situation of P2. By this, the group attempted to share in what P2 meant when he talked about home.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Glossary entry</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Listening/Personal attention:</strong> paying close attention to how a youth is presenting her own situation; offering solutions shaped to students.</td>
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**Event 11.** This event enacts themes of *group cognition* and *body language*.

*Group cognition.* In line 7, PB investigated how P2’s frustrations with his situation affect his behavior. By this, the group demonstrated their understanding of the connectedness between events, and sought to connect with P2 on this deeper level of understanding.

*Body language.* In lines 18-20, PB leaned in toward P2 in order to emphasize the importance of the question “How do you see your situation?” The abstract nature
of this question implied a deeper probing into P2’s view of his situation, and the answer “Really, I just don’t care about much right now” caught the whole group’s attention. PB’s reaction, “That’s really serious,” created meaning with P2 and the entire group about the gravity of his situation. The group’s cognition about the significance of the statement was indicated in line 24, by a shift from sitting normally (as they had been) to leaning in toward P2 – a change in the group’s collective body language.

**Glossary entry**

**Group cognition**: a situational awareness displayed by the group of participants who are actively seeking ways to connect with a youth; this can entail actively engaging in or refraining from immediate dialogue.

**Body language**: a change in physical demeanor displayed by a youth that reflects some connection with the group’s dialogue; or by an adult participant to emphasize an idea.

**Part C**

A little bit later in the session, P2 showed none of the physical indicators that communication has worked. He leaned forward with his elbows on his knees, rarely shifted, looked at his hands or the floor, and made only fleeting eye contact with anyone. Also, as noted in the transcript, all of his statements were followed by a shrug and a toss to the side as if they were being discarded as unimportant.
Transcript for Analysis.

1 PB: “That’s a whole lotta weight, man.”

2 P2: “yeah, I guess so” no shrug

3 PB: “I don’t know if anybody could carry all that weight by themselves – not for too long anyway – but you’re trying to. Let’s try something else.”

4 PB has P2 stand up and put his chair in the middle of the circle. P2 smiles a little unsurely about it but PB reassures him it’s just an exercise. P2 moves the chair and PB says, “That chair is your problem.” PB tells him to pick it up and hold it in the air. He does so with one hand and smiles with a shrug. PB acknowledges that he’s really good at carrying his own weight. PB takes his chair (problem) and stacks it on top of P2’s and tells him to lift it up – he does, still with one hand. “Wow, you can carry my problems too – how about everyone else’s then...” Group members joyfully get up and stack their ‘problems’ on top of P2’s until they are stacked eight high. P2 lifts the stack of chairs with both hands not too high off the floor. “I can still do it,” he says.

5 PB says “could you carry all that everywhere you go everyday for the rest of your life?” P2 says “maybe not.” PB has group members remove their chairs one by one until P2 is only holding his own chair again.

6 PB: “You feel the difference?”
PB: “That chair is your problem, and that is the weight that is yours to carry. Everyone has their own weight. It’s hard to learn not to carry other people’s weight, but you can practice setting it aside – and it does take practice. Let’s say you get really frustrated with a situation – you get frustrated because you want to fix that situation for the person and for yourself, but you can’t always fix other people’s problems.” PB relates his own situation growing up in order to illustrate what ‘not caring’ can lead to.

PB: reflects to a time when he eventually stopped caring what anyone thought of his actions because he thought he was doing the right thing. “You have a good heart, and you’re really smart – but if you stop caring because you’re trying so hard to carry other people’s shit around – you let all that goodness inside of you die. That’s the stuff that you need to take care of the most because it’s who you really are. You’re a good guy.”

P2: nods his head slightly and looks down.
Analysis.

Event 12. This event enacts themes of empathy, offering options, listening/personal attention, and sharing personal experiences.

Empathy. In lines 1 – 4, PB expressed his understanding of P2’s struggle to carry the burdens he does. This expression of empathy is followed up at the end of the project in lines 30 – 34 when PB offered a reason why P2’s reevaluation of his situation is so important.

Offering options. The exercise in lines 5 – 25 recontextualized the idea of the weight of one’s own burden by representing the practice with the resources available in the room – chairs. Through this exercise PB and the group made the attempt to create a learning situation in a different way. In lines 21 – 34, the option of not carrying the burdens of others was restated as a difficult task to learn, but one that is important for P2.

Listening/personal attention. The exercise in lines 5 – 17 was an attempt to find an effective way to communicate with P2 about his experience, and also reflected the kind of practice that is found in some traditional classrooms where youth are given multiple approaches to interacting with a subject – through text, audio, or through hands-on exercise. The attempt to find an effective way to communicate a lesson to a student or youth is precisely what teachers do when they
employ Bloom’s Taxonomy, scaffolding, or other approaches to instruction that build on levels of understanding.

*Sharing personal experiences.* Lines 25 – 30 are evidence an attempt to connect with P2 through the sharing of PB’s similar experience in his youth. He specifically tried to connect the feeling of *doing the right thing* to the experience of eventually *not caring.*

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<tr>
<td><strong>Empathy:</strong> expressing understanding of a youth’s situation as a means to establish a connection with him or her.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Offering options:</strong> proposing the reconstruction of a youth’s point of view about their situation from one that is hopeless to one that is constructive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Listening/Personal attention:</strong> paying close attention to how a youth is presenting their own situation; offering solutions shaped to students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sharing personal experiences:</strong> relating to a youth’s experience through sharing of a similar personal experience – a precursor to establishing a personal connection with a participant.</td>
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**Part D**

Although P2 showed some, but not many indicators of something working during the remainder of his session time. I am skipping to a shift in the conversation that happened toward the end of his focus session.
Transcript for Analysis.

1  JA: “Do you do drugs?”

2  P2: “Just a little weed sometimes.” Smiling a little.

3  JA: “That’s how I started too.”

4  A discussion begins about gateway drugs and making a habit of good choices.

5  P1: quiet until now, engages with P2 directly about her own thought process at

6  the beginning of her addiction. “A little bit of weed would make me forget my

7  problems for a little while – that felt so great – but then it took more – and

8  then I just started finding more and more stuff I wanted to forget about.” She

9  tries to let out a short laugh, but a quick frown appears instead. She looks

10 down and away from P2.

Analysis. As I worked with this transcript, I confess that I missed the

significance of this moment through several readings. It was not until the process of

triangulation, as I looked for markers of when it is working that I realized what had

happened within this brief event. For this analysis, I will forego the previous format

and discuss the event as a whole.

Event 13. In this event, P1, the subject of case study 1, exemplified what

situational learning is. She had moved between levels of engagement within the

community of practice; she talked about her experience as a student, but tried on the
role of a teacher as well. P1 shared her personal experiences and recreated herself as a resource for others by connecting her experience to that of P2.

The language P1 used in this dialogue showed a significant change from her previous references to her use of drugs – this time she spoke of her drug use in the past tense. Finally, her facial expression exposed an unintended realization that her experience is not funny.

Her engagement in this way shared the idea that her own transformation was beginning. All at once in these few sentences P1 illustrated precise markers of how, when, and why YEAGA sessions work.

**Part D analysis follow-up.** I was fortunate to be able to interview P1 a week after this YEAGA session. I asked her to tell me about a time in her life when she realized something significant about herself. She immediately referred to the session I observed saying, “I guess that I’m a good listener because when I’m at YEAGA I feel like I can tell other kids... I feel like I have a lot of advice that I can give to them so they don’t go down the road I went down.”

The second question was about a time when a teacher at YEAGA made her rethink who she is as a person – what that teacher said, and how she responded. Again, she referred to the same YEAGA session,
I was talking about how I don’t know if I do want help or not, and he said that you’re... he was telling me real things and that I’m worth more and stuff. I was kinda in silent mode just because I didn’t know what to say to that, because growing up I was just like nothing... I was always in trouble and doing nothing with my life, and like, right now, it’s the same things going for me, it’s just hard trying to believe people – strangers, basically – trying to tell me that I’m worth more when I don’t really know what I’m worth.

I followed up with the question – When did you know that what he said was significant? She responded “When I thought back on it later.” This is evidence of P1’s adoption of reflective practice that is inherent in situational, liberatory and transformational learning, and that is demonstrated through the adult participants in YEAGA when they share their own stories of transformation.

**Conclusion**

I have found through these two case studies clear and empirical evidence of the beginning of transformation within this situated learning context. While I cannot state outright that what was observed in this study is evidence of transformation, I can assuredly say that it is evidence that the communication that happens within this particular group of people is instructional in nature and can lead to transformation. Added to this is the undeniable evidence that transformation can and does occur
within this group because of the number of participants who began attending
YEAGA sessions as youth-at-risk, and who are now attending as adults helping
youth.

The final chapter of this thesis will discuss the findings of this study, review
its limitations, and point toward future research.
Chapter 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This chapter discusses the findings of this study, reviews its limitations, and most importantly, offers some directions for future research based on those findings and limitations.

Discussion

The goal of this ethnographic study was to answer the research questions set forth in chapter two: How does instructional communication proceed in YEAGA? What instructional patterns facilitate the re-creation of student identity from prisoner to citizen? What constitutes transformational interaction in YEAGA?

