Creating a New Beginning  Youth Speak Out on Race and Ethnicity in Metropolitan Detroit

The Participatory Evaluation of the Youth Dialogues Project

Stephanie Chang (University of Michigan)
Ellie Gunderson (Southfield Lathrup High School)
Surabhi Pandit (Southfield Lathrup High School)
Katie Richards-Schuster (University of Michigan)
Phillip Vails (Southfield High School)
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A project of the Skillman Foundation and the University of Michigan
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Map</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What is it Like to Grow Up in Metro Detroit?</strong></td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story: David</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story: Maria</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through Your Eyes: Pictures of St. Clair</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through Your Eyes: Pictures of Ann Arbor</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How Do Young People Experience Race and Ethnicity?</strong></td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story: Ashley</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story: Angie</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through Your Eyes: Pictures of West Bloomfield</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through Your Eyes: Pictures of Detroit</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How Did Young People Experience the Dialogues?</strong></td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story: Jack</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story: Jay</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspective: The Facilitators</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through Your Eyes: Pictures of Dearborn</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through Your Eyes: Pictures of Riverview</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What Do Young People Think about the Future of Diversity in Metro Detroit?</strong></td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story: Bree</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through Your Eyes: Pictures of Canton</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through Your Eyes: Pictures of Southfield</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Our Recommendations</strong></td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Our Conclusions</strong></td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix #1: The Interview Questions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix #2: The Curriculum for the Dialogues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The world is broken into fragments and pieces
That once were joined together in a unified whole
But now too many stand alone - There's too much separation
We can resolve to come together in the new beginning ....

We can break the cycle - We can break the chain
We can start all over - In the new beginning
We can learn, we can teach
We can share the myths the dream the prayer
The notion that we can do better
Change our lives and paths
Create a new world and

Start all over ...

We need to make new symbols
Make new signs
Make a new language
With these we'll define the world...

“New Beginning” by Tracy Chapman (1995, New Beginning, Elektra Entertainment Group)
INTRODUCTION

We are pleased to share our evaluation report of the 2005 Summer Youth Dialogues on Race and Ethnicity in Metropolitan Detroit project.

This project brought together 14 community-based teams of youth to talk about issues of race and ethnicity in Metro Detroit. Each group, made up of 6–8 young people of similar racial and ethnic backgrounds, spent the first two dialogues in intragroup meetings and then were paired with another group for five dialogues in intergroup meetings. There were two seven-week sessions, involving six groups in the first session and eight groups in the second session. The dialogues were facilitated by University of Michigan undergraduate students and recent graduates.

We started this report with the lyrics from the Tracy Chapman song “New Beginnings” because it reminded us of the project’s goal. The purpose of Youth Dialogues was to break down barriers and address the prejudices that have segregated our community into what it is today. This song talks about celebrating one another and using our newfound knowledge to start from scratch and create a world in which prejudice does not exist.

We began this evaluation as a team of high school, college and graduate students, diverse across age, gender, race, and ethnicity. We called ourselves “The Rangers.” While the name didn’t mean much, it became a symbol of the team we created. We were unified in our work, developed strong relationships between ourselves, and, most of all, had a lot of fun in the process.

We got involved in the evaluation because of our own personal stories and our mutual interest in race and ethnicity. For example, here are some of our stories:

Ellie: I got involved in the Evaluation of Youth Dialogues because race relations is something I've been interested in for as long as I can remember. Growing up White in a Black community, I've always paid close attention to the way races interact, and what role race plays in every type of relationship. I have a great concern for cooperation between people of every race, and that's what led me to have an interest in Youth Dialogues. I'm passionate about involvement in anything that will allow people of diverse backgrounds to really get to know one another for who they are. Last year, my participation in Generation of Promise, a program to unite high school juniors of various races from across Metro Detroit, deepened my interest in this topic even more. For the evaluation, it was interesting looking at the issue of race from a new perspective,
from the views of people who grew up in every different type of community, not just my own. Being able to observe the process instead of directly participate was a challenge, but also a welcomed opportunity to experience something different and truly eye-opening.

Steph: The program seemed to fit with the two main things I’ve focused on: working with high school students, and building bridges between different communities! I grew up in Canton, Michigan, and going through college at the University of Michigan made me realize how segregation really did limit the interactions that were possible or impossible for me growing up. Being a second generation Taiwanese American has definitely played a role in my life just as race has an impact for the dialogue participants. This experience has made me even more passionate about these issues. In terms of the evaluation “Rangers” team, I just thought it would be cool, and the idea of “collecting stories” and making people’s voices heard is something I will always believe in. Go rangers!

Over the course of the summer, we came into our own as evaluators. We developed a plan, created questions, and set up contacts in each of the communities. We visited each of the communities and interviewed young people. We examined photographs, discussed common themes, and analyzed results. We learned about how young people experience race and ethnicity, how they think about diversity, and what they learned during the dialogues.

This report highlights the lessons learned throughout the summer. In addition, it showcases the stories of six young people who participated in the project. The purpose of these stories is to provide an in-depth view of how certain young people experienced the dialogues and how and why they mattered to them. We have used pseudonyms, chosen mostly by the young people themselves, and masked some of the community characteristics to protect their identity. We recognize that not all communities are represented in these stories; however, our aim was to provide a few examples of youth to illuminate and provide a face to the project.

We would like to especially thank all the young people who participated in the interviews. We would also like to thank the facilitators for assisting with the process, the evaluation contacts who provided information and pictures, Amanda Kim who provided feedback on our interview questions, and Roger Fisher and Barry Checkoway who made this participatory evaluation possible. We would also like to thank Yasmin Esayed who served as an important team member to the evaluation during the early stages of the process and provided insight to the planning and development of the evaluation tools. Finally, we would like to thank the Skillman Foundation and the University of Michigan for their support of the Youth Dialogues Project.

We submit this report not only to tell what we learned, but to inspire even deeper thought about the issue of race and ethnicity in Metro Detroit. Our goal is not only to tell what we’ve learned and experienced throughout the project, but also
to provide our recommendations for a better future here in our community.

We hope that you enjoy!

“The Rangers”

Ellie, Phillip, Surabhi, Stephanie, & Katie

Phillip & Ellie hard at work

Surabhi & Stephanie working away
METHODS

The Process

This evaluation built on a participatory process to develop the methodology. During the first few meetings, we worked together to develop the purpose, focus and outcomes for the evaluation. We decided to focus on gathering stories about the young people who participated in dialogues. More specifically, we wanted to understand four questions:

(1) What it was like to grow up in Metropolitan Detroit?
(2) How do young people understand race and ethnicity?
(3) How did the participants experience the dialogues?
(4) What do the participants think about the future of race and ethnicity in Metropolitan Detroit?

We then developed a process and plan for the evaluation. After developing the process, we met many times to create the interview and journal questions. It was often a challenge to find a convenient meeting time given busy summer schedules and to coordinate transportation since we were in different cities with some not having access to transportation. Thus we used combinations of face-to-face meetings, email, and cell phone conversations to make plans and move the work forward.

After we developed the questions, we reached out to each community organization’s dialogue group to appoint one person to serve as the evaluation contact for the group. The evaluation contacts were responsible for providing background information about their community, identifying one or two people in the group who would be willing to participate in the interviews, and for taking pictures which best captured the community.

The Data Collection

We used many different methods to gather information for the evaluation including interviews, journal writing, and photographs. We decided on these methods because we wanted to capture different perspectives and as many voices as possible. In addition, because we felt it was important to gather different ideas about how others saw their communities, we had each evaluation contact take pictures.
The bulk of our data collection came from individual interviews with participants. In total we interviewed 12 participants. Each interview lasted between thirty minutes and one hour. We taped the interviews to provide accuracy. In general, two of the evaluation team members attended the interviews. Most often, the high school members conducted the interviews and the university members assisted with notes and additional questions. All team members took responsibility for transcribing tapes and writing up the interviews.

We conducted the interviews in the home communities of the participants. In some cases the interviews took place at the host organization and in other cases in a public location such as the local library. It was very interesting for us to drive to the communities, in part because it provided an opportunity for us to see the contrast in the communities first hand. It was amazing to us to see the distance between communities and the inability to easily get around them. (In fact, we often got lost trying to navigate the many highways and roads that linked the communities!) Our experience in just traveling to the interviews confirms the fact that without forms of transportation, young people will have challenges interacting with others in different communities. As one of our team members described, “everything is walled off into its own corner.” Through the interview process, we saw the differences in resources between communities and the isolation that impacts the way young people experience growing up in Metro Detroit.

