

Developmental Theory and Children's Participation in Community Organizations

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THIS ARTICLE REVIEWS THE DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY LITERATURE FOR ITS relevance to the design of organizations for children and youth. It does so from a distinct ideological perspective. For this reason, we begin with the rationale for our belief that there is an increasing need for community programs for children and youth that are democratic and that enable them to play an active role in their communities. We then review theories on the development of children's identity, social understanding, and capacity to participate. We are interested in what each of these literatures says about the values of participation in community organizations and what some of the major principles should be in designing these programs.

Changing Ecology of Children and the Need for Community Programs

Although there is an enormous research literature on children's development, particularly children's thinking, there has been remarkably little research on their everyday lives. We know much more about the way children and teenagers behave in schools and in strange experimental settings than about their lives out of school in their own neighborhoods. Yet, by the time they finish high school, children have spent only 11,000 hours in the classroom and approximately 65,000 hours outside it (Medrich et al., 1982). During that time, according to research in 1982 in

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California, they will watch about 15,000 hours of television, something research does know quite a bit about (*Ibid.*). This still leaves 50,000 hours about which we know very little, beyond the fact that there have been dramatic changes in the past two decades in children's relationships to their communities. They are less free to choose where they want to go and when without adult accompaniment. As a result, their opportunities to contact their peers in unprogrammed activities outside school time are often severely limited (Medrich et al., 1982; Hart, 1987; *Children's Environments*, 1992; Gaster, 1992; Bryant, 1985).

Probably because the data is more readily available, far more attention has been given to the seductive power and negative influences of television than to the dangers and environmental deterioration that keep children and teenagers indoors. Certainly, the growth of crime and parents' fear of it is a significant determinant of free-time activity (Medrich et al., 1982). Medrich et al. found in their study in Oakland, California, that a mother's employment status did not increase the likelihood that her children would be heavy television viewers unless she was also worried about their safety. These fears are not all unrealistic; during the 1980s, there was an 11% increase in the violent deaths of teenagers and a 10% increase in juvenile incarceration (Carnegie Center for the Study of Social Policy, 1992). There have also been great changes in the structure of families in the U.S.; for the 20-year period beginning in 1971, there was a 276% increase in the number of very low-income working mothers (Dugger, 1991). Added to these changes is the increase in single parent families, the increase in two-parent working families, a 40% reduction in federal aid to cities, and a wholesale retreat from public support for play, recreation, and youth services (Rubin, 1981). The result of these changes is an entrapment of children and youth indoors, alienated from their communities and separated from their peers.

A 1988 longitudinal study of a nationally representative sample of about 25,000 eighth-grade children found that approximately 27% of them spent an average of two or more hours home alone after school (U.S. Department of Education, 1990). Researchers have also found that children of lower socioeconomic families were more likely to be home alone for upwards of three hours (Benson, 1993; U.S. Department of Education, 1990). The loss of a safe outdoor environment for children and adolescents has precipitated a breakdown of the "naturally occurring social networks" that once supported them in many ways (Bernard, 1991). This means fewer opportunities for the young to engage in spontaneous activities with one another, fewer opportunities for informal contacts with responsible adults in the community, fewer opportunities to observe responsible community action, and a reduction in the amount of time spent with other people in community public spaces in general. Furthermore, when children are isolated from the surrounding community, the pressures on parents increase even further and the incidence of child abuse and neglect increases as well (Garbarino and Gilliam, 1980). A few studies show how such disturbing statistics can translate

into difficulties for individual children and youth (Kotlowitz, 1991; Hamburg, 1992; Williams and Kornblum, 1993).

Given these striking changes in the kinds of contacts children and youth have with their communities and the resultant reduced opportunities they have to direct their own lives outside of home and school, it is not surprising that other research is beginning to find that youth are attracted to, and more likely to maintain their participation in, programs that offer them the chance not only to engage in activity and social interconnection, but also to lead such activities themselves (Villarruel and Lerner, 1994; Heath and McLaughlin, 1993; Steele, Miller, and Rai, 1993). However, young adolescents have revealed in research that they generally do not want to be left alone or left to their own devices. They want more regular contact with adults who care about and respect them, greater access to constructive alternatives to loneliness, protection from the hazards of drugs and violence, and activities that allow them to contribute to their communities (Benson, 1993; Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989; Carnegie Center for the Study of Social Policy, 1992; Lou Harris, 1993). In an ethnographic study of a wide range of community-based programs for inner-city youth over a five-year period, Heath and colleagues found that inner-city at-risk adolescents prefer organizations that have a high degree of activity, a wide range of choices, and include youth-driven activities (Heath, 1994). Youngsters who remained in programs explained that the experiences produced an increase in self-control and self-respect and greater expectations for their own futures. Socially, they found opportunities to find friends and to link up with caring adults as role models.

Given increased numbers of families in poverty, along with a deterioration in community and social networks, there is a growing need for child and youth organizations to serve as a bridge for troubled children from highly stressed families to a larger community of social support. When a family is having great difficulties, group membership and contact with alternative social supports can greatly decrease the likelihood that a child will subsequently exhibit poor social adjustment (Bryant, 1985). Werner and Smith (1982) found that 80% of "resilient" youths who grew up in chronic poverty felt that support and counseling from friends and "parent" figures in their community had been valuable in helping them cope with crises. They also found that informal sources of community support were more numerous and available in the communities of these resilient "youths" than they were in the communities of youth who had serious coping problems.