Finding the answers to the research questions involved observing and analyzing YEAGA group sessions and leading participant interviews. A triangulated analysis of the group discussion data was conducted and revealed the themes summarized in Table 1. Through two case studies, instances of thematic discourse were found and at least partially supported from interview data. The glossary of themes and definitions found in Appendix C emerged as an epiphenomenon of the process of observing and naming patterns of interaction.

Overall, this study of YEAGA finds a uniquely instructional environment that deploys processes of identity formation and instructional communication to facilitate
cognitive and affective learning in student/clients. In YEAGA sessions there are several instructors at any one time attempting to find a way to establish a meaningful connection with a youth participant, and from that connection, to make alternative meanings with the youth about his or her life. Efforts put forward by adult participants in group sessions result in a team-teaching environment that employs a multi-faceted approach to establishing a foundational connection with a youth from which to foster transformational learning.

Instructional communication in YEAGA proceeds in a serpentine pattern like the model of CMM posed by Cronen, et al. (1989) wherein each level of social meaning exists within the context of levels before and after it. As was discussed in chapter two, Pearce (1989) said that communication is “...a recurring, reflexive process in which resources are expressed in practices and in which practices (re)construct resources” (p.23). In the case of YEAGA sessions, practices are the actions by which communication occurs, while resources are the constituents that inform those practices. The clearest evidence of reconstructing resources can be seen in Event 1 on page 63 and Event 4 on page 68. Within session interactions, adult participants reconstruct a youth’s resources from a different point of view – commonly through the practice of sharing experiences – and when this process is successful, the adult has in effect reconstructed him or herself as a resource for the youth to use in practice interacting with the world.
In group sessions, the themes found in interviews that formed Table 1 exhibited the same characteristics that Linell’s (2010) communicative projects do, and more closely resembles how communication functions toward a goal within YEAGA group sessions. Themes identified in the observed session evidenced the dynamic progression, asymmetrical participation, collective accomplishment, nestedness, size variation and multi-functionality of communicative projects that Linell describes. A clear but abbreviated example of the dynamic progression and collective accomplishment of a goal can be found in Events 8 and 9 on pages 77 – 80. Themes, in this case, push toward a shared social construction between youth participants and the team of instructors. The new, shared construction attempts to transform for youth what it means to talk to adults. It also functions to co-create the group as a safe place where youth and adults can be honest and express their feelings.

Instructors in YEAGA work toward meaningfully connecting with youth by honestly sharing life-experiences. The experiences related by adults articulate both negative consequences of choices as well as potentially positive transformations of students’ identities and futures. The curriculum consists of the shared experiences of the instructors. When an adult participant shares personal experiences, youth are essentially invited to interpret the adults’ behaviors and to construct new meanings about those behaviors as well as about themselves within the group. In turn, new meanings are created about the world. It is exactly this process that Symbolic Interactionism describes. By serving as active examples, adults foster the
reconstruction of youths’ situations from those that are hopeless and insurmountable, to those that are transformative and liberatory. As stated in chapter two, being a participant in YEAGA requires that a youth practice, on some level, expressing views about his or her situation, and then transforming that perspective through talk and reflection. Thus, transformation, inherent in learning to alter one’s perspective, aligns well with the kind of change found in Erikson’s (1968) eight stages of identity formation, and is critical in the fifth stage, adolescence, which is evident in the cases of P1 and P2. Former youth participants who now take part in group sessions as adults exemplify the possibility of transformation and the praxis of reflection.

Reflective and transformative praxis also points to what Bourdieu (1990) called the habitus that is created within this community of practice. Adult members offer new information to youth participants with which to begin rebuilding meanings. Younger adult participants help to exemplify the reconstruction process as they move through the community of practice toward inner levels. The habitus of YEAGA uses an open and inclusive language code that facilitates youth openly engaging the group in his or her own words. The coded interaction is similar to Bernstein’s (1996) “pedagogic device” (as discussed in chapter two). The distributive, recontextualizing and evaluative rules of the device are determined by the situation and needs of the student and are employed on that basis by instructors.

There is a larger pattern of communication that follows a person from the first session attended as a youth to his or her attendance as an adult participant. Patterns of
this kind would not be exactly reproducible as a script with other actors; however, patterns emerged from the organic, serpentine pathway taken by the group’s coordinated management of meaning. This is less of a pattern that could be visualized as a set of steps than it is an *effort* or a *push toward* a new, complex, and situated goal such as a transformed personal identity for a student.

For example, strong evidence of transformation was found with P1. To recap, a transformation occurring in the moment was found in Case Study 1, Part B – Event 4, and was nested within JA’s sharing his personal experience with P1. P1’s body language, facial expression and tearing-up indicated that she was listening, and arguably that she was relating to JA’s story. In the same case, Event 6 further displayed evidence of shift in P1’s communication when she suddenly revealed her feeling of low self-worth. By far the strongest evidence of transformation occurring was found in Event 13 on pages 88 – 90. In this event, which happened during P2’s session time, P1 illustrated the situational learning that is at work in YEAGA sessions. She had shifted her level of engagement from within the community of practice. She tried on the role of a teacher by sharing her experience and recreating herself as a resource for P2.

Event 13 also displays the process of social cognition put forth by Vygotsky (1962), in which language is both a tool to interact with the external world, as well as a tool for internal dialogue. In Case 1, P1 practiced talking about her experiences first to the group (the external world); in Case 2, Part D, as she attempted to remake
herself as an instructor for P2’s learning, her facial expression exposed an internal realization about her own situation. Internal observations speak both to social cognition and identity formation.

The follow up interview conducted with P1 one week after the observed session also showed strong evidence of a transformative process. When asked about a time when someone made her rethink who she is, she indicated that somebody in the observed session was telling her “real things” and said that she is worth more – and that is what made an impression on her. Talking to youth honestly and openly about themselves and their situations makes a difference, and is the kind of dialogue that does not happen in traditional learning environments.

**Conclusion**

The two cases that are presented in this study, when taken as a whole, indicate that adult participants in YEAGA sessions have an approach to communicating with youth participants that reflect the overall goal of the YEAGA organization. The approach can be aligned with some common tools used in classroom instruction such as Bloom’s taxonomy. The instructional approach in YEAGA relies on the same sort of cognitive building as Bloom’s taxonomy does in moving students from lower level, simple understandings of themselves and life processes to more complex self-analytical and self-evaluative competencies. Further, the instructional process at
YEAGA, as shown by the data, attends to the affective domain of learning, per Bloom’s taxonomy. As Pierre and Oughton (2007) explain,

Affective learning inculcates the values and beliefs we place on the information we engage with. It refers to our attitudes and willingness to take part in new things, and ability to make decisions about how we operate and behave in a variety of circumstances.

As students interact with new information, especially as it relates to identity, there is a shift from the cognitive to the affective domains. Attention to the affective dimension of student learning in contexts like that represented by YEAGA suggests that affective learning is central to the overall learning process. This quality of situated learning indicates significant differences in the nature of instruction, and learning when informal and formal classrooms are compared.

A traditional classroom is set up with one teacher who is responsible for attending to many students and ensuring that everyone is at a reasonably similar level of comprehension about the material at hand. In stark contrast, YEAGA sessions are set up to work the other way around, employing a team-teaching approach. According to MB, the typical group session has three to six youth in attendance and typically has five to seven adult participants. Each youth participant is made the focus of attention for a period of time (that time is determined by the youth’s need). The group’s challenge is to find a way to make a connection with a youth participant.
They do this by asking questions about the circumstances that brought the youth to the group, encouraging and testing the honesty of the individual and challenging the participant’s perceptions of their situation. This approach requires a concerted effort by the whole group who must try to find a way to tap into what the youth needs to talk about, say, or do in order to share a necessary level of trust with the group. The adult group members must also maintain a high level of cognitive participation in the proceedings that informs the group cognition about what the youth might be experiencing at any one moment. By this group effort approach to pushing toward a larger goal, a rich level of instructional communication is established in YEAGA sessions.

These same procedures also work to facilitate the re-creation of youth identity. Adult participants, who make a connection with a youth through sharing similar experiences and feelings, embody the possibility of transformation for that youth. Many of the adult participants in YEAGA are men who spent a great deal of time in prison for the same types of behaviors that youth attendees get in trouble for. In the course of their imprisonment, they found ways to transform their thinking and actions, and when they talk about this transformation in interviews and in YEAGA sessions, it can be quite an emotional experience. Group members offer youth different ways to practice action in the world, and they personify the difference that those actions can have through the sharing of their experiences – but the emotion, honesty and love that
this group of adults is willing to express toward youth is the thing that humanizes all participants.

Transformational interaction in YEAGA encompasses the entirety of group members’ shared experiences, all of the realizations that sparked their own transformations and all of their desire to help youth to overcome the pitfalls that they have experienced. The effects of transformational interactions are exemplified in the lives of the instructors.