Despite the logistical challenges, the interviews were fun. Because most of us did not have a great deal of contact with the actual program, it was interesting to learn about the dialogues, the activities, and the impacts of the project from the perspective of the participants. In most cases, we interviewed people that we did not know, but in a few cases this was not true. In these cases, the interviews were especially interesting because the participants often shared even more and allowed us to learn new things.

In general, we were surprised at how open people were during the interviews. The interview questions hit really deep and asked people to share their personal experiences. The information we gathered from participants was very powerful. People talked about their experiences with racism, discrimination they had experienced, and racist attitudes in their own families. They talked about times where they were challenged during the dialogues and even times where they offended someone in the process and learned something from it. They also talked about the future. While some were hopeful, many were honest about their feelings that little will change.

We think that this level of openness may be in part due to the fact that the dialogues helped participants to reflect on these issues and have a framework for thinking about their experience. Thus, the fact that we conducted most of our interviews near the end or after the participant’s last dialogue session often made it easier for the participant to discuss personal experiences.
We also suspect that having a group of multicultural high school students conduct the interviews made a difference in the level of openness of the youth. Having peers interview peers really made the interviews more of a conversation. In addition, the language, dress, similar characteristics and general atmosphere created by the high school interviewers helped to break the ice with the participants and put them more at ease. We think that taping the interviews also helped because we didn't have to be taking notes throughout, and it did not feel like we were analyzing every word being spoken.

**Making Sense of the Information**

Once the interviews were completed and transcribed, we began to make sense of what we had learned. While we conducted two distinct analysis sessions, much of the “making sense” of the information happened along the way. We discussed the lessons we were learning in the car between interviews, on the phone, and in meetings. In addition, we found ourselves comparing and contrasting interviews as we were doing them. As such, analysis was actually happening all the time!

The biggest challenge we found during the analysis portion of our evaluation was the amount of information we had collected. We had over 50 pages of interview transcripts alone, not including over 70 pages of journal questions to analyze. Because of this, just keeping track of the information and drawing connections between themes was difficult. One of the challenges we experienced was keeping check of our own emotions and reactions to the information we were reading. Because some of the information was very powerful and often uncomfortable to read, it was hard to try and be objective and not let our own interpretations get in the way.

One thing we were disappointed with was the fact that there were still many stereotypes and assumptions that were raised in the journals and interviews that would have been important topics within the dialogues. Some main examples of this were the many young people that made assumptions about poverty, and especially Detroit, without any understanding of the link between race and class. Perhaps these various stereotypes and assumptions were talked about later in these dialogues. At any rate, the evaluation team truly observed the honesty of the participants and the reality of the stereotypes and assumptions that are and have been generated by various institutions in society. This kind of honesty and reality was valued very highly in the dialogues, and we saw it again in the interviews and journals.
Writing the Stories & Developing the Report

We took a collective approach to writing the stories and developing the report. Our main focus was to make the report come as alive as possible and to highlight the issues raised in the stories of the young people. Thus, we chose to write the report in a way that incorporated quotes, pictures, and stories to help put the reader in the shoes of the dialogue participants. We divided responsibility for the different sections of the report and met a few times to work on the development of conclusions, recommendations, and to craft the final look of the report.

Lessons Learned

There were many lessons learned during the evaluation process.

1) There were many challenges throughout the evaluation (i.e. logistics of meetings, coordinating transportation, scheduling interviews, sharing interview equipment), and the evaluation took more time than any of us had imagined. That said, we enjoyed what we were doing and had fun along the way.

2) There is real power in working as a team. Each of us brought a special perspective to the design and implementation of the evaluation. The entire project was better for it.

3) It was critical to have young people conduct the interviews because they created a rapport with the participants that allowed for a comfortable atmosphere and more rich discussion.

4) The process of reflecting on the project itself gave us an opportunity to think about recommendations and lessons learned.

5) This evaluation was personal to us in a few ways. In part because we we're dealing with people’s words and experiences and so we wanted to make sure we portrayed their voices in as accurate a way as possible. But it was also personal because each one of the evaluation team’s members grew up in Metro Detroit. These are our towns, our schools, and in some cases, our friends. We realized in the process of this evaluation that we too are products of this environment, so it made us question and think about our own experiences and ideas on race and ethnicity.

Overall, the evaluation was as much about our own process of working together and learning as it was about a process for gathering information about the Youth Dialogues project.
What is to follow are our findings about the Youth Dialogues project including what it is like to grow up in Metro Detroit, how young people experience race and ethnicity, what the dialogues were like, and what young people think about the future. We have interspersed personal stories and community pictures pages to enrich the information.

THE EVALUATION TEAM

ELLIE  STEPHANIE  PHILLIP  SURABHI  KATIE
The Metropolitan Detroit Experience...

A: Neutral Zone – Ann Arbor
B: Youth Council of Asian Pacific Americans – Canton
C: West Bloomfield High School
D: Southfield Community Foundation
E: Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services – Dearborn
F: Guidance Center – Downriver: Southgate, Riverview
G: Community Foundation for Southeastern Michigan
   Based in Detroit, most participants from Macomb County

In Detroit:
H: Mosaic Youth Theatre
I: Detroit Youth Foundation
J: Rosedale Park Baptist Church
K: Detroit Hispanic Development Corporation – Southwest
L: Latin Americans for Social and Economic Development – Southwest
M: People’s Community Services – Delray/Southwest
WHAT IS IT LIKE TO GROW UP IN METRO DETROIT?
Growing up in Metro Detroit impacts the experience of young people in their neighborhoods and their schools. For example, here are some of things young people said about their experience growing up:

Safe. Kinda boring. There's not a lot of kids, it's mostly older people and it's all white.
--St. Clair Shores

I live in a working-class neighborhood; everyone keeps their yard taken care of and complains if one neighbor slacks off. Mornings and afternoons are peaceful, evenings the younger crowd comes out with their basketball hoops and music.
--Detroit

Living where I live, you experience everything from selling drugs to shoot outs. This doesn’t have to mean its bad out there. It’s what you make of it.
--Detroit

Growing up in my community has been pretty uneventful and even boring...I have always been in a safe, clean community with nice neighbors...I suppose I have been a bit sheltered.
--Southgate

My community is definitely lively. It's all Latinos, which I'm not used to.... They play music all the time; there's singing and dancing at all hours! It's cool to see that.
-Southwest Detroit

In my community...you knew everyone in town and you knew who to avoid. Like mean kids who picked on you for being Jewish.
--West Bloomfield

For many of the youth in the dialogues, their growing up has been strongly influenced by race and ethnicity. However, it is clear that young people grow up relatively isolated from one another. We heard one participant say that she had never heard of someone being Jewish before. Another described that she did not know that other schools celebrated Martin
Luther King Day (her school did not commemorate the holiday). Other young people described that this project was the first time they had ever had any real interaction with others from a different race or ethnicity.

Young people described this segregation and isolation as stemming, in part, from their families. They described how families tend to stay rooted in communities. One young man from Detroit described:

People in my neighborhood don’t like to leave. ...Most parents don’t want you to hang out with other races. I had a White friend but as I grew up my parents got on me because of it. I think parents just want you to hang out with the same kinds of kids. Not that they are racist—but I assume it is because parents may think the other races are bad.

Similarly, a young person from St. Clair described:

A lot of my friends, their parents have lived in St. Clair their whole life and their parents before that. I feel like people feel comfortable living in one area that they’re familiar with. They haven’t experienced other cities; they don’t really know what they’re missing out on.

Another young person from Southfield added that the tendency for families to stay rooted also changed over time. As families moved to new communities, segregation also moved too:

As time went on, the Asian and Caucasian neighbors moved out and more Blacks moved in...It seems to me to be a “great migration” of Whites from Southfield to Farmington and Blacks from Detroit to Southfield.

Young people also described that most of their friends are from similar racial and ethnic backgrounds. In fact most of the youth described that they only knew a few people who were different from themselves. One young person from Detroit answered our question about “if there was much interaction between the races,” by answering, “Well, one of my friends is actually half African-American and half Chinese, but that’s it.” Another young Arab-American person added, “I was born in Dearborn, Michigan where most of the population is Arab-Americans. It was natural for me to have Arabic [sic] friends.”

In fact, most of the participants described that they do not have opportunities to meet people different from themselves. One young person stated, “I mostly interact with people of my own race, not because I choose to, just because that’s the way it is.”
Sometimes this segregation literally occurs over a street barrier. One young woman described growing up on Eight Mile Road, the border between the cities of Detroit and Warren:

\[ \text{It's crazy, but...it was...a learning experience, because most people look at you like –how can it be just a street barrier where hardly any White people cross it on this side, and hardly any Black people cross on the other side. But seriously there is a barrier right there. Where White people live on that side, and Black people live on this side.} \]

Many participants described how the schools in Metro Detroit are segregated making it difficult to meet others. One young person from Detroit said, “Even though my school is like the top school in Detroit, most different races, mostly Caucasians go to private schools....Most Detroit public schools are African-American and most private schools are Caucasian.”