Formation of Children's Identity and Importance of Group Membership

Many theorists and researchers who focus on identity development characterize it as a social process, although they differ in their descriptions of how society plays a role. Explanations are available from the perspectives of the psychodynamic tradition, the social psychology tradition, narrative psychology, and femi-

nist psychology. The insights from these diverse perspectives are, in our view, complementary. The psychodynamic perspective focuses on the changing needs in one's affective life with development, and in particular on the crises that children and adolescents experience as they work toward integrating their feelings and beliefs with those of the people around them (Erikson, 1950). While the psychodynamic perspective aids our understanding of subconscious processes, the social-psychological perspective offers insights into how children and adolescents analyze themselves and their roles, which is helpful in understanding their conscious reflections (Harter, 1988). To these insights, narrative psychology adds the observation that social and cultural factors, in particular the nature and use of private and public discourse, play a major role in constituting identity (Harré and Gillet, 1994; Fivush, 1994; Gilbert, 1993; Polkinghorne, 1991; Bruner, 1991; Nelson, 1993). For example, girls cast themselves in social situations much like the girls in the oral and written stories in their worlds (Fivush, 1994; Gilbert, 1993) by focusing on issues of power and political dynamics that play a role in identity and community.

Finally, feminist psychology extends this emphasis on social and cultural influences by focusing on issues of power and political dynamics in the formation of self-concept in boys and girls (Alcoff and Potter, 1993). In particular, being socialized to play the role of "other" by society, parents, teachers, and even peers is a foundation of girls' identity. This disempowers them, especially when they do not recognize the power imbalances or make explicit efforts to struggle against these imbalances (Fivush, 1994; Rogers, 1994).

Across these various theories, there are some general points. Each defines identity as social rather than something uniquely within individuals and emphasizes the role of language and thought in identity. In addition, all of these theories offer some common observations about children's orientations to the world at different phases in their development. Their common observations about two of these phases are particularly relevant to the formation of children's participation in their communities. Children from roughly eight through 11 years of age are characterized as enthusiastic, outward-looking, and industrious as they begin to forge what seem like independent identities. In contrast, adolescents from roughly 12 years old on are characterized as more inward-looking, philosophical, and mercurial as they test the identity constructions they have made for themselves. Although broadly characterized, these qualities of children and adolescents suggest the need for somewhat different kinds of participation. Of course, the social, economic, and cultural differences that determine just how and where these qualities come into play must also be considered.

In late childhood and adolescence, group membership is crucial for different reasons. Children aged eight through 12 develop their sense of competence, independence, and self-worth in a context of social interchange that provides the opportunities for mirroring what these children require to test their self-concepts.

Adolescents over 12 years of age engage in the consolidation and differentiation of their ego identities, seek group membership that allows for symbolic work with the possible identities they are constructing, as well as the social interchange that meets basic affective interpersonal needs. Thus, for adolescents, groups serve, in part, as a stage for the identities they are creating, while for younger children groups serve more as work places in which they demonstrate competence and the first flourishes of independence.

Erik Erikson proposed that psychosocial crises propel identity development. These crises occur in several of the important formative stages that shape the individual's relationship to others. Infants, for example, develop their orientation to others based on their early experiences of being able to trust or having to mistrust. Young children face a crisis over autonomy versus shame and doubt, and later over initiative versus guilt. Then, in adolescence, the child faces further struggle. All of these tensions provide the challenges and potentials for each stage of development. As children mature, they develop a sense of identity through their problematic experiences and resolution of these crises.

Cross-cultural research indicates that identity and self-concept are influenced in specific ways by the beliefs and practices of specific cultural and social groups (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). For example, children in Asian cultures tend to describe themselves in collective terms, while children in North America tend to qualify their self-descriptions less in regard to a surrounding context (*Ibid.*). Some have argued, moreover, that personal identity and self-concept may be uniquely Western concepts and that a broader sense of societal anchoring dominates individuals' orientations in other cultures.

Organizations can provide contexts that allow for the needs, challenges, and potentials of children in various phases of development. These structures must allow flexibility for them to explore their identities in the world in ways consistent with their own cultures. Environments like school that emphasize self-restraint and a strict sense of duty in doing what one is told — if carried to the extreme — make children dependent and overly restrained, which spoils the child's desire to learn and work (Erikson, 1980: 88). At the other extreme, relying entirely on free play to learn what one must do can lead children to a feeling of confusion since one cannot learn what one must do only by doing what one likes. Children need to be led toward activity that shows them they can accomplish pragmatic and realistic tasks.