There are just a few more points that I wish to make about this study. The first is that one particular theme that was discussed in interview but was not evident in the case studies was the notion of love. Themes of honesty, trust, and love were themes that interviewees especially emphasized about YEAGA. As one participant put it when asked about what makes YEAGA different than school,

They are all about the love... You don’t get that kind of love in school... they are ex-convicts, ex-correctional officers... that come together for the youth. They come together to help you out. They did that for me... they kept coming to me, and back then I didn’t really care. But they kept coming and they kept showing their love... I can’t tell you exactly what happened that day in the group [when the communication worked], but I just know that I felt something inside change... Now I’m able to build that kind of connection with youngsters just overall.
This participant was 15 or 16 years of age when he first attended a group session. He is now 21 years old. These themes reflect Freire’s (1970) notion of imperative elements to liberatory teaching, and in fact, to dialogue itself:

Dialogue cannot exist, however, in the absence of a profound love for the world and for people. The naming of the world, which is an act of creation and re-creation, is not possible if it is not infused with love. Love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself.

(p. 89)

YEAGA fosters a dialogical process that seeks to humanize and transform students from passive participants in learning to active liberators of their fellow students.

Those themes that interviewees talked about speak to the flexibility of the communication that is fostered within YEAGA. When a group of adults come together to listen to and dialogue with youth honestly about his or her situation, what the youth takes away from the larger communicative project is perhaps open to that individual’s own interpretation, and arguably can be based on what it is that they need to find.

**Limitations and Strengths of the Study**

Discovering what patterns are at work within YEAGA sessions requires a study that is much broader in scope than this thesis. Because YEAGA functions
differently than a traditional classroom environment, current methods of study must either be adapted to this environment, or new methods must be discovered. In my effort to present rich examples of working within the dialogue, I made choices about presentation that involved focusing on rather narrow dialogical passages that showed an event occurring. This necessary tactic made this study possible, but did not facilitate analysis of many of the small projects that occurred in the dialogue.

A survey of studies involving classroom observations found the average number of sessions that communication research of this kind entails ranges from three to five class-sessions, at around an hour each. (Artz, 2001; Bryan, 1974). A typical YEAGA session lasts between four and six hours. While I can claim that an equivalent amount of time was spent in observation, it must be noted that the nature of the communication in YEAGA sessions is significantly different in structure, function and evolution, than in a traditional classroom.

Instead of structuring sessions with one instructor guiding multiple students, YEAGA relies on multiple instructors focusing on one student at a time. The functionality of multiple instructors in group sessions focusing on one student at a time as opposed to a single instructor focusing on a group means that communication with that one student can be tailored to fit his or her needs. Finally, the evolution of communication within the instructional setting of YEAGA sessions is dependent on students’ willingness to take guidance. For an instructional communication researcher, the profound differences between traditional classroom settings and
YEAGA group sessions, while rich in data, can be difficult to study through established approaches. This limitation is of utmost importance, and should not be overlooked in future studies.

The secondary effect of this initial limitation was that gathering parent and youth consent forms in order to conduct youth interviews and surveys over the summer was impractical and would cause an undue burden on the group’s coordinator. Although adult interviews were conducted over the course of the summer, as planned, youth surveys and interviews were not. The greatest impact of this limitation was simply that once group sessions began again, only one session observation could be obtained and used for this study. The youth surveys that had been planned for this study were eliminated because of a lack of response over the summertime. While only one youth interview was conducted (with P1), its importance to this study is immeasurable.

This study tests the boundaries of instructional communication. YEAGA is not a traditional learning environment, yet instructional communication happens there; it is not a therapeutic environment, but therapy happens there. The endeavor to test the boundary at which instructional communication lays should be more common in academic study. Boundaries are where things happen, and where we can discover ways to adjust our research in order to remain relevant. By placing instructional communication in the setting of a community organization whose goal is to transform the lives of youth, I am attempting to inspire a richer conversation about what
scholars in this field can do to help a dire situation. In my research and preparation for this thesis, I did not find a comparable study that would lead me toward an effective approach to investigate, and so I had to make my best attempt at what would produce evidence. The ultimate outcome was the Glossary of Theme Definitions found in Appendix C; a result which marks the beginning of this type of study, and that should be expanded upon and refined in the future.

Despite the limitations that emerged at the outset of the study, the overall project has considerable strengths, namely the richness of the data gathered from interviews and observation partnered with the one follow-up interview with the youth involved with Case Study 1. The greatest strength of this study is that it displays the profound nature of the communication within the YEAGA learning environment, and establishes such communication as fertile ground for future studies into transformational learning.

**Indications for Future Research**

By this study, I am addressing a dire need for scholars and activists to find creative new ways to address the very real and problematic phenomenon that is the school-to-prison pipeline. We must, as academics and humans, confront this problem in the same manner that YEAGA confronts the problematic thinking of their youth – by patiently and tirelessly coming at it from multiple angles until an inroad is found.

Future research indicated by this study should involve much more detailed
and longer-term studies of groups of this type. Further research into this particular group should involve pre- and post-session interviews with youth and adults, longer-term observations that include video recording, and more detailed focus on former youth participants. It would be interesting to find out if the Glossary of Themes Definitions found in Appendix C is useful in other studies. Additionally, research that explores the possibility of groups such as YEAGA working officially alongside traditional school instruction could prove to be invaluable to solving the problem that is called the school-to-prison pipeline.

**Researcher’s Note**

The complex nature of the data invites further analysis from a variety of perspectives. I encourage any researcher, educator or interested party to do so and to share their findings with the community of scholars who are interested in understanding how communication functions in non-traditional instructional contexts; for those interested in models of social justice and adolescent develop or any other allied disciple. For full transcripts (with sensitive information Redacted), please send a request to me at amandamina550@gmail.com
APPENDIX A

Transcript of YEAGA Group Session

YEAGA Session Observation: September 12, 2015

For the purpose of confidentiality, no names are used in this transcript. Participants are labeled with one or two characters only – Adult participants are labeled in capital letters, youth participants in lower case letters. Case study subjects are labeled P1 and P2.

Additionally, information about youth participants whose session transcripts are not used in the study, has been redacted and those redactions have been noted throughout the following transcript – only the participant’s initial remains.

SETTING

When I walked into the classroom where the session would be held MB was setting up the food area. She explained that it’s important to feed kids especially because the session takes 4 to 6 hours and because it starts early. There’s coffee, warm burritos and cold water available today, to which both adults and youth have access freely before, during and after the session.

The room is a multi purpose bungalow room, about 30’x 30’ used by the school, which is a continuation high school. A makeshift kitchen is set up in one corner, tables are set up on the floor space, and larger tables are folded on one wall of the room. In this room, chairs have been set up in a circle with a small opening facing the door.

Before the session some people are talking to each other, some are eating, some are sitting and waiting. A and P2 are talking to each other about P2’s recent experiences – PB overhears them and asks m if he would mind sharing some of that in the group today? P2 agrees – “that’s what I’m here for,” and A says – “oh, he’s an open book – he’s really honest and a good guy – that’s why I brought him here.”

Today the session started late because P1 called at 9am wanting to attend but not having a ride, so MB went to pick her up. When she came back, everyone took a seat in the circle, and the session was ready to begin.

The YEAGA session began with 13 people sitting in the circle. Going clockwise starting with myself, the seating order was random– me, MB, a small space followed by J, then v, P1, PB, JR, P2, A, JA, Jm, GG, f. L would join us late along with a – L would sit between PB and JR, a would sit between MB and J.

MEETING DATA

Group introductions
MB: began the meeting with the welcome, thank you all for attending, and an invitation to please eat at any time and a small bit of housekeeping - where bathrooms are, Etc. Next she pointed to me and asked me to explain my purpose here and what notes I’m taking.

Me: I explained about my study and what type of information I’m gathering as well as the kinds of notes I’m taking, and that I will not be using names.

PB: spoke next, setting the rules for the session – confidentiality and truth. He says “What is said in the room stays in the room, and because of that we want you to tell us the truth. The point of being here is not so that you just say what you think we want to hear. Even though we may not like what we hear, we can work with the truth.” He began the introductions, and asked for name, age, school, if you go to school, any trouble you have, or any bullshit you’re going through.

JA: ex-lifer gave his name, criminal history, how many times he’s been shot and shot at, and then his gang history. “I’ve changed my life. Today is personal to him – everyday is now. Right now, you’re in a group of people who are reaching out to you.” He pointed out that in hindsight he can see that when he was getting in trouble there were people reaching out to him, but he never reached back. “If you’re here today, we’re here with you.”

Jm: says good morning and gives his short history. He’s here because he got sold out by a friend for something he didn’t do. He was sentenced to life in prison, and although he’s out now, he spent a lot of years locked up. “Sometimes your life depends on who you choose to hangout with.”

G: said hello, he’s a retired corrections officer. He met some of the guys sitting in this room when he was working in the prison. He grew up in the same communities, and he said he did his time too, just on the other side.

f: REDACTED

Me: Because the mood was light so far I gave my name, school, and that the only trouble I get into is because I’m lazy and procrastinate on my homework.

MB: introduced herself and gave her history. Unlike the first two sessions I attended, this time she focused her introduction on her drug history. She said she didn’t get into trouble in school when she was growing up, but later when she was an adult she started experimenting with drugs and she didn’t know how bad it got until she couldn’t ignore it anymore.

J: introduced herself as a parent of three, and then talked about one of her sons and his trouble, and his choice of friends.

v: REDACTED

P1: introduced herself and said she’s on probation– her ankle bracelet is clearly visible–Jm asked what she’s on probation for. “For monitoring,” she said, and then looked around the room – and then said, “For drugs.” Adults in the group wanted to know what drugs, and she explained
a little. GG said, “The last time you were here you didn’t have an ankle bracelet. Why can’t you stay out of trouble?” She had a meek smile and said “I don’t know, I guess I just like it.” Someone asked a more detailed question and she said with a smile “Can we finish the introductions?” PB agreed and said “but we’re coming right back to you.” She smiled and said, “I know.”