However, even when a school has some diversity, most young people described how they tend to self-segregate during the lunch hour and hang out with friends who are of the same racial and ethnic backgrounds after school. One young person from Canton described, “...at lunch...you can walk in to the cafeteria, look around, and see that the Blacks are with majority Blacks, Whites are with the majority Whites, and Asians with the majority Asians.”

Another Asian-American young person of mixed heritage remarked, “It seems as if people segregate themselves according to race. And now that I really think about it, [perhaps race is] the real reason why I am not in the so-called ‘popular group’ ...because I am not fully white.”

This self-segregation also plays out within the community. A young woman from Ann Arbor stated, “I think it's interesting that a lot of people view Ann Arbor as a liberal town and it is to some extent. But it isn't as accepting as people think it is.” Similarly, one young person from West Bloomfield described this complexity: “Growing up in my community has taught me a lot because of the diversity. But the only problem is that all the different groups don't seem to get along and are segregated for the most part.”

Some participants described this self-segregation as “sticking to what you know.” “Sticking to what you know” meant for the participants that sometimes one feels comfortable around those who are and act like oneself and so that may explain in part where some of the segregation comes from. For example, one person from Southfield said:

\[ \text{...there's no real problems. It's mostly positive when they do interact but mostly people stick to their own. I mostly hang with the same because I don't have any other options...it's just that the majority of kids in out school happen to be Black.} \]
Some participants saw this as a positive thing, that growing up in a community where everyone is like you or has the same background as you helped you to better understand your own culture and history. For example, this was especially true in the African-American and Arab culture. One Arab-American youth from Dearborn stated, “Growing up in Dearborn community was a good experience because I learned about my culture.” Similarly, a Latina youth from Detroit described:

[People] see the word ‘Latino’ and group us all together, when really the Puerto Rican culture is different from the Mexican culture, which is different from Dominican, and it’s interesting for me to see the way they do their thing and the way we do ours, so it’s a good way for me to see that.

But, in general, most of the young people in the dialogues wish that they grew up in communities that were more diverse.

I don’t interact with that many people that have different views or different outlooks on life or even a different color…It doesn’t make me feel bad or anything like that but I know it’s going to limit my learning about different cultures and life itself.

The fact that I judge people before I know them personally makes me feel ashamed. I would not want people judging me so why should I judge them? Perhaps if I had more contact with people from other ethnicities, then I would not be as judgmental.

In closing, most young people in Metro Detroit experience growing up as relatively isolating with little interaction between different racial and ethnic groups. As one young person from a suburban town stated:

Many people that live in my town have lived in this area their whole lives. Because of this, they are unaware of the different opportunities and experiences that are in diverse areas. They isolate themselves from the outside world and miss the opportunity to meet incredible people.
DAVID

David is a sixteen-year-old African-American male. He has lived in Detroit all his life. He lived in Northwest Detroit until he was five, and then in a neighborhood in the Southwest part of Detroit until now. His family came to the area in the 1920s—his grandma, who he lives with during the summer, came from Alabama.

Within the context of his neighborhood, David doesn’t get much opportunity to interact with people of different races. Most people in his neighborhood don’t get outside the neighborhood, and the limited interaction he has with people of other races is in school, not extended to outside of school. But Southwestern High School does have a large Hispanic population. David recalls that parents in the area have tended to encourage hanging out with kids of the same race.

Before his group from Detroit met with a Caucasian group, David and other participants expected that the other youth would be “afraid of us” and maybe even racist. Through the dialogues, he found that they actually had more in common, “and we were cool with that!” He remembers that during the first intergroup dialogue that the different groups didn’t really talk to each other. Over time, they began talking more and more, and he felt like they were able to break down stereotypes.

David hopes that people from both groups could be friends and stay in touch. He realizes, however, that transportation is a huge issue in Metropolitan Detroit. David feels that he is one of the few in his neighborhood who interacts with other races in his community—“there are a lot of people who don’t know [why it’s important].” He hopes that for his own neighborhood community, there can be dialogue sessions between the groups of different races that make up the area’s diversity—mostly African-American and Latino/a. He thinks that the dialogues he took part in were really important!
Maria grew up in a very traditional Latino household in Southwest Detroit. She is of Puerto Rican descent, and her family exhibits a good deal of pride in that origin. Maria eats traditional foods at her home, and her neighborhood, in one word, can be described as “lively” because of the music, singing, and dancing that takes place there day and night. Even so, her mother always encouraged her to interact with everyone, because it will lead to better people skills later in life. Growing up, Maria moved around a few times, and didn’t always live in such a predominantly Hispanic area. In fact, Maria had the ability as a young child to interact with people of many races due to the diverse neighborhoods in which she was raised.

As a child, Maria didn’t even know what race was. She had mostly Black friends, but she befriended a few White and Hispanic kids, too. Although she was the minority at school, she never experienced any racial problems. Now, however, living in an area with a largely Hispanic population has revealed many issues of race in her community. For example, Maria observed that the couple Black families that live on her street isolate themselves and stay in their gated houses, as the neighbors watch and wonder what’s wrong with them. Also, Maria realizes that her school is ‘not the best place to be’ if you’re looking for a diverse environment to learn in. Over half of her school is Hispanic, while most of the rest is Black, with a few kids who are White or of a different origin. These groups tend to segregate themselves, leading to a very homogenous learning environment. However, in her school’s ROTC program, Maria has had the ability to work with people of every race in order to get things done, and she wishes everyone could have this experience. Maria’s experiences in school and in her neighborhood have helped to build her image of what race means.

The dialogues gave Maria a chance to further explore the complex issue of race, and she was more than happy to join. Her group met with a Black group from Northwest Detroit, and when the first intergroup meeting started, Maria could feel the tension in the room. But as time went on, the students became friends, and everyone felt comfortable to say what they were feeling. This was especially hard for Maria, though, because the discussions brought up emotions she had never even tried to express before, so it was hard to put her feelings into words. She was especially moved by the web of oppression activity, which opened her eyes to the injustices that her peers face every day and made her grateful for the people who “have their head on their shoulders straight.” The dialogues opened up a whole new way of looking at race for Maria, and she views her community in a whole new light now.

Maria knows that change will take a lot of hard work and convincing of other people, but she is ready for the challenge. She truly believes that if people are shown and taught that stereotypes are wrong, they can change their mindset. Maria has realized that it is not okay for every race to be segregated into its own community, and wants to continue to work for interaction between races. She knows there is a prevalent attitude among Hispanics in her community that because they worked so hard to be where they’re at, they shouldn’t be forced to change. However, she feels that this attitude can be combated if people open their minds to new experiences. Maria feels a sense of determination and hope for the future.
Through Your Eyes: Pictures of St. Clair
Through Your Eyes: Pictures of Ann Arbor
HOW DO YOUNG PEOPLE EXPERIENCE RACE AND ETHNICITY?
HOW DO YOUNG PEOPLE EXPERIENCE RACE & ETHNICITY IN METRO DETROIT?

Most of the young people in the dialogues have experienced race and ethnicity in their lives, but often in very different ways.

Some of the young people we interviewed said they had never thought about race or ethnicity before the dialogues. For example, one young White woman from a Downriver suburb described how, “[Race] was never really a big deal to me. I’ve never really encountered it, I guess you could say…I’ve always been in the majority.”

Another young man from the suburbs had a hard time articulating his race and ethnicity. When asked about his race and ethnicity, he described, “My race? I don’t really know. I’m just White. I’m American. I don’t really have any ethnicity.”

Others, however, described how race and ethnicity is part of everything and impacts the way they interact with the world. For these young people, race and ethnicity is a strong part of everyday life. For example, one young African-American woman from Detroit described how she feels she is “prejudged” even before she has a conversation, just because of her race. Another White young person from Ann Arbor described that she notices race all the time—“I think about it a lot…I’m very aware.”

The fact that two very different perspectives can coexist is very interesting. It shows the complexity of race and the differences in the way young people in Metro Detroit experience race. An African-American young man from Southfield described:

The dialogues made me think about how complex it is…I mean race is individual but is also something that everyone shares. We’re separated by them but we are also connected by them…I don’t know, it’s hard to grab my brain around it.

For the participants of color, especially, race is very important and helps to provide a sense of connection to history and culture. One young person described:

Race is very important to me. It is an important aspect. It doesn’t define me but leaves something to build upon…I think tradition and culture is built on race and that fits into your personality. I’m very
proud of my race and my family. I think it impacts the way I react to others because I like learning about other races and traditions.