Thus, an organization for children from ages eight to 10 should provide the impetus and resources for manageable and intellectually challenging projects, like doing community research. Children in this age group have enormous energy and enthusiasm for turning outward to the world as a way of feeling their identity and gradually using the world as an alter ego or mirror. In consideration of the industry/inferiority crisis of childhood, an organization must also make it a priority to ensure, as much as possible, against failure in these projects by supporting

children's grand schemes with structure and practical resources and to be ready to help them deal with failure when this becomes necessary. If both authentic projects and adequate supervision are provided, preadolescents can become part of a community where their industry is valued and where they can engage in meaningful tasks with peers and adults who are subtle models of the competence and social efficacy that children seek. Since early adolescents focus more internally, their projects would ideally enable them to do extensive comparison and contrast of self/other in emotionally intense contexts. Thus, participation in artistic and dramatic humanitarian projects may be attractive to adolescents.

How and Why Children Establish Child and Youth Cultures

As children mature, they become part of an increasing number of other cultures, including the culture of school, interest groups (like sports), organizations, and peer groups (Daiute and Griffin, 1993). One pervasive culture that children construct and join is youth culture. Youth culture tends to cut across ethnic boundaries; it is often shared via media, fashion, music, or performance. Though youth may use the material of commercialism, there is evidence that they also reconstruct it in their own terms, beginning a cycle of mutual influence between their own youth culture and the popular culture designed to attract them. Thus, the spontaneous and essential elements of youth culture are defined by the needs and sense-making strategies of the young themselves. This culture is, moreover, ever-changing and tends to be formed in resistance to mainstream culture, in particular that associated with adults (Fiske, 1991; Willis, 1990).

Children and adolescents participate in popular culture as a means of social action and identity development. They use popular cultural forms of music, fashion, and cultural media as arenas of social action to form and reproduce collective and individual identities. This participation involves symbolic creativity that must be engaged in daily and is essential "to the production and reproduction of human existence" (*Ibid.*: 7). Through symbolic activities of fashion, music, performance, and friendship rituals young people learn to understand themselves and what their possibilities are for the rest of their lives (*Ibid.*). Thus, the construction of youth culture symbols, rituals, and meanings is referred to as "necessary symbolic work" — mental, emotional, social, and physical activity that is like clay for identity formation.

Performances like drama, dancing, story-telling, and humor are symbolic forms of communication that can serve for role-playing. These symbolic creations are not mere forms, but are instead infused with personal and shared meanings that function as foils for identity. As youth use a set of these symbolic forms consistently, they also begin to constitute cultural practice, since symbol formation is an aspect of culture building (Fine and Mechling, 1993). Because this is also important identity work, the content of these youth cultures tends to be created by youth anew, based on the available raw materials, issues, needs, and developmen-

tal emphases. Since this identity work is authentic and effortful, youth need freedom to create symbolic forms and meanings and to contrast these emerging forms with the existing forms of established, adult, mainstream culture.

An important function for youth organizations is to provide a context in which youth can establish a culture in ways that positively affect personal and social identity (Daiute and Griffin, 1993; Heath and McLaughlin, 1993). Thus, youth organizations need to allow the formation of certain aspects of youth culture, which means they must be flexible enough to allow members to form symbols and rituals, and to infuse existing rituals with new meanings. Adults should manage youth organizations increasingly from the sidelines as children mature. They do, however, need to provide certain types of support for positive youth culture — most notably, a clear, participatory structure for the organization and a flexible, understanding, and caring staff. The staff should ensure that all members are seen as important and resourceful in complex and diverse ways and should provide some stability, mirroring, and aid in facilitating productions.

Organizations that have captured and maintained young people's interest have been found to have several important features (Heath and McLaughlin, 1993: 59). It is made clear that the young people are valuable to themselves and to society and a resource to be developed. At the same time, youth organizations need to allow for complexity — in particular for young people's participation in multiple cultures and multiple identities, defined in their own ways. In successful organizations, youth benefit from having the opportunity to play a range of roles and to be experts in these roles as well as apprentices.

Adults cannot overdetermine the culture of a youth organization. Instead, they need to provide a trustworthy base, maintain a sense of purpose, and understand the issues, purposes, and needs of youth as they define these things themselves. Adults can honestly convey their values and compare and contrast their values with those of the youth, but this should not take on the form of an evaluation, which can diminish the sense of responsibility and identity work in the young people. Thus, supporting youth organizations is a difficult job indeed. Structure and support are crucial, as are positive role modeling, but if these organizations are going to attract and serve young people in ways that encourage them to participate in and serve their communities, adults need to allow the organization's culture to be deeply informed by youth.

Development of Children's Understanding of the Social World

Table 1 (see page 63) formalizes theory on the development of children's ability to take the perspectives of others, and what is known about the development of children's close friendships and peer-group relationships. Like all systematic summaries of child development, it should not be used as a literal framework, but as a conceptual tool. Children do not always function in these ways and organizations should not be rigidly structured on this basis.

The development of children's ability to think about the thoughts and feelings of others and of self in relation to others has been widely studied in the U.S. (Feffer and Gourevitch, 1960; Flavell, Botkin, and Fry, 1968; Guardo and Bohan, 1971; Broughton, 1978; Chandler, 1977; Selman, 1980). This research on perspective-taking indicates that, with development, children become increasingly facile with decentrations, enabling them to better understand the others' point of view. This has direct implications for how a child is likely to interact with peers, as