PB: gave his behavioral history and what it was that landed him in prison. That his elders instilled in him wrong beliefs, and reinforced his negative behavior. He said that when he was in prison, he and the group of inmates kept watching kids come in and stay in, and they decided to ‘flip the script,’ and try to solve the problem instead of being a part of it. He said “I’m here because sometimes kids get the wrong messages about themselves and what they do, and sometimes they look for a way out. I’m here to give you positive support.” He assured them, “Nothing is out of bounds here – we will listen to anything you have to say. If you have any questions for us at anytime, stop us and ask – because your questions are important – period.”

JR: gave a little bit of his history and concentrated on when and how he made the choice to do things differently. He said he made the choice not to end up in prison as he thought he would. He said that he started coming to YEAGA as a teenager in a gang – and at first he didn’t like it because he thought they were after him to get him in trouble. But he saw that the adults here made different choices for their futures. He said that a little while ago he decided to fly to Hawaii to see a concert just because he can. He said that if he hadn’t made the choice to change himself and if he hadn’t worked hard on himself that he would never have the freedom to choose what he wants to do. “It’s way better out here.”

P2: introduced himself by his nickname, and talked about how he’s had to change schools and that he’s affiliated with a gang. A question came from P1 and some adults about his gang affiliation – questions having to do with the area he lives in. He explained that he goes between homes in different areas.

A: P2’s mentor shares his history with drugs, and his history with YEAGA, how he found God, his experience with the youth diversion program at Folsom, and that he’s now a youth pastor at a church, because he wants to help kids who are like he was. He said something funny and everybody laughed.

Case Study 1: P1

PB: thanks everyone for coming today, and then cranes his head to look at P1, in a funny sort of way to say ‘your turn.’

P1: smiles and says “I know, I know.”

GG: asks a broad rhetorical question about her history, and then asks about the ankle bracelet and when she got it.

P1: “My mom requested that the court put it on so that they can monitor me.”
GG: says “every time we see you you’ve fucked up again,” and he smiles at her in a serious
way. Then asks her bluntly, “Do you want to stay clean?”

P1: no answer – she is gazing past him.

PB: (sitting directly to her left) turns to face his body towards her – “Right here right now,
what’s up with you?”

She shrugs and doesn’t answer. Then she says with little inflection “I’ve been clean for a
week.” She says that she has a boyfriend who’s nice to her and wants her to do well in school
and in general.

Jm: “Oh, so he’s good to you?”

P1: “Yes.”

Jm: “And he wants you to get clean?”

P1: “Yeah.”

JA: “Do you want to?”

P1: shrugs.

JR: “Just keep it real, you don’t have to lie to us – maybe you don’t want to get clean.”

GG: “What are you going to do when the bracelet comes off?”

P1: Looks down in thought, “I’ll probably go use again” nobody says anything... “Because I
want to. I like it. I’ll probably go do a line – if I have some money, maybe more.”

*A short time passes while the group processes the information.*

Jm: “Why do you like it?” [referring to previous reference to drugs]

P1: “I was diagnosed with [Redacted]. But mostly because I just like the way it makes me feel.”

GG: “Your friends do it too?”

P1: “Some. And I don’t listen to the people at drug court because I don’t like the way they talk
to me - like I’m stupid or slow or something.”

MB: “Maybe you can teach them how you want to be approached. You know, some of the
people who work at drug court want to help you, but they don’t know your experience and
where you’re coming from.”

Pause
MB: “They don’t know how smart you are; maybe they assume that you’ve fried your brain on drugs.”

Another pause as MB watches P1, who is gazing past her.

MB: “How do you want them to approach you?”

P1: “I’d prefer it if they were blunt and told me what I need to know without talking to me like I’m a baby.”

MB: “Okay then, maybe if you try to tell them that. You know, there are some people who work there who really want to help, they can’t know what you know unless you tell them.”

P1: Agrees with a silent nod – looking down.

GG: “If you don’t speak up and tell the people who want to listen where you are – you can be pretty sure of where you’re going to end up. And you know it, don’t you?”

P1: Agrees with a quiet “yeah.”

A: Relates to her drug use through his own experience before he came to YEAGA. He knows how it feels and how it gets progressively worse. “It starts with just a little weed at a party or something, and then you get something for yourself, and you use a little everyday, then it’s not enough – you try something else to get high – and it keeps going and going.”

MB: “I know it too – I knew it was getting bad, but I didn’t have the tools to help myself – you need to find the things that work for you to help you solve your situation.” Three adults discuss their own experiences and what they’ve witnessed in others.

JA: (who has been almost silent) breaks in – “So, how do you afford your addiction?”

P1: explains that she had been working full time and living with her mom. She goes into a bit of detail about her weekly schedule until she is finished talking.

JR: asks “What else do you like to do? What hobbies do you have other than drugs?”

P1: shrugs her shoulders – “I don’t know.”

JR: “what goals can you set for yourself?”

P1: shrugs.

JA: relates that his was the same drug of choice – he speaks in detail about how he’s been clean for so many years but he still has a physiological reaction when he sees that particular drug in a movie or if someone even says the word. He says his nose tingles when he thinks about it, so he practices making the choice not to use drugs everyday - constantly. He says that before, all of his focus was on getting and using drugs, and wherever your focus is that’s where you go. He offers an example – “If you’re walking down the street and there’s an accident at the side of the road
and you are focusing on it, that is where your body will go. You can’t look one way and walk another – not for too long, anyway. He asks where she’s going to focus her energy when the ankle bracelet comes off.

P1: looks uncomfortable now – her right leg is crossed over the left, and her foot is twitching up and down energetically – her left hand is in her lap and she’s scratching her nails together. She is looking intently toward JA with a furrowed brow, but doesn’t answer.

JA: continues that he has to stay clean for his kids – he wants to be there for them and he doesn’t want them to get in trouble like he did. He talks about his parents and how they tried to help him. Then he talks about himself as a parent trying to teach his children.

P1: as JA talks, her left leg starts twitching nervously to the point that her whole body shakes with it – she tears up but doesn’t cry.

MB: asks what she is going to do when you get off the ankle?

P1: gives a surface answer – “I’m moving in with my dad, and I guess I’ll look for work.”

MB: refocusing the question – “Okay, but do you want to get clean?”

P1: Looks down.

MB: “Have you hit bottom yet?”

P1: Thinks and says quietly “No, I don’t think so.”

MB: “Do you want to hit bottom?”

P1: Shakes her head unsurely and says meekly, “No.” Tears start to well up and PB hands her a tissue.

GG: Gently offers her a prediction of her future if something doesn’t change – she’s going to get busted, someone will give up on her, her boyfriend will leave her, maybe she’ll have to prostitute herself when she loses her job and can’t afford the drugs she wants.

JA: concurs, adding, “And you’ll probably blame it all on your boyfriend because he didn’t do enough to stop you.”

J: “I’ve never heard you say you want to stop – if you want to. Do you?”

P1: says – “I don’t want to. Look, I don’t want to lie to you guys - I just don’t want to stop.”

There is a moment of silence while adults process the information.

JR: gently confronts a previous dialogue – “You say that you want people to be blunt with you – to tell you how it is. It seems like that’s how your mom is with you – but you’re moving in with
your dad. Your mom gets an ankle bracelet put on you so that you don’t get in trouble and you
don’t use – that’s pretty blunt. She doesn’t want you to die. So what is it that you really want?”

P1: blots her eyes and is thinking about it, but doesn’t answer.

GG: asks bluntly – “Why are you here?”

P1: is looking down - no answer.

GG: relates her story to one of his family members. She started smoking weed, and then she did
other drugs, she liked it and eventually ended up as a prostitute. “These patterns have a way of
repeating themselves.”

PB: “Why are you here?”

P1: “For community service hours. I know it’s disrespectful to you all and I know that it’s
wrong, but that’s why I’m here. I don’t want to just say it because I don’t want to make
everyone here feel bad that you can’t help me and get all mad at me, even though you should.”

PB: “Why should we be mad at you? You’re telling us the truth just like we asked you to.
Maybe you should be mad. Why aren’t you mad?”

P1: I don’t want to get all mad and act up – it’s stupid to throw a fit. I know I shouldn’t just be
here for hours taking up your time, because you guys want to help me and I don’t want you to. I
don’t want to be disrespectful, but I don’t want help either. I know I’m a piece of shit – my
parents tell me that all the time and...” crying.

PB: shifts in his seat so that he’s facing her and leaning in trying to make eye contact. “Let me
tell you something, and it’s important – no matter what you say, I am here for you. You’re not a
piece of shit, no matter what anyone says – and to prove that you’re not a piece of shit –
everyone in this room is here for you and believes in you.”

P1: trying to hold back her tears.

PB: “You’re processing a lot right now, and we don’t want you to feel like we’re tearing you up,
so we’re going to go on to someone else and get back to you. You just sit with that for a while.”

P1: nods.

JR: “Hey, you know what? I always thought I was a piece of shit too – and it sure feels good to
prove people wrong.”