Several Arab-American young people from Dearborn talked about how the events and aftermath of September 11th impacted how race and ethnicity became a more distinct barrier in some ways:

Growing up I never made the distinction at a large scale between Arabs, Muslims, and non-Arabs/Muslims. ...I was never really confused [about] who I am. [But] it was not until 9-11 that a distinct separation or barrier was constructed.

In my community, there has been some positive and negative changes. The negative changes would be how people are more paranoid now since 9/11 toward Arab-Americans.

One young Asian-American woman from Canton talked about the realization that race has played a role in who her friends are and how she thinks about herself in comparison to other people of the same background:

My friends are mostly comprised of Asians, but I never gave a thought to it until I realized how many Asians were on my buddy list. I'm more aware of it now, since I'm slightly afraid of being labeled a 'fob' ['fresh off the boat'].

For the same young people, race can be a constant reminder of discrimination still present. One young Black man from Southfield described a powerful experience of discrimination he experienced:

One time at football camp some White kids from the [suburbs] walked by our school's team and made gorilla noises. I didn't know what to do...no one knew what to do...we'd never experienced anything like that...but our coach just told us to ignore it...that in life we'd have to experience stuff like that and if we got in to we'd just be adding to the problem.

Another young man, also from Southfield, described the discrimination he sees on his own block:

...Race plays an important part in our society today, because I mean discrimination and segregation are still present in our time today...I pretty much know that the White families in our neighborhood see Black families moving in and they think, “oh, my God, the neighborhood's going down...”
Most of the participants in the dialogues recognized that racial judgments are a part of every day life. One young woman from Canton stated, “Even though we try to be [color-blind] we always do see skin color and it does affect our perception of things... I feel that race shouldn’t really matter, but it does and we need to be aware of it.” Another young man from West Bloomfield added that he knows “there are people who won’t accept people from other races to be their friends.”

Most felt that these attitudes and stereotypes about race come from families and from the media. For example, one Arab-American young person from Dearborn added, “The media is the one responsible for all the racist ideas people are getting and them using that “fake” info toward people of different cultures, which in fact is clearly wrong.”

Another young African-American woman from Detroit described how her mom was prejudiced against White people because White people had burned down her home during the riots when she was a child:

Growing up with my mom’s side of the family, she’s pretty racist. When I talk about it, everybody’s like—she’s really negative, has stereotypes and is prejudice. Because they don’t know her like I do— they don’t know the stuff that has happened to her while she was little, why she is the way she is...

The fact that many of the participants learn to make assessments about race and ethnicity from family and media is very important. Since children are very impressionable, the messages picked up early on about race and ethnicity can become ingrained and impact the kinds of judgments and stereotypes young people make about others different from them. Most of the participants described these negative racial stereotypes as stemming from an ignorance caused by a lack of interaction. One young person added, “I’m starting to learn about a lot of things that I couldn’t have learned while I was growing up. And I’m not saying that it’s my parents’ fault, because I mean, that’s what they know!”

One young person added, “I think that in order to not have stereotypes continue, people need to understand the culture behind different races. Most of the racism in Ann Arbor is due to ignorance and not that someone hates someone else.” She went on to state that she thinks “education is the key.”

Without education to help challenge stereotypes or media images or to provide opportunities to interact, there is, as some participants described, a “never-ending cycle” of racism: “I know a lot of my friends are pretty racist, and I think it comes from their parents. I’ve heard their parents talk and the things that they say are passed down over and over again. It’s a never-ending cycle. It sucks.”

Some wrote in their journal that the stereotypes ingrained are very hard to break, as they realized from participating in the dialogues. For example, one young person from the suburbs wrote:
I have already judged them and decided that I do not want to associate with them... These judgments affect my attitudes when having to work with any other individual, and close my mind to any objection of my stereotypes. This prevents me from the learning process, and therefore limiting my future.

Others were more hopeful about breaking stereotypes. One young woman from Detroit described her own personal conviction to make a change:

Oh my goodness, I can't say how many times I've heard that in my life. It's like, it's so closed minded, but it's what they know! It's what they were taught. My grandparents would say “They're (White people) are bring the Black man down, that's why you've got to fight to be in this world, they're going to bring you down.” Like—the only person that's bringing you down is yourself. If you want to keep losing in debt or keep paying other people—that are bring you down? Then you do that. I'm gonna go this way.

Another young person from West Bloomfield described his desire to reach out to others from different races:

Everyday I interact with people different from myself, I have a lot of friends from different races. It doesn’t matter to me really, we’re all human...

We learned from the dialogue participants that there is a hard system to break in terms of racism and prejudice—it's all around us! It was powerful to hear the young people acknowledge their own internal prejudices and reflect on thoughts and behaviors of the past—it seems like the dialogues sparked continuing reflection on this matter. At the same time, it was also powerful to hear the strength of how individuals also know that they can make a change in their own lives to be free of the system that they recognize.
Ashley, a young Detroit resident, has always lived in different neighborhoods around Eight Mile Road. Growing up, she was always surrounded by family - not only does she live with her mother, two sisters, two stepsisters, and one stepbrother, but she also has so many uncles and aunties that she’s never met them all. In her community, Ashley feels a sense of pride in the improvements that are happening, but she also knows that there’s a long way to go before it becomes the ideal community. For Ashley, being raised in her neighborhood was a learning experience, both good and bad.

Ashley feels a strong connection to her African-American heritage. She feels that race is a huge part of family and cultural history, and is very interested in tracing her family’s lineage. She feels an emotional connection to the African-American struggle, and appreciates what the previous generations have done to secure for Ashley all the rights she has today. Being raised near Eight Mile Road, the infamous barrier between Black Detroit and White suburbia, Ashley has experienced many life lessons on race relations first-hand. Her surroundings immediately educated her about self-segregation and racist attitudes, and she noticed a definite racial barrier at an early age. Even within her own home, racism pervaded many parts of her life; for example, her mother’s negative adherence to stereotypes and her father’s caution when dealing with other races were some of her earliest encounters with racism. However, she understands that her parents were raised in a different era, and their experiences affect their attitudes. All of these factors have strongly influenced her thoughts on race today.

Ashley was excited for the chance to be in the youth dialogues. At first, Ashley definitely noticed that people were holding back and staying with their own group, but once they started having dialogues, barriers dropped and everyone truly bonded together. The conversations brought up some bad memories for Ashley, but it felt good to acknowledge some of the hardships she’s had to go through. The dialogues opened her mind even more to better interactions between races, and gave Ashley hope for the future.

Ashley feels that there are many barriers even within her community that would make change difficult, but the dialogues have given her a more optimistic attitude. She feels that the people who discourage social change with pessimistic and unsupportive attitudes actually fuel her determination to get something done. Her main goal after the dialogues is to stay in contact with all the diverse people she’s met over the course of the summer, and continue working towards racial unity.
ANGIE

Angie is a fifteen years old, 1.5-generation (born in another country, but moved to the U.S. before the age of 10) Chinese American female who currently lives in Canton and goes to Plymouth High School, one of the three high schools in Plymouth-Canton. She was born in the Northeastern part of China, and came to the U.S. with her family when she was five years old. Her family lived in Detroit while her mother got her Masters degree at Wayne State University. After that, the family moved to Canton, a basic suburban neighborhood where there are mostly nice neighborhoods and medium-sized house, “not too big, not too small.” Angie is part of the Asian Pacific American Club at the high schools.

“I feel that race shouldn’t really matter, but it does—and we need to be aware of it and how it affects society,” Angie says. Angie was born in China, and “that makes me Chinese.” Angie plays piano, goes to a Chinese Language School, and attends a Chinese Gospel Church—all things that add up to some sort of Chinese American/Asian-American identity—“It’s all Asian, kind of!” Her first friend was another Chinese girl who lived next door. While still young, most of her friends were White, but as she grew older and went to high school, she came to have more Asian friends. Canton is a pretty diverse suburban area, but she realizes that cliques and stereotypes play a part in the make-up of her group of friends—mostly Asian and White, not many other races. Angie thinks that there is a sense of community within Asian ethnic communities—Chinese, Filipino, etc, but maybe not a pan-Asian-American community in Canton.

The dialogues opened Angie’s eyes and shattered some stereotypes about African-American people in Detroit—“they really opened up something new for me.” Angie’s parents would say that Detroit is a dangerous place, and perhaps racial stereotypes have something to do with this. Through the dialogues, the participants started talking to each other and have hung out in downtown Plymouth and at the Michigan State Fair recently! One realization that Angie had during the dialogues was that stereotypes can be considered racism, not just actual actions. Another was during the web of oppression activity, when she realized how everything ties together—she thought to herself, what would happen if we all let go of the system? What will happen then, and will there be a new web built up?

