

School redesign and neighbourhood redevelopment

A longitudinal study of educational success, families, and equity

Study overview

The *School redesign and neighbourhood redevelopment: A longitudinal study of educational success, families and equity* research project investigates how an innovative school redesign initiative affected children in a historically marginalized neighbourhood in downtown Toronto. This community-partnered study helps us to understand how social and physical environments affect children's educational success and well-being, and the role of the built environment in reducing inequities. The research also investigates how school redesign affects children, parents, educators, and community members within the larger community-level changes of neighbourhood redevelopment.

This study and its activities have been approved by the Research Ethics Board at Ryerson University and the External Research Review Committee of the Toronto District School Board.

Our approach

In 2011 and 2012, a public school located in a socio-economically disadvantaged neighbourhood in downtown Toronto was closed down to go through a school redesign that was informed by an inclusive architectural design process. An inclusive architectural design process is a participatory and collaborative approach to designing buildings. It involved gathering school design input from various stakeholders, including students, teachers, parents, and other school, community, and housing informants. During the school redesign and rebuild process, students and teachers were relocated to two feeder schools in the same neighbourhood. After the completion of the redesign process, the school was reopened in 2013 with many former and new students from the feeder schools moving to the redesign school.

In the same year, one of the feeder schools was closed down.

Throughout the school redesign process and since 2003, neighbourhood redevelopment has been ongoing in the school catchment area, whereby old social housing units were being demolished and upgraded in phases, resulting in residents being temporarily relocated during construction.

From 2010 to 2015, we spoke with students, teachers, parents and key informants from the redesign school, feeder schools, and comparison schools located in different neighbourhoods to gain their insight on the changes happening at the school- and community-level and the role of the built environment in reducing inequities.

2010

Redesign School (RS) prepares for school redesign

2011

RS closed for redesign
RS teachers and students relocated to Feeder Schools (FS) 1 & 2

2012

2013

RS reopens, students and teachers return
FS1 closes

2014

Follow up with RS and FS2

2015

Follow up with RS

What we found

From our preliminary analyses, various themes emerged at the student-, family-, school-, and community-levels. Themes included thoughts on neighbourhood redevelopment, violence, and safety in the community, school redesign and related transitions, and family involvement in the lives of students and the community, among many more. Initial reports based on the following topics were created and shared with community partners:

- School and Neighbourhood Safety
- Neighbourhood Redevelopment
- Built Environment (before, during, and after school redesign)
- School Social Dynamics and Transitions (during school redesign and related transitions)
- School-based Programs and Services (e.g., Model Schools Paediatric Health Initiative)

DATA
COLLECTED

607
TOTAL
PARTICIPANTS

359
students
FOCUS GROUPS

100
teachers
FOCUS GROUPS

98
parents
FOCUS GROUPS

50
key informants
(including school-based, housing and municipal
stakeholders, among other community informants)
INTERVIEWS

13
school built
environment surveys
COLLECTED OVER TIME

What we're doing

With data collection complete, our efforts are now focused on sharing our results with the study participants, stakeholders (e.g., municipal, housing, education, community members), and the broader public. We are sharing our findings in the following ways:

- Knowledge mobilization meetings with stakeholders
- Sharing community reports and presentations of findings
- Creation of summaries of findings for circulation
- Scholarly manuscripts and presentations of findings

Study team

PRIMARY INVESTIGATOR

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COMMUNITY PARTNERS

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SSHRC INSIGHT DEVELOPMENT GRANT

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