J: says that her son still apologizes to her for being a piece of shit and for being ghetto. “And
every time he says that, it hurts, because I tell him that he is not any of that. He just made some
decisions that weren’t good for him, and it lead him down this path, and I hope he can find his
way out.” She recommends looking in the mirror every day and telling yourself the things you
like about yourself. She says it can be difficult to do, but you have to start loving something about yourself.

P1: looking down and continuing to blot away tears.

PB: “unless there’s something else you want to say now...”

P1: shakes her head no.

The group’s attention gently shifts to L

L: (came in late) introduces himself. He’s 18 now, but he started with attending YEAGA sessions a few years ago when he was having some trouble. Now, he says, he spends all of his time working and going to school. MB tells the group that he just won a scholarship for his good work, and he has been accepted to college.

A: applauds him for his efforts.

Case v

Note: REDACTED for suitability to the study.

Case f

Note: REDACTED for suitability to the study.

Case Study 2: P2

JR: starts with one of the group rules that had yet to be stated. “Whatever you say here, stays here, but with that said – tell us what you’ve already gotten in trouble for, not for what you’ve done that you haven’t gotten in trouble for yet.”

(Reasoning for this is stated in interview with some adult members. In order to maintain a high level of trust between adults and youth in YEAGA, there should never be a question that an adult spoke about a youth’s actions with authorities in case the participant gets busted for something they’ve talked about in group session)

GG and P1: inquire together about P2’s gang affiliation (because it is highly uncommon to affiliate with a gang faction in one area of town, but live in another faction’s ‘turf’).
P2: explains that he was living with his stepdad, but that he is trying to move in with his mom who lives in another part of town.

GG: “What are the benefits for you of being in a gang?”

P2: “I thought that I’d be cool, really, that was it, but then one of my friends got me really messed up.” He is sitting forward with his elbows on his knees and looking at his hands.

JR: “You know that all those homies will turn on you – sometime.”

P2: “Yeah. I know – I know it. I want out but I keep getting harassed. I mean, I get good grades, I take advanced classes.”

GG: “Then why are you dressed like that?”

P2: “I’ve always dressed like this. These are my clothes.”

GG: “You’re dressed like a gang member. If you want out, don’t dress like you don’t.”

L: “I was in the same situation as you, you know. I was taking AP classes, and trying my best, but everyone kept trying to mess with me. It was hard to ignore them, but I kept trying, and eventually, they just forget about you.”

PB: “What else is going on with you?”

P2: Explains that he has problems at home. [REDACTED]

The group sits quietly and listens while P2 explains his complicated home-life [REDACTED]. Clarifying questions are asked about various household situations and dynamics. Once everyone agreed that they have some level of clarity on P2’s situation, a question is posed about how he gets into trouble.

PB: “What is your trigger?” (what frustrates him to the point that he wants to act out)

P2: Explains that his triggers are stepdad’s mistreatment and/or his mom’s illness [REDACTED]. He also says that he has been to counseling for a lot of stuff and has learned some coping mechanisms for when he gets triggered.

P2’s stance, verbal inflection, facial expression has been monotone throughout his statements. He sits in the same position with his elbows on his knees. He rarely shifts in his chair. He looks at his hands or at the floor. He makes fleeting eye contact, but does not seem to establish a connection with anyone. All of his statements are followed by a shrug and a toss to the side as if it is being discarded.
PB: Acknowledges his intelligence and insight and then leans toward P2 in his chair and tries to establish eye contact, but is unable to. He asks, “How do you see your situation?”

P2: “Really, I just don’t care about much right now.” No shrug this time, but still monotone.

PB: still leaning in – “That’s really serious.”

Other adults lean in toward him now.

GG: “Where is it that you want to be?”

P2: thinks, but doesn’t answer.

L: recontextualizes what P2 might be feeling about his situation – “…like you don’t have a home – like there is nowhere safe…”

P2: agrees “yeah” and doesn’t shrug

PB: admires him out loud for carrying so many burdens – “That’s a whole lotta weight, man.”

P2: “yeah, I guess so” no shrug

PB: “I don’t know if anybody could carry all that weight by themselves – not for too long anyway – but you’re trying to. Let’s try something else.”

PB has P2 stand up and put his chair in the middle of the circle. P2 smiles a little unsurely about it but PB reassures him it’s just an exercise. P2 moves the chair and PB says, “That chair is your problem.” PB tells him to pick it up and hold it in the air. He does so with one hand and smiles with a shrug. PB acknowledges that he’s really good at carrying his own weight. PB takes his chair (problem) and stacks it on top of P2’s and tells him to lift it up – he does, still with one hand. “Wow, you can carry my problems too – how about everyone else’s then…” Group members joyfully get up and stack their ‘problems’ on top of P2’s until they are stacked eight high. P2 lifts the stack of chairs with both hands not too high off the floor. “I can still do it,” he says. PB says “could you carry all that everywhere you go everyday for the rest of your life?” P2 says “maybe not.” PB has group members remove their chairs one by one until P2 is only holding his own chair again.

PB: “You feel the difference?”

P2: “yeah”

PB: “That chair is your problem, and that is the weight that is yours to carry. Everyone has their own weight. It’s hard to learn not to carry other people’s weight, but you can practice setting it aside – and it does take practice. Let’s say you get really frustrated with a situation – you get frustrated because you want to fix that situation for the person and for yourself, but you can’t always fix other people’s problems.” PB relates his own situation growing up in order to illustrate what ‘not caring’ can lead to.
P2: has stopped looking at his hands and has started looking at PB calmly but intently.

PB: reflects to a time when he eventually stopped caring what anyone thought of his actions because he thought he was doing the right thing. “You have a good heart, and you’re really smart – but if you stop caring because you’re trying so hard to carry other people’s shit around – you let all that goodness inside of you die. That’s the stuff that you need to take care of the most because it’s who you really are. You’re a good guy.”

P2: nods his head slightly and looks down.

JA: relates to the frustration that P2 feels because it feels like his fault when he can’t fix things, but he says that it’s really important to practice telling yourself good messages, even if sometimes those are the only ones you can hear. After a little pause, he gently changes subjects to P2’s clothes. He says that even though P2 is not wearing too much color (an oversized grey hoodie, saggy black denim jeans, black Vans with white laces and a red stripe around the top of the soles, a team hat - light gray with red stitching around the team decal), he says even that tiny amount of red is enough to affiliate with a gang. He laughs a little that some gang members will wear hats from some random Midwestern team because it has ‘their color’ in the logo, even if they’ve never been out of their own neighborhood.

P2: smiles and laughs a little and agrees that he’s seen that too. Others chuckle as well.

JA: shares a story about being pulled over by a cop not too long ago, not for doing anything wrong, but because the cop ran his plate and his record comes up first. He says he had to make a conscious decision not to react the wrong way, and so he pulled over. Soon there were five or so cop cars there. The cop started asking him about his record and JA saw it as an opportunity to talk about all of the good things that he’s done since he’s been out. It turns out that all those cops were there mostly because they’ve never seen someone with that kind of a record. They were curious. He told them that he’s really careful about what he wears (no colors at all) and just generally about everything.

P2: has been looking at him and listening intently.

JA: The point of this story, he says, is that what you do now lays the ground for your story. When you’re 50, do you want to get pulled over because someone is curious about your record? Down the road when someone asks you about your life – what do you want to tell them?

P2: looks down.

JA: waits for him to look up again. “Caring for people is different than carrying their burden for them.”

MB: seeing that P2 is thinking – turns attention to JA – asks off-topic question about whether he had to report that to his P.O.

JA: “for the rest of my life”

The conversation goes onto the topic of parole for a short time.
PB: refocuses the group on P2—“what did you learn right now?”

P2: “about reconciling mistakes and being honest.”

PB: seems unconvincing

GG: “What’s in your future?”

P2: looking down - “I lost hope and I really don’t know.”

GG: “Do you want to change?”

P2: “I don’t know. Most of my family members are in a gang. I mean, I want out—but it seems kinda hopeless, you know.”

GG: “Once you’re in, if you want out you need to make sincere and unquestionable changes. You need to send clear messages about what is important to you and about what you intend to do. You know that that little red line on your shoes tells them that you don’t want out.”

P2: nods slightly in agreement

At this point, MB asks about P2’s real dad and where he is. (REDACTED). Adults offer help to P2 if he wants to find his dad.

JA: refocuses the conversation. “Did you know that when you stop caring about yourself is when you start allowing bad things to happen?”

P2: looking down

JA: “Do you do drugs?”

P2: “Just a little weed sometimes.” Smiling a little.

JA: “That’s how I started too.”

A discussion begins about gateway drugs and making a habit of good choices.

P1: quiet until now, engages with P2 directly about her own thought process at the beginning of her addiction. “A little bit of weed would make me forget my problems for a little while—that felt so great—but then it took more—and then I just started finding more and more stuff I wanted to forget about.” She tries to let out a short laugh, but a quick frown appears instead. She looks down and away from P2.

JA: talks about the serious combination of being someone who is willing to do drugs partnered with a toxic environment and all of the people who are around you. He says, “Choosing not to do drugs is a really big part of making a serious change.” He asks P2’s real name (he has been using his nickname thus far), and then requests permission for the group to call him by his real name.
P2: sure.