Angie sees things differently now. She used to not be able to help the tendency to categorize people, but now she is a lot more aware of herself. She also sees the city of Detroit differently—as a place of history where different things have affected the demographics and nature of the city. One thing she thinks is important for the Canton community is to have intergroup dialogues for the different ethnicities within the township, “so we can compare how we see Canton with other people that live here too.” Angie believes it is possible to change people’s attitudes on race and ethnicity, because those attitudes are formed by what we’ve been taught, so “if we learn something new… it can change our ways.” However she knows that it takes time for this kind of process to happen in the future.
Through Your Eyes: Pictures of West Bloomfield
Through Your Eyes: Pictures of Detroit
HOW DID YOUNG PEOPLE EXPERIENCE THE DIALOGUES?
Almost unanimously, young people described their participation in the dialogues as a very positive experience.

**Participation**

Participants were selected by their community organizations, and were paid up to $500 to participate in the project. Most young people said they participated because they wanted to meet new people, learn about others, and discuss issues of racism:

> It sounded interesting. I haven't had an opportunity like this before, and I'm interested in racism and how it plays a role in our lives.

As one Latino youth wrote at the beginning of the dialogues:

> [Interacting with other races] makes me feel different but I like to feel different than others because I believe change is good... change and difference are what set us all apart and spark our individualism.

Most participants felt their families supported their involvement in the dialogues, although few actually talked with their family about the dialogues or what they were learning. Some, however, had mixed feelings about whether their families would participate in the dialogues if given the chance.

Some of the participants were part of pre-existing groups (i.e. the YAC (Youth Advisory Committee) of Southfield, the YAC of Southeast Michigan, and the Detroit Youth Foundation) and others were young people that were meeting each other for the first-time. Participants provided a mixed perspective on the composition of their dialogue group. Some felt that knowing everyone in the group made the dialogues more comfortable. For example, one young man from Southfield described, “it kept me in my comfort zone. I was able to talk to the Arab group while knowing that I have people that I already know behind me, supporting me.” Others felt that knowing everyone lessened the amount that people shared and pushed their own thinking. For example, one young woman described, “I think it hurt our group because it was kind of like, I already know what he would say.”
While many of those interviewed were excited about the dialogues, others were skeptical about what would be learned in the process. For example, one young person from Detroit described her initial skepticism:

I was really interested because I was getting $500. But I was like, if I'm getting paid for this, it must be kind of boring…But when we met with the other group…I was like oh, I actually could have done this without getting paid for it.

The Dialogues

As stated, the dialogues involved two intragroup and five intergroup dialogue sessions.

The first two weeks of the dialogue were spent in intragroup dialogues. Some of the participants had mixed experiences with this portion of the program:

The first meeting was kind of boring because all we did was read, and it was just us. I knew them already. But all the other meetings were good because I didn't feel like we were just working; I felt like it was more of a dialogue, we were talking, and I can learn stuff out of that, so I liked it.

A big part of the dialogues was the intergroup sessions. These sessions brought young people from different racial and ethnic groups together for dialogue. Most participants described that they were nervous and apprehensive before for the first intergroup dialogue. Much of the nervousness stemmed from not knowing what to expect from the other group. As one Latina participant commented, “At first I was nervous because I really didn't want them to think bad of us.”

For some participants the drive to the other community was a new experience. For example, one young woman from the Downriver area described her experience driving to Detroit:

It was kind of scary because the community is a lot more run-down than staying here. So we’re going in the rec center and we see this sign with a bullet hole through it…I mean, I’m not used to that…not many people are. So it was a little intimidating at first...

Another young person described how “cool” it was to see another community and to “see the buildings and the area.”
Others were stressed about the interaction with the other group. One young woman from a small town in Macomb County said, “It was definitely different. I admit I was very uncomfortable at first. I was nervous about how to act in front of the Latinos.”

In fact for most groups, the first intergroup dialogue was marked by everyone “sitting in their own little group.” As one young woman from Detroit described, “Asians (here), African-Americans (there). It’s like—there’s one seat next to you [the facilitator]. Okay, I’ll take it. I was the only person. Everyone else was sitting in their own little group.”

One of the first activities in the intergroup was an activity to break down stereotypes. Each group was asked to brainstorm a list of “messages that they had received about the other group’s race or ethnicity in the city they lived in.” The groups then brought their lists together to discuss, and realized that these messages were indeed stereotypes. While most participants felt especially uncomfortable with the stereotype activity initially, it was important for breaking down preconceived ideas, and became the highlight of the dialogues for many participants.

Once over the initial dislike, some participants were alarmed at how easy it was to do the stereotype activity:

We had to break up into our separate groups and write down all the stereotypes we’d heard about each group. They wrote down stereotypes they’ve heard about White people and we wrote down stereotypes we heard about the Latino group, how, you know...wife-beaters and gangs and all the other stuff that people say about them. It was really kind of awkward.....because I didn’t want them to think that was how I felt, because it is not. Those are just stereotypes we’ve heard from people and stuff that’s in the media.

Over time, however, participants opened up to one another and began to engage in real dialogue.

The first meeting was so funny...when we first met each other, it was...you could tell people were holding back. Because it’s like “Uh...I don’t KNOW you, and you don’t know me, so I’m not going to tell you anything.” It’s like—once we started to open up, and you started asking questions that we couldn’t just...shut up about it.

This does not mean that the dialogues were easy. In fact most participants experienced challenges throughout the process. Often the challenges stemmed from confronting one’s own assumptions or stereotypes, but others had to do with learning to communicate with one another.
For example, here are two young people’s reflections on their own growth during the dialogues:

When our facilitators starting talking about what we can do to spread diversity, and prevent racism…they asked us if we felt like anything could change in the future. I remember one of the Latinos said that nothing would ever change. I thought his view was pessimistic. I said this in front of the group and said that people who believe nothing will change are ignorant and I accidentally offended him. It was a challenge for me because I didn’t realize my comment would come out as offensive. I apologized to him at the end of the session.

I mean, just this year, I found out that “A-rab” was a racist word. I mean, I didn’t know that, because I used to say it all my life. And this one girl, she told me—she was half Arab and half White—she was like, “you know that’s a bad word?” I was looking at her like “What is she talking about? What did I say?” I mean, I didn’t know!

Lessons Learned

Almost everyone described that the intergroup dialogues helped them to think differently about themselves, race and ethnicity and their communities.

Most of the participants described that the dialogues made them realize that there were many commonalities across young people in Metro Detroit despite race or ethnicity:

When they came back and we started to talk and started talking about assumptions, we realized that we had more in common and we were cool with that.

I’ve become much more open-minded. It’s like I’m able to walk the streets, see a person of a different ethnic background, and actually start a conversation …and…open myself up to them, because I know that many people of different ethnic backgrounds went through the exact same things and they don’t really even think differently. We’re pretty much the same type of people.

It really put things in perspective. We realized that if we lived in the same area, or whatever, we’d have a good likelihood of being friends, but just location-wise, it makes a difference…
We got to get things out in the open and realize that we aren’t so different… We got to know some people that had totally different lives, totally different backgrounds, but there are still similarities between us.

Many of the participants described that the dialogues helped them to become more educated about races and break down stereotypes:

That’s what I liked, because it felt better to hear somebody new and what they had to say. Some of the discussions were like, [about] the races [their community] had and some were Jewish and it was like, I’ve never heard of that.

The few stereotypes I have heard have been smashed.

It’s made me so much more open-minded. I just don’t go by stereotypes anymore. I don’t even listen to stereotypes anymore. I get to know somebody before I judge them.

One young man from Southfield eloquently described his transformation from being “closed-minded” to “eye-opened” about Arab-Americans:

[Describing a challenge]
Probably my first dialogue [with the Arab group], because when I walked in there I felt so closed-minded. I didn’t really know anything about Arab people. I felt like I was uninformed and ignorant, so ignorant, because I didn’t know anything about Arab people except I thought a lot of them were terrorists because that’s all you get from TV and the radio: terrorist this, terrorist that and it’s like, I just go in there and all I’m knowing is that Arab people are terrorists, some of them.

[Describing a time you gained something]
Probably the second meeting, when we were talking about how Arabs are just disgusted with the stereotype that all of them are terrorists. And it’s like, I want to say, ‘oh, we don’t believe that you’re terrorists!’ but when you see an Arab guy on the street like everybody’s first reaction is ‘oh, he might be a terrorist!’ And when they all expressed how they felt about it, how they know none of their family is terrorists, how they don’t even know a terrorist, it’s like, to walk away from the meeting to know that just like me, they don’t know anything about terrorism, I just walked away like, we are not different at all. We’re like the same person except they grew up in a different area than me, their ancestors were
treated differently than me. Not even treated different, but just grew up in a different area. That was just an eye-opener when I left.