JA: “Here’s the thing P2— if you really want to change your situation, change yourself and you’ll see that the change in you starts to change the people around you.”

P2: looks at JA and nods, returns to looking at his hands in contemplation.

After a period of silence, adults who have engaged with P2’s session make eye contact and nod, and the group’s focus shifts to a.

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Case a.

Note: This session is redacted for suitability to the study.
Y.E.A.G.A.
Youth Empowerment and Goals Association

INFORMATIONAL SHEET
Youth Empowerment and Goals Association (Y.E.A.G.A.) is a voluntary community service program operated by ex-felons, retired Correctional Staff, representatives of the Armed Forces and members of the community. This unique group of individuals is very aware of the existing problems among our youth in today's society. The members of this program are dedicated men and women who have a genuine concern and wish to help our youth. The membership of Y.E.A.G.A. consists of different races, age and crimes ranging from auto theft to murder. Some members have served over 20 consecutive years in prison. As such our members can be considered "experts" on all aspects of prison and on living a criminal or gang lifestyle prior to incarceration.

All members are successful off parole and are living productive lifestyles. Other members of Y.E.A.G.A. bring additional resources for juvenile issues (i.e.: Alcoholic's Anonymous /Narcotic's Anonymous, and the Inside Circle Men's Support Group. The program will educate the juveniles on the negativity of a lifestyle which can lead to incarceration. Using the members as living examples of what can happen along the path of anti-social behavior. We attempt to convince juveniles that a life of crime is non productive and has long term consequences. We explore the present day to day challenges each juvenile faces. We guide the juvenile to look at his/ her life and help them identify solutions to critical issues in their lives.

The program offers an immeasurable learning experience for the juvenile. The juvenile receives first hand knowledge from the members of Y.E.A.G.A., instead of experiencing incarceration themselves. The program utilizes all resources available to help our youth. Our primary approach is a one day session, on Saturdays, from 8 am to 3 pm. This "rap session" consists of 6 to 8 juveniles with the same amount of Y.E.A.G.A. members. The group sits in a circle which ensures that all juveniles will participate in the session. Harsh language and graphic photos may be used during this session.

The discussion does not take an analytical or diagnostic approach. Y.E.A.G.A. members are direct, to the point and truthful. The same is expected from the juvenile participants. We do not believe in "sugar coating" a response or beating around the bush. The program is unique because of its members. They are individuals who have
"been there, seen it, did it and lived it'. They openly share their pitfalls and knowledge with the juvenile.

This program is definitely not a text book approach as we feel the average juvenile involved in our program has already learned how to "play the game". For the most part, a juvenile is never ready for these sessions because the members "see right through them". Important issues such as education, integrity, respect, and positive self-esteem are always addressed at length. The goal is simple but important: We educate the juvenile and attempt to expose the realities of making poor choices in their lives.

Our secondary approach, usually a 90 minute presentation, is designed to reach a large audience. The presentation attempts to shed light on the pitfalls and consequences of anti-social and criminal behavior, using speakers who are members of Y.E.A.G.A.

We stress the following:
1. The importance of communication with family, peers, school, community and others in a positive, self-motivating way.
2. Taking responsibility for one’s own actions and life.
3. Goal setting techniques which can ultimately lead to living a positive and productive lifestyle.

Y.E.A.G.A. members will follow up with each juvenile to not only gather statistics but to consistently stress the issues which were discussed in the "rap session". The message from the follow up is "we are not gifting up on you because you matter". The message is simple but profound. For many youth the feeling that society has given up on them is real and it becomes evident through their actions. Y/E/A/G/A/ attempts to provide these youth with a connection to those who have "walked" in their shoes. All the while, allowing Y.E.A.G.A. members to continue to give back to society in a positive manner.

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APPENDIX C

Glossary of Theme Definitions

| **Aloneness**: offering group resources as an alternative to a youth’s sense of isolation during identity formation. |
| **Body language**: a change in physical demeanor displayed by a youth that reflects some connection with the group’s dialogue; or by an adult participant to emphasize an idea. |
| **Crying**: a physical expression that indicates that group dialogue is having an effect on a youth. |
| **Empathy**: expressing understanding of a youth’s situation as a means to establish a connection with him or her. |
| **Facial expression**: a change in facial expression displayed by a youth that reflects some connection with the group’s dialogue. |
| **Group cognition**: a situational awareness displayed by the group of participants who are actively seeking ways to connect with a youth; this can entail actively engaging in or refraining from immediate dialogue. |
| **Honesty**: willingness to engage in truthful dialogue about one’s circumstances, feelings or understandings. |
| **Listening/Personal attention**: paying close attention to how a youth is presenting their own situation; offering solutions shaped to students. |
| **Offering options**: proposing the reconstruction of a youth’s point of view about their situation from one that is hopeless to one that is constructive. |
| **Personal connection**: the bond established between a youth and an adult or adults by means of any method. |
**Searching for identity**: offering group knowledge as a tool for youth to construct meaning about themselves.

**Seeking approval**: maintaining an unbroken, personal and group connection with a youth by continually putting forth the effort to connect with them; framing the group as an alternate source of support.

**Sharing personal experiences**: relating to a youth’s experience through sharing of a similar personal experience – a precursor to establishing a personal connection with a participant.

**Sharing transformation**: exemplifying the possibility of transforming one’s current circumstance by sharing a personal experience of transformation; linking a previous thought or action pattern to a substantially different pattern.

**Trust/safety**: framing the discussion group as one in which a youth may speak about him or herself freely and without threat of rejection.

**Verbal language**: a change in utterances that reflects a change in an actor’s perspective or a different level of dialogue.
APPENDIX D

Interview Excerpts

Interview #1 JA

Q: Is there something that you feel that YEAGA offers to kids that you didn’t get when you were a kid?
A: I remember being a child, acting like a child – even when I was older. Anything my family said or anything I was told in school I automatically discredited. In fact, I was automatically discredited too by everyone – I wanted someone to listen to me. The difference in YEAGA is that everything we say to kids is coming from someone who has been there – who has been down the road they’re on. We don’t spend our time telling them that they have to do this or that – we’re trying to help them define who they are – their character. It’s so much more about cognitive thinking and behavior. I never got that out of school – nobody talked to me about who I was.
In the YEAGA sessions we talk about the things we’ve done – we talk about them honestly – we talk about the effects that those things have had on us and, for instance about what I have to deal with every time I think about the families I’ve affected and what they go through. Every time we meet I hope that I can share with the kids what I had to learn the hard way.

Q: What is it that you are trying to teach?
A: I know that teens are trying to find themselves, and usually – especially some of the kids we see – feel like everyone (or every adult anyway) is fighting them and wants to hold them back, and it makes them feel alone. When you’re alone like that, it’s natural to try to seek the approval of others, and if those others are kids who will get you in trouble, then you do that. But maybe – you meet me first and you come into this group and you get approval from people who really like you and know that you have something good to offer. Maybe we reach you first, and you can learn from our mistakes. Maybe you finally get to be honest with this group of adults and kids – we don’t have to agree with what you say, but we won’t tell you you’re wrong – we will just try to look at what you’re saying from another perspective. Maybe if I can share with a kid what I used to think about myself and how I think about myself now – even though it’s a struggle, I know that I have something to offer and that is what my life is about now. I’m trying to show them how to value themselves more. Sometimes I tell them what I’ve seen people’s “friends” do to them. Because if you’re a kid and you’re getting in trouble with other kids – I can guarantee that somebody is going to snitch on you, and it’s going to be one of your so-called friends. I saw it in when I was a kid; I saw it happen in prison gangs – it happens everywhere. It’s really different if I tell a kid that versus if I share it with them as my own experience.

Q: How do you know when the session works?
A: At the end of a session, we ask everyone to name something that they liked about the session – sometimes a kid will mention me. I don’t need it to be about me – it’s about everyone there, but we make special connections with some kids. Sometimes it’s cultural, sometimes it’s something else, but the connection between the adult and youth in this environment where it’s safe to say anything – is a really powerful thing to share that kind of experience or situation-connection.
Q: What is different that you feel that YEAGA offers to kids that maybe you didn't get when you were in school?
A: The thing I got from YEAGA that stood out most to me was that are real people that lived through a lot of the experiences that kids are going through today. These are people with first-hand experience who go out and talk to these kids about their personal experiences. I never got that when I was a kid. Everybody that was telling me that I was doing wrong, but they were too – all the while telling me to make different choices… and the adults in YEAGA have experience going down the wrong road with their own situations and they know from their own first had experience and that counts for a lot. When I went to school I didn't really get anything like that. Everybody who told me that I wasn't supposed to be doing what I was doing was never in my situation and my life, so they didn't know what I was going through.

Q: When you go into a session and talk with the kids, what is it that you're trying to teach?
A: We're trying to teach them that there's a lot more to life than bad choices. And when we get to sit down and talk to these kids – they're not bad kids – a lot of times they are just misunderstood and confused and trying to find their way. So that's why I try to get through to them that they can't just sell themself short just because they have a few bumps in the road and messed it all up for themselves. That's what I'm trying to teach is that it's a lot easier to do right and stay out here being free and doing whatever it is that you want. And as a kid, all you have to do is go to school and get an education - so that's a whole lot easier than doing it the hard way.