Many of the participants also described how much they had learned not only about another culture but also about another community in Metro Detroit. One young person from Ann Arbor described, “I walked away with knowing more about the Dearborn area and the Arab culture.” The fact that young people are learning about other communities in addition to racial and ethnic groups also highlights the community segregation within the metropolitan area.

In addition, some of the participants discussed the impact that the dialogues will have on their own personal behavior. For example, one young man stated, “now I’m going to check them [my peers saying ignorant comments], because they’re very ignorant to the fact that what they’re saying is so untrue. And then you tell them about it and they’re like ‘for real?’ and then, believe it or not, you’re changing the world just by that one person. The world is changing just because you’re checking that one person and correcting that one person.”

As a result, some participants have come to think differently about their home communities:

- It has really shown me that something needs to change in St. Clair. That we really are isolated, and that people really need to do programs like this more.

- I realized how un-diverse Riverview, Michigan is! I used to think like, why talk about [race] if we really want to get the idea that we’re all the same, why make a big deal of it? But I realized that in a way it is good… I think it is good to talk about it and I never really used to think that way before.…

- I think before, I thought my community was so great and so happy. But once you go into these meetings and notice that you only grew up around Black people, like you never really interacted with a lot of White people around the neighborhood, you sit there and think, maybe I’ve been so closed-minded before and I didn’t realize it. You go back to your neighborhood and you see the minorities, you see the few Arab people in the neighborhood, you see the few White people in the neighborhood, and you actually interact with them, you make them feel comfortable in the neighborhood.

**Recommendations**

Based on the participant’s experiences, some offered recommendations for future dialogues. In general, most people wanted longer time in the dialogues with more opportunities to develop relationships with the young people from other
groups. Some wished that the discussion within the dialogue have been deeper but that the lack of sessions didn’t allow for the discussion to be as complex as it could be. Most of the participants expressed that they hoped that the friendships that developed during the dialogues could continue after. However, most were skeptical about that actually happening because of the distances between communities and the lack of transportation to make the commutes. For example, here are some of the participant thoughts:

Um…to me it was pretty sad that it was ending already. I still felt like I didn’t really gain relationships with the Latinos individually and I really hoped that would happen. Because it was open discussion I guess it was hard to do that. I guess I wanted more sessions. But, at the same time, I felt good just being a part of this, seeing all of the positive results. I felt really comfortable around the Latinos.

I feel at the end we could be friends….I have a sense of respect, because they respected us.

I feel like we could stay in touch, but transportation is a problem.
Jack is a sixteen-year-old African-American male from Southfield. He was born in Detroit, and lived in the city for much of his early childhood. When his family got ‘fed up’ with the negative aspects of his community, they moved to Southfield, where Jack has lived since he was six. Jack lives with both his parents and his two younger siblings. In his Southfield community, Jack describes his neighborhood as everyone supporting, helping, and looking out for one another, so growing up has been a positive experience. Jack is able to appreciate his surroundings in Southfield because he spent his early childhood in a community that wasn’t as safe.

Jack feels that although race is an important factor in a person’s background, it should primarily serve as just that: where you came from. According to Jack, race should never be a way to discriminate against anyone or to separate groups of people. Still, he values the unique traditions that his family honors because of their ethnic background, and he appreciates what his ancestors went through to bring him where he is today. Jack has lived most of his life in a community that changed right before his eyes: when he moved to Southfield, it was primarily White, but now most of the residents are Black. Living in his community, Jack has gotten the opportunity to associate with people of many other races as well, such as Mexican and Chaldean, and sees this as a positive learning experience because everyone doesn’t get that opportunity. He sees racism even in his own neighborhood, and feels that if people simply got to know each other, the color of people’s skin would not have to play as big of a role in society.

The Youth Dialogues have truly opened Jack’s mind to a culture which, before the dialogues, he was largely unfamiliar with. His group met with an Arab-American group from Dearborn, and the stereotypes he had learned from society were ‘smashed’ after the meetings. It was a challenge to put the media’s image of Arabs as terrorists aside, but after the intergroup sessions, Jack realized that they had much more in common than he had previously thought. The Dialogues have inspired Jack to start conversations with people of different backgrounds, and to really open himself up and share with them. He has learned that people of the Arab community have gone through many of the same struggles and even have much of the same mindset as members of his own community. Jack will be able to use this knowledge to better relate to people of every race now and later in life.

Jack’s experiences in Youth Dialogues have encouraged him to make a change in his community. The realization that his neighborhood is not nearly diverse enough has inspired Jack to share his new knowledge with those around him. His goal is to make minorities in his neighborhood feel comfortable, so that more people of diverse races will feel welcome to join his community. He will also incorporate his knowledge into an annual Youth Diversity Symposium, as well as a program for 5th grade Southfield students. Jack knows that change starts small, so he will try to erase the ignorance in his community one person at a time, in order to educate people for the future.
Jay is an Arab-American, 15 year-old student at Fordson High School. His family—two brothers, two sisters, and his parents—have lived in Dearborn for his whole life. His great-grandparents emigrated from Jordan in the 1950s. Jay’s father is quite active in the Arab-American community even working for a period of time at the Arab-American Community Center for Economic and Social Services. In fact, it was his father who signed Jay up to participate in the Youth Dialogues program.

Jay describes his experiences growing up in Dearborn as mainly spending time with other Arab-American teens mostly because “there are just more” Arab-American teens to hang out with. His high school is very diverse and almost 60% of the students are of Arabic descent. However, the groups tend to be quite segregated. In general Jay thinks this is because it is more comfortable for people to hang out with those who are of the same race and ethnicity.

Jay has tried to break away from the segregation and be friends with lots of young people. As a result, he’s said he had never really felt isolated nor experienced prejudice. But he also acknowledged that he thought his experience was unique, and many of his friends have faced racism and prejudice from others.

For the dialogues, Jay’s group met with a group of White students. In the beginning he thought the White group would be more racist, although after the first dialogue he realized that this was not true. He said, “Overall, they weren’t racist like I thought they would be.” Jay described how he thinks that through the dialogues, his group taught the White group a lot about the Arab culture, the Arab community, and Dearborn. He said that, generally, “we knew more about them, than they knew about us.”

In the future, Jay wants to continue to learn more about different backgrounds and cultures. He thinks that it is important for young people to have opportunities to talk about issues of race and ethnicity. In fact, he has thought creating a meeting space in the community for young people to hang out and talk. He thinks it is important for people to have a chance to experience others different from themselves. “People fear what they do not know. That’s how people get ignorant. They’re scared and don’t want to open their eyes.”
PERSPECTIVE: THE FACILITATORS

The youth dialogues were facilitated by eight college student and recent college graduates. Below are some perspectives from four of the eight facilitators, on the program, the facilitation experience, the dialogue, challenges, and the future. Facilitator names have been replaced with group location.

Why is this program important?

Canton: I grew up in Canton, Michigan and it is amazing to look back and realize how little interaction I had with people in different areas of Metro Detroit. This program is important for that reason—to start to provide that opportunity and have youth show adults how this segregation really does affect their lives and why it is important to address.

West Bloomfield/CFSEM: This program is a great first step to raise awareness of racism in participants' communities. Once racism is acknowledged in all of its complexity, participants can work to fight it and raise awareness of it in their communities.

Rosedale: This program is important because these students live so close to each other, but they know nothing of each other's cultures.

What were the dialogues like?

1. The First Intragroup

Canton: The room was mostly quiet when we started. It felt like everyone was sort of looking around at each other, unsure of what was going to happen. Everyone was looking at me to see what these dialogues were all about, what they should
expect for the summer. When I started talking about what the intergroups would be like, I started to see things click in people's minds, and a couple individuals mentioned that they were really excited!

Downriver/Ann Arbor: I could just see how nervous they all were and I was nervous that when we wanted to talk about anything of substance they would not be willing or able to say anything because they didn't want to misspeak. They were also all so nice, sweet, and afraid of hurting anyone's feelings.

2. The First Intergroup

Canton: When everyone was settled, everyone except two participants were sitting “with their own [intra]group!” …Once everyone started sharing their testimonials, people seemed a little bit more relaxed and interested, but still on edge.

Downriver/Ann Arbor: The first intergroup dialogue both sessions was tense, to say the least. Everyone was scared, including the facilitators. No one quite knew how it would go because … of the whole aspect of Detroit … added into already tense race relations in the US overall.

3. The Progression

West Bloomfield/CFSEM facilitator: Through the process of dialogue, participants get to know each other and find common ground; they find that they have similar interests. Essentially, they get to know other people and work with them to dissect perceptions and reality.

Downriver/Ann Arbor: It took some probing to get them to talk about anything of substance, but once they got going, it was amazing. …College students … have by the time they come to dialogue already learned what not to say and how to cover up various parts of their beliefs. The high school youth were… all able, whether purposefully or not to express what they thought and have learned more honestly.

Canton: The dialogues were sort of like pulling in lots of different things- people’s experiences, people’s perspectives, knowledge about the area’s history, knowledge about oppression and the systems in which we live—and we kept adding on to this, like a ball of yarn. It kept growing and growing and was sort of tangled but we were also making sense of it at the same time.

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4 White facilitator; Guidance Center (Downriver) during spring session and Neutral Zone (Ann Arbor) during summer session.
Downriver/Ann Arbor: You are so happy when anyone has an “a-ha moment!”

How would you sum up your experience facilitating the dialogues?

West Bloomfield: This was a very hard job emotionally. I had moments when I glowed with satisfaction and moments that I was in tears because of how little some of the participants had and the effects it had on dialogue.

Rosedale: I will sum it up like this: I was the parent who wanted to teach their child how to ride a bike. The child wanted to learn how to ride the bike, but was scared to do it alone. At first I held on to the back of the bike so the child would not fall. Then I gradually let go and let the child ride alone. This may sound weird, but I honestly felt like I guided them until they started to make the connections on their own.

What were the biggest challenges in facilitating these dialogues?

Canton: The logistics of transportation and scheduling. It shows the need for public transportation in Metro Detroit and how that can really impact the effects of segregation in the area, and the lives of these youth.

Downriver/Ann Arbor: Facilitating White people is always hard because we have a hard time owning up to what we’ve been taught and learned...So many White people go into a dialogue "unprepared." It is not that there is some test they didn't study for, but when most things in society are tailored to your race, why would you ever think about it? Why would it even cross your mind? As a result, White people generally haven't sifted through or seen as many discrepancies as people of other races.

How do you think these dialogues impacted the youth? What do you think should happen now?

Downriver/Ann Arbor: I wouldn't say they have all the answers, but they certainly have a better grasp on themselves and others in relation to race, and how it all fits into a generally racist society.

Rosedale: I think we should take it one step at a time and build from here. There definitely needs to be more integration in Metro Detroit so that the races can actually learn from experience and not from hearsay.

Canton: At school, youth need to be able to talk about their experiences with race, ethnicity and other identities. If teachers discourage this sort of sharing of experiences, that cuts down on the real learning that students are capable of.
Education about real life issues needs to start with real life experiences, and needs to start with a connection to the community in which our students live.

*Downriver/Ann Arbor:* People need to keep talking about race for anything to happen. We've been so programmed not to talk about it that that has become the first step toward change. We have to get comfortable discussing it before we can do much to change the impact of race relations in our society. EVERYONE needs to learn to talk about it.
Through Your Eyes: Pictures of Dearborn
WHAT DO YOUNG PEOPLE THINK ABOUT THE FUTURE OF DIVERSITY IN METRO DETROIT?
WHAT DO YOUNG PEOPLE THINK ABOUT RACE AND ETHNICITY IN METRO DETROIT IN THE FUTURE?

There were a number of different ways that young people thought about the future of race and ethnicity in Metro Detroit. Some thought that diversity should look like one big intermingled race. Others suggested that diversity should look like equal portions of all races with interactions. Still some said that they would want the distribution of races to remain the same but would like there to be interactions between different racial groups that are respectful and understanding of difference.

Despite the various ways, most young people want a diverse community in the future. One person described this as a community where “people would be more interested about different cultures instead of unaware of them” and “people of different races would live at peace amongst each other instead of under constant tension.”

Some described that in order for diversity and racial understanding to occur, changes would have to happen in the schools and within families. For example:

- **Education needs to begin at home.** Parents need to teach tolerance to their children and schools need to continue with this effort.

- **Yeah, I think it is possible for people to change their perceptions on race.** It depends where you get it from...if it comes from parents and you don’t ever experience it...the way to get rid of that is to teach...

- **...The things we think about race and ethnicity it’s basically what we are taught and if we learn something new about it, it can change our ways because we’ll see how it helps other people...**

Most of the participants described that some form of intergroup dialogues would be an important and useful strategy in the communities and schools for breaking down stereotypes and ignorance around race and ethnicity.

- **Without diversity there are many assumptions made, stereotypes made...when in fact we’re really more the same...I think that’s where racism, violence and conflict come from...just not knowing.**

- **I think a lot of people need an eye-opener.** I think that it would open their eyes...there’s so much good in other people and other cultures and other religions and races, and they don’t take the time to see it.
This seems like a way to break it down...an easy...I mean you talk, you learn, and you change your perception of different races.

One young person from Ann Arbor added, “[Intergroup dialogue] is an amazing opportunity. The first step is to learn and have knowledge about the different people and cultures and groups...and then you can start making a change.”

However, many participants were not sure how to make change happen and recognized that there are many challenges to creating large scale change. For example, one young person stated that for real change to occur, “the personal opinions and viewpoints of millions of people would have to be altered. Such a change would take many, many years of efforts.” Similarly, one Latino youth stated, “I think [change] is possible, but you need a lot of perseverance and hard work. Nothing like that is ever easy.”

Others saw the ability to make small changes that would have large impacts on the community. One young person stated, “In 10 years, I hope not for a utopia, but I just want everyone to be respectful of each other.” Another young woman added, “Yes, it is possible to create change. Things are changing all the time. Every time an event is held to celebrate another culture, people are learning...and things are changing.”

As a result of the dialogues, many have concrete ideas about how to begin to create change and are already begin to work toward putting ideas into action. Below are some ideas of projects that participants developed at the summer retreat, many of which are already beginning to take shape:

**Rubber Bands Against Racism**

Youth will join to produce rubber wristbands that bear slogans against racism or about races joining together. Wristbands will be distributed to children in the Metropolitan area.

**Youth RAP (Racial Awareness Program)**

City students and suburban students will switch schools for a day to learn about a different Metro Detroit school community in terms of race, class, culture, and geography.
Exploring Diversity for the Next Generation

A multiracial team of high school students will go into 5th grade classrooms in all 10 elementary schools of Southfield Public Schools presenting information (and food) on different cultures, organizing icebreakers, and introducing students to diversity.

Diversity Lock-in for Teen Youth

Different racial and ethnic groups will be joining together to communicate with each other, and learn about the music of different cultures background.

Path for Diversity

People from all of the ethnic clubs at Plymouth-Canton Educational Park will join together to create a diversity courtyard on the school campus. Ideas include planting trees and a peace pole.

(Newsletter) “Linked”

A newsletter will be created to keep the groups from the youth dialogues in touch. Monthly issues will discuss topics such as, updates on projects, updates on people involved in the dialogues, a “spotlight on...” story discussing someone’s personal story and dates for activities for everyone to get together at centralized places and have an opportunity to meet more people.

Medley of the World

Students will come together to teach the community about the music of other cultures that we have learned about during the dialogues and will learn from our future studies. The medley will be performed at places in and around our community that need to experience different cultures.

Smoker’s Cough

A documentary will be created on race & ethnicity. Youth of varying races will be sent into situations out of the norm for their culture and the documentary will highlight the reactions & attitudes of authority figures. The film will be shown in public middle and high schools.
Sixteen-year-old Bree was born and raised in an all-White Michigan community in the Northeast suburbs of Detroit. Growing up, Bree felt safe in her small, close-knit community, and feels grateful to have been raised in a positive environment. However, she immediately describes her community as sheltered, and feels that the lack of contact with other ethnic groups makes her peers somewhat judgmental. Because most of the residents of her community stay there and have kids from generation to generation, not much changes in the demographics of the community, and results in an unintentionally closed-minded setting.

Because Bree’s community was all-White, she was never forced to think about race at a young age. Her homogenous setting hindered her ability to compare her culture to that of other races until she was old enough to participate in programs that included youth of diverse backgrounds. Now that she sees what her neighborhood is lacking, she feels sheltered in her community, and wishes her friends could understand what it means to experience diversity.

Youth Dialogues gave Bree the opportunity to do exactly what interests her - explore relations between people of different backgrounds. Her group met with a group from Detroit. Bree admits that it was uncomfortable at first. However, by the end of the first intergroup dialogue, the participants really felt comfortable, and had many eye-opening discussions about how their lives contrasted due to the communities in which they were raised. It was sometimes challenging to avoid being offensive and to keep an open mind, but the dialogues helped Bree to overcome these barriers. Bree’s experiences throughout the summer have inspired her to actually talk to her friends about racial issues in order to make a difference.