Q: What indicates to you that something is working when you see it?
A: The indicators to me that show that it's working – first, you have to pay attention to who it is that you're working with and try to relate to what they're going through because when you start to work with them more than one time and you notice that they keep coming back - that's an obvious one - that they keep coming back. YEAGA isn't really mandatory - because they have the choice - they don't have to be there. They don't have to come. Maybe somebody told that they can go, or they should go, or someone just told them they had to go, they still have a choice to step into that room and speak with us. But when you hear them talk about the things they're going through and you interact with them, your following up with them - you just see it in their eyes. They talk about things differently - their eyes light up as soon as they walk in the door they just change they know that they're there to get what they need.

Q: When you when you say they talk about things differently what is that about?
A: Their perspective just on the way life is… Is a lot brighter and they're more optimistic instead of just saying “these people trying to get me in trouble” or whatever. Once they figure out that YEAGA is not about getting them in trouble, once they figure it out, they tend to let their wall down, but that's not always the case for everybody. There are kids that are much harder to get to - and they don't break the wall down – it'll just stay up. Everybody has a choice, but when it works you can see a change in their eyes - they have a little bit more spark in them. But you have to be paying attention.
Interview #3 RM

Q: What do you think is different about how YEAGA talks to kids?

A: I think YEAGA is different because we meet our kids on their own levels. We let them be the driver, and we don't tell them where they need to go. I educate them on substance abuse. I don't sit there and say “no drugs” but I give them the understanding of what chemical substances do. If you tell a kid to just say no, you're suppressing the child's curiosity. But when a kid asks why should I say no? that's when I answer their why. So instead of "Just say no" I say, “just know the drug”. Every biological system works differently, therefore, if somebody does acid they're not going to have the same reaction as someone else because they don't really know what is in their background, their history, and biology – so I don't preach to them about “don't do this.” I just say, try to know what the possible outcomes are. What this does is offer potential options that the kid might not see, so that they can make an informed decision for themselves. We come to their level and give them options and choices and we talk to them like they're human beings and we don't say they can't do that, there is no such thing as can't. It works because when we're on their level, even if we don't see results right away, it's amazing when they come back to you at 18 and they say, “because of you I graduated,” or, “I'm sorry for being so difficult to you.” This is where I get emotional – is when a young adult makes a change for the positive because they chose to – not because we told them to. And then they appreciate what we did, and they're grateful. I always say “do what's in your heart and what you're passionate about. Don't do what others want you to do because that's not going make you happy - it won't bring you joy.”

Q: When a kid comes to YEAGA and he or she is sitting in a group of adults who are talking very honestly with them, and the kids are being encouraged to be honest too – how or why does that work?

A: Our kids struggle to understand that their life is their own. And if they're not able to have control of their life now, what's to say that they're going to be able to have control of it in the future. I may want my son to be a doctor but he may not want to be a doctor, so why would I ever push in that direction? Why wouldn't I encourage him to explore what it is that he wants to do so he can be successful for himself. Because we push our kids to graduate high school and college, but even if they're able to do that it doesn't mean they will be successful because each person needs to decide what they're passionate about. YEAGA helps with that by showing them that they have a lot more options than they know. Margarett has a lot of exercises that she does with kids to open up their minds and to explore what is out there in the world. They've never had that and they don't know how to explore, all they know is their little box that someone else gives to them. And when we show them something else, before you know it they're flying. One of our kids L just recently got a $3000 scholarship straight out of high school. He got other scholarships as well, we didn't do that for him, We only have to show them that it was possible. He was the driver and we were the map. I educate, mentor and advocate. In my professional life, I know that taking off your armor and showing vulnerability to a child is unprofessional-You don't reveal anything about yourself. It's all about reflecting off of them. But it's plain to see that young adults don't react well to that. They are trying to look to you for guidance, but instead of embracing that and guiding them in a way that they would understand, professional counselors are reprimanded for such behavior. In YEAGA it's different. We all go into the room and we behave as humans. YEAGA empowers me to show kids that being human is okay.
Interview #4 PB

Q: Is there something that you feel YEAGA offers that you didn’t get as a kid?

A: How to deal with your issues. Tools. Nobody taught me how to deal with when every day issues came up – nobody taught me truthfully how to deal with them. I learned how to do it through ... and stuff – what I picked up – I was brainwashed from an early age. Because of that is why we talk to the kids the way we do – truthfully we help them deal with what’s going on for them.

Q: When you’re talking to a youth in a session, there’s something between you and the kid, you’re trying to figure out what is it that I can say that’s going to flip this around? How do you figure out what that is?

A: In the programs that I ran in prisons, It became obvious that I couldn’t relate to, for instance, a kid who stole or who committed robberies. I didn’t do that. So what we would do is we would put those kids in with guys who have the same experience guys who were in for a robbery. The kids and the parents would fill out a questionnaire and we would study them to figure out who to pair the kids with who had similar experiences. And that model seems to work the best.

I guess the reason why programs like these work is because we let the youngsters lead us where we need to go. Or where they need to go. As teens or most of the guys I know in the pen, We were never heard. We talk and talk but nobody would sit down and listen to what we have to say. The message in that is that ‘I hear you but that’s it, I’ve got to go on with my life.’ And youngsters get the same thing now. When you’re interacting with a kid, and everybody else’s sitting there hearing and experiencing a level of trust, when you get through to a kid that you’re talking to, first how do you know it and second what is it?

His conversation changes just a little bit but you can see it in His face too. It’s like he’ll have a light bulb go on sometimes and you can see, I’m and I can spot that. But their attitudes change to when they’re sitting there. A lot of them come in looking hard-core. And it takes a minute to break down that front that they have. But once do You get past that and you see that light bulb come on then you can really get to talking to them. But really goes back to... we just got a stop and listen to them. And that’s so simple. But it’s the hardest thing for adults to do. But you have to think about it like this– What am I telling you when I drop everything I’m doing and I sit down and listen to what you have to say?Q: so what is it that you’re telling them?A: I’m telling them that they matter to me. It’s that simple. What you say matters to me. I don’t know you, I’m just an old guy, but you matter. And it takes a while for a kid to get that. They don’t understand that dynamic. But subconsciously we’re touching them. That says to them, It doesn’t matter if your mom doesn’t listen, And it doesn’t matter if your dad just works, right here-Right now you matter. After that we tell them but it doesn’t matter what you want to do in life, but don’t listen to the guys that are lying to you. But if you decide to make that step, we got you. We work really hard to try to find the resources to help our kids whatever they need. No matter what that looks like. Because if you’re going to be dedicated to doing this kind of work, You need to be able to dedicate yourself to going all the way. If you nurture a youngster, they can do whatever they want to do in life.
Q: How old were you when you joined YEAGA?
A: I believe I was 15 or 16 – high school age

Q: What do you think YEAGA does different than what regular school does?
A: The whole atmosphere itself and what they teach – where you're in a group and you’re getting to know your fellow youth. You’re getting to get the insight into how they’re feeling and what’s going on in their lives – their family, their lifestyle. You’re able to learn from the OGs – the elders and what they’ve gone through, because they’ve gone through it all. You don’t get that in school. There you just see youngsters talking to youngsters – they don’t want to hear the adults. So, when I got involved with this, I was able to talk to the youngsters and tell them what’s going on – you don’t want to go down this path. What they teach here, and what I’m able to do now is to communicate more because they brought me out of my comfort zone. School doesn’t do that – you’re just there, sitting in a classroom – and yeah, of course you talk to your friends, but if you don’t ever talk to no one else, you don’t have friends. For an example – my little brother, he doesn’t talk to any friends or anything – he hasn’t been in this group either. What YEAGA did for me is that they brought me out of my comfort zone and made me be able to... because I used to mug the heck out of everyone – I used to look at them differently, judge them on the spot, look at them wrong, but now I’m able to see everyone – if anything, we’re all bad – we’ve all gone through a lot, we all go through our own things, we all have problems and situations that we go through. So who am I to judge when I’m going through my own thing – they’re going through it too. But being able to see them differently and speak with them and just now being able to just... what I didn’t take with me was the science and all that geometry, English... what I did take with me was the leadership skill in the organization and the communication in YEAGA – that’s what I got. I’m able to in an interview talk about what I’ve gone through personally, and I’ve overcome a lot of things because of the group – because of YEAGA and where they lead me because the whole lean in thing – its up to you to choose. They can show you, but its up to you to choose whether you want to do it or not.

Q: Is it that there is a lot of emotional support?
Definitely, it’s that. They are all about love too. You don’t get that kind of love in school – you really don’t. I don’t know if you heard, but they are ex-convicts, ex-correctional officers, and all that from all sides that come together for the youth. They come together to help you out. They did that for me, and I was like, man, that’s some love right there – that’s good stuff. You don’t get that anywhere else. Out in the street – nah – if you put them in the same room – it’s all bad. In the school, the teachers weren’t like that with me – they didn’t talk to me about what I did. They talked to me enough to say – you’re going to detention. YEAGA got to know my family – they spoke to my family. They kept coming to me, and back then I didn’t really care. But they kept coming and they kept showing their love – they showed that they cared a lot – and they do. Back then they told me that there were a whole lot of youngsters who were taking over [in meetings]. That told me that it was working out. And it’s helped me big time. I came from a lot of drugs and gangs, and right now I’m involved with this church and I’m able to use those leadership skills that I learned here in church. I talk to youngsters there and tell them what I’ve gone through, and I’m able to talk to them without judging them. I’ve come a long way.
Q: Do you remember when it worked for you? When you heard someone say something that clicked, or when you had a moment of realization?