Bree sees a great need for change in her community, but admits that change would mean a big adjustment for many people living in her area. Because her area is not used to racial diversity, steps in the process would have to be gradual. Bree plans on incorporating more programs like Youth Dialogues in her community to open people’s minds, and wants to expose more people to diversity so they can become more accepting and well-rounded individuals. She wants to push for change on higher levels as well, such as within the government, but she knows that change starts at home, and any opportunity for dialogue between members of different races will benefit her community.
Through Your Eyes: Pictures of Canton
Through Your Eyes: Pictures of Southfield
OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

The summer youth dialogues were very effective and serve as the basis for future projects. Based on our analysis and the comments of the participants, we suggest the following recommendations for next steps:

- Increase the number of intergroup dialogues sessions, even if in means focusing on fewer groups. Many of the participants felt like there was not enough time to get to know the others or time to discuss critical issues that would have been helpful for the overall effectiveness of the project. Also given the limited time frame and the structured curriculum, there was less flexibility to deal with issues as they arose in the groups.

- Broaden the issues discussed in the dialogues to include a focus on some of the multi-faceted reasons of segregation such as the relationship between race and class. Lacking such discussions, young people were not always able to discuss why Detroit is so segregated or the complexity of the issue intertwined with and beyond race.

- Consider the possibility of having more inclusive dialogue groups that reflect young people in their specific geographic community. Because few of the communities were 100% racially similar, the creation of race-specific groups to represent the communities sometimes led to oversimplified discussion about communities. Additionally, some young people were of mixed-race and so that also complicated the idea of having racially-specific groups as mixed students may have a different experience. Perhaps it would be appropriate to have dialogue intragroups that represent communities as a whole, rather than groups based on race within community.

- Because of the differences in each community, it might be beneficial to begin the project by having young people research race and ethnicity in their schools and community as a way to begin the dialogues about how race and ethnicity plays out at home. This ties into the recommendation of having each intragroup consist of people from the same city or township community rather than race within that community. Having more time within the intragroup during the school year to discuss their own community, might lead to more points for discussion and more opportunities for sharing ideas during the intergroup. If the intragroup started during the school year it would allow for more time in the intergroup during the summer when it is easier for young people to travel.

- Enable participants to help start intergroup dialogues in their own communities, by providing “train the trainer” workshops to help participants and adult allies learn to facilitate intergroup dialogues in their communities and schools. Many young people felt that schools were an important place for intergroup dialogue to occur between
people of different backgrounds living in the same city or township; the young people recognize that this rarely happens. Possibly working with school administrators and teachers and providing curricular resources might help encourage intergroup dialogue in the classroom.

• Include time during the intergroup sessions for participants to “chill” and hang out with each other in both communities. Most young people felt that they wanted more time to really learn and experience the differences by seeing each other’s communities. Since so much of the dialogue time was spent in a room, most of the participants did not get a chance to informally spend time with one another, have opportunities to get to know one other personally, and to see how young people experience their own communities. For example, young people might select activities that reflect their experience (such as taking young people to the school that they attend, the theatre they hang out at, or the neighborhood shops that they visit). Many of the participants wanted to have a day or two where they could spend doing some fun in the community. We suggest that during the intragroups young people might have the opportunity to plan a “day in the life of...” as a way to think about their own experiences with race and ethnicity on a daily basis and as a way to show other young people about what it is like to grow up in their community.

• Add a community tour for all participants that includes a history of each community and allows for members from each team to talk about their community from their perspective.

• Paying participants may or may not be necessary. Other incentives such as food at meetings, attending activities with the intra or intergroups (i.e. films, museums, etc), transportation to other communities, intergroup “chill” activities (i.e. going bowling, getting ice cream after a dialogue) may be enough for the participants and would also be education and contribute to the overall aims of the project.
OUR CONCLUSIONS

Our basic conclusion is that race and ethnicity does indeed matter to young people growing up in Metro Detroit. It affects the way young people experience growing up, their schools, and their communities. It impacts all aspects of the lives of young people. Despite this, young people do not have opportunities in their homes, schools, and communities to talk or even think about the impact of race and ethnicity in their lives.

In general, the dialogues allowed young people to begin to explore issues of race, ethnicity, and diversity. In the dialogues, young people talked critically about their experiences, their personal histories, and their communities. We learned that young people want to talk about their experience and that they have powerful things to say when given the chance.

We also learned that the dialogues created opportunities for interaction across racial, ethnic, and community lines which were important. There were some young people who had never had a sustained conversation with someone different from themselves, and even a few who had never held a conversation with someone of a different race or ethnicity, and it was a big deal to talk to someone different. Some of the young people had also never been to other communities and so traveling to the city, the suburb or across town was a new experience.

The dialogues helped to create a space for young people to challenge their ideas, develop tools for communication, and a chance to learn about different experiences. It also provided an opportunity for young people to realize that they can relate to one another across race, ethnicity, and community.

As a result, young people said that their participation in the dialogues will impact the way they interact in their own lives and in the communities. They will work to break out of patterns that lead to self segregation and realize new ways to interact with others different from themselves in school and in the community. They said they will challenge themselves to dismantle stereotypes and check their friends to do so as well by having the confidence to talk about race with their friends.

The dialogues highlight that race and ethnicity impacts everything in Metro Detroit, and is not something that can be ignored. As Tracy Chapman sang, “we can learn, we can teach, we can...change our lives and paths...(and) create a new world.” The Youth Dialogues demonstrated that changing lives and paths can occur through interaction, engagement, and most importantly, opportunity for dialogue. In doing so, the young people in this project just might be able to “create a new beginning” for Metropolitan Detroit.
Appendix #1: THE BASIC INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

QUESTIONS

Personal Background

Can you say a little bit about your own personal background? (For example, about your family? About yourself?)

How do you relate to your own racial background? For example, are there certain things that make you feel solidarity with other people of the same racial/ethnic background?

How did you get involved in the dialogues? Why? What does it mean to you to participate in the dialogues?

What do your families think about your participation in the dialogues? Do you think they would participate in intergroup dialogues?

Community

Now I want to ask you some questions about your neighborhood and school:

Do you mostly interact with people of the same race or ethnicity, or with others who are different from you? How much and what kinds of interactions?

Do you think that the place you live impacts this (your interactions with others)? If so, how? Why?

What about your school?
   (i.e. do you think the school you go to impacts your interactions with others? If so, how and why?)

How do you think that this has impacted your experience growing up?
   (For example, do you ever feel isolated?)

What do you think are some reasons that explain the situation?
   (i.e. why is this the way it is?)

Would you want it to change? Why? Do you think it is possible to change? How might be possible to change things?
Dialogues

Now I want to ask you some questions about your experience as a participant in the dialogues:

What has your experience in the dialogue been like? What was it like in the beginning of the dialogues? What about in the intergroup?

Did your experience change over time? If so, how?

Can you give a concrete example of how your experience changed?
   (For example, a time you faced a challenge and overcame it or a time you felt your group came together?)

What have you learned as a result of participating in the dialogues?
   (For example, has the dialogue project changed the way you think about race and ethnicity? How so? For example, Has the dialogue change the way you think about your own experience growing up in your community?)

Future Thinking

Finally, I want to ask some questions about your experience after the dialogues...

Do you think that intergroup dialogues are important for your community? If so, why?
   (For example, do you think it is possible for people to change their opinion on race and ethnicity? If so, how? If not, why not?)

How do you think that you will be changed as a result of participating in the dialogues?

What is one concrete thing you will plan to do as a result of having participated in the dialogues?

Closing

Okay, this wraps up our interview...

Do you have any final comments?

Is there anything you'd want someone to know about the dialogue program, good or bad?

Thank you!
Appendix #2: THE CURRICULUM (Process & Content)

The youth dialogues were facilitated by U-M college students and graduates, all trained to carefully facilitate dialogues around issues like race and ethnicity. The activities, debriefing, and dialogue progressed from the first session to the seventh session in this way:

The first two sessions were in “intragroups”—individuals of the same background and community, from the same community organization.

Session #1: INTRODUCTIONS
Groundrules, setting the atmosphere for dialogue

Session #2: EXPLORING IDENTITY
Personal racial/ethnic identity timelines

The remaining five sessions were in “intergroups”—a combination of two intragroups—introducing two sets of high school youth from two different communities to each other.

Session #3: CREATING SAFETY & PROMOTING LEARNING- OUR STORIES
Testimonials from participants about their racial/ethnic identities

Session #4: THE METROPOLITAN DETROIT EXPERIENCE, PART I
Timeline of Metro Detroit’s racial/ethnic history, “caucus” groups on messages received from society about the other community’s group

Session #5: RACISM, POWER, PRIVILEGE AND OPPRESSION
Personal/historical examples and the structure of various forms of oppression

Session #6: THE METROPOLITAN DETROIT EXPERIENCE, PART II
Evidence of and reasons for racism and segregation in our communities

Session #7: THE FUTURE
Brainstorming plans and positive steps for an anti-racist and multicultural Metro Detroit