A: My first time coming to this group was back when the meetings were held at a police station. I was kinda forced to go. But they just... I can’t tell you exactly what happened that day in the group but I just know that I felt something inside change. I didn’t get that feeling nowhere else. I just felt the love – that’s what it was – I felt that love. That’s what made me come back to the group. They ask you if you want to come back, and you can. They aren’t going to force anything on you, but I came back because there was that connection and that relationship that I was able to build. Now I’m able to build that kind of connection with youngsters just overall now. With anybody now, I’m able to talk to them about whatever. I’m comfortable now talking about everything – and it’s just awesome. But it was that love – that love brought me to it. I didn’t feel that anywhere else.

Q: And you felt that the first day?

A: Yeah. I did. I’m not gonna lie – they hammered me because I was doing my thing, but it was the love in the end. They did it because they love me and that’s what it was.

Q: And so now you’re an adult participant...

A: Yup, now I’m 21. I’ve been off and on coming in. Like today I came because I brought this youngster in with me. You know, we all go through our things, but I want to be able to see him grow and just see him expand in his life as I did. That’s all I want – I’m here to help out. I wasn’t like that before – I didn’t care about nothing.

Q: Was it that the folks in YEAGA set an example for you?

A: They kinda set an example, because they told me... well, it was really that they shared a whole bunch of information and just all kinds of things... They mentored me along the way. They showed me the ropes and I chose to follow the right way. I’m thankful for that. Q: When you say that you chose the right way, what does that choice look like?

A: I believe that I saw that they were doing their part to help us youngsters out. I wanted to be like that. I wanted to be able to help others. At that time... it wasn’t on that spot... but as I kept coming I saw that and I saw it working. The streets ain’t the right way, and going back to gangs wasn’t right either. So what I did was I ended up choosing to take the responsibility for my own actions and say ‘yeah, I messed up, and yeah this and that, but yeah, I’m willing to change’ and that’s what ended up happening. It took time – it doesn’t happen overnight. You have to take baby steps. So I kept coming back and they kept seeking me out and kept showing their love and just kept opening me up and I finally just... I’m not gonna lie – I still made a few mistakes, and some big ones, but now that I can see all this – it’s just a whole new blessing. If you hear PB’s life story... for him to be here talking to me is just amazing. For me... for them to be here with us... it’s just cool... it’s good stuff.
Q: What is it that YEAGA offers to kids that they don’t get in school, or that you didn’t get in school?
A: School just educates – Math, History, English – but when it comes to dealing with the lifestyle of the kids and peer pressure, they don’t know how to back away without being called names, or how to be themselves. They don’t have to put on that role that the street wants them to put on. YEAGA gives them the tools – but it’s a process – it’s not a quick fix – it’s a process that works when the kids keep coming and understanding. They pick up a little bit here and there. It’s the same in school – they pick up a little bit and while they’re doing that their brain is growing and they’re getting mature. Then they begin to understand how to deal with the peer pressure and how they can back away from that. I think that’s what YEAGA teaches the kids, and I see that when they become adults and what they talk about.

Q: When you’re in a YEAGA session and you’re talking with a kid, what indicates to you that something is clicking, that it’s working?
A: The expression on the youth’s face. Their body language. You can also... and I tell our members... ‘pay attention to your client’ – their face, their body language – if they’re understanding it or if they’re not. A lot of our members sometimes talk over their head so they don’t understand – so you have to bring it down a notch. I learned working with the high school or middle school – you pay attention to that, because you’re a teacher. You pay attention to whether you caught that child, and if you didn’t then you bring it down a notch. Kids don’t like to raise their hand and say ‘I didn’t understand.’ They just sit there and listen but without comprehending, so I tell the members ‘pay attention to your client, and see if they’re getting it - look at the expression on their face, their body language, and if not, then listen to what’s going on with them again... don’t just keep talking.’

Q: When you see something is working, what is the change that you see?
A: Really it’s that they keep coming back - or when they share with me at school. When I see them out in the field and they’ll say something like... ‘GG said this and it worked.’ or ‘I like the way he presented it to me’ or ‘PB broke this thing down for me and I understood it.’ And when they say that they tried something we talked about... it means that there is a change – that they were willing to try some new things because their way isn’t working. I tell kids, ‘look, you’ve been trying things your way for 5, 10, 15, however many years, and it’s not working, so why don’t you give YEAGA a chance, and see if having our members help you with it works.’ If it hasn’t worked yet, why keep going and making the same choices?

Q: Is there a technique to doing what YEAGA does?
A: I think it just comes naturally. We want to build that relationship with them and that’s the most important part of it, is letting them know we believe in them and that we love them and if they need to hear that word will tell them. If we need to tell them that we believe in them, we know that we need to tell them, because they have been so torn down that they even believe it. After you tell people you’re dumb and you’re good for nothing they start believing it. And you’re really carving that in their heart. I think that’s when we start out building that relationship and that trust and sometimes it takes a while. PB notices who has that wall up and he’ll talk to everyone else around first. He knows he has to get to that one youngster - that target - and he knows he’s going to be the tough one. And he waits. And sometimes than that one let’s real hard and has that wall way up there,
he sees how all the other kids adapted to the trust and the love in the group, and sometimes that is enough for that kid to bring the wall down.

Interview #7 PG

Q: What happens in a session with a youth that tells you that something is working? A: You sit there and you’re watching and you listen and you can tell if they’re being kind of annoyed because of her tone of voice. You can just tell when they’re talking to you if they’re slouched in the chair... something about the body language. Just somehow you can see it all. But then after a while, after they keep coming. Eventually they break and once you break, cry, start letting everything out, that’s when you can open up more. I was in that position once where I just broke down and let it all out.Q: What is it that YEAGA does differently than schools do? A: I want to say– life. It’s more about showing you what path you want to take what you want to do with your life. It also helps you with school. To go to school, do good, and be successful in life. It helps – it helps out a lot. Especially when you have problems in the household or if you don’t even have a household. It helps. It’s giving them basically a family. If they don’t have a family it gives them a family to come and talk about their problems with. Some kids don’t even have moms or dads to go to talk to. It’s sad, but, YEAGA helps.Q: When it starts working on a kids, doesn’t usually involve tears? A: Yeah. You see it in their face when they’re about to break. Their eyes will start getting all watery and that one tear comes down and a lot more follow. Everyone breaks.Q: Even though everyone breaks eventually, it doesn’t always work–or it doesn’t always work on the level that needs to work in order to keep a kid from getting in trouble. But, what is your sense of the difference between that kid and a kid who stops and decides to make a change? A: So, for a kid to stop acting up and stop getting in trouble, they have to change their thinking. They have to stop thinking that they can get away with something that they’re not going to get caught. And while you might not get caught right away, Eventually you will, and over the stupidest thing. I don’t know. You can only take so much pain and loneliness before you realize that you don’t want to do it anymore. Maybe some kids just aren’t tired yet but eventually they’ll get tired. I know I got tired. Hopefully then it’s not too late, but everyone’s different. I’m just lucky that it happened a lot sooner than later for me.Q: As somebody you started in YEAGA as a youth, and now you’re a teacher - How do you learn to do that? How is it that you learn how and when to talk in sessions? A: After going there for so many years, you pick up on how they come at kids. How they ask them questions. Just basically doing it with them and watching them. That’s the type of learner that I was. You would have to show me to do it not to tell me to do it.Q: what’s the best part of being a YEAGA teacher for you?

A: helping the kids. It feels good because sometimes a kid Will come up to you and shake your hand and say “You save my life.” It’s hard to explain, it’s just a really good feeling.
Interview #8 P1

Q: Tell me about a time in your life when you realized something significant about yourself.
A: I guess that I’m a good listener because when I’m at YEAGA I feel like I can tell other kids because I’m older (not old, but older) than other kids and kids that are going toward the road that I was going towards – I feel like I have a lot of advice that I can give to them so they don’t go down the road I went down.

Q: Tell me about a time when a teacher here at YEAGA made you rethink who you are as a person. What did they say?
A: I forgot the guys name but I was talking about how I don’t know if I do want help or not, and he said that you’re... he was telling me real things and that I’m worth more and stuff.

Q: What did you say?
A: I was kinda in silent mode just because I didn’t know what to say to that, because growing up I was just like nothing... I was always in trouble and doing nothing with my life, and like, right now, it’s the same things going for me, it’s just hard trying to believe people – strangers, basically – trying to tell me that I’m worth more when I don’t really know what I’m worth.

Q: When did you know that what he said was significant?
A: When I thought back on it later.

Q: Are YEAGA teachers different from the teachers you have in public school?
A: Yes.

Q: What do you see or hear that makes YEAGA teachers different?
A: They just talk like they know where I’m coming from and stuff. Because they relate to what I go through.

Q: What do you think they are trying to teach you here?
A: To not continue on the path that I’m following.

Q: What is it that you are trying to learn here?
A: To stay out of trouble and to know my worth.
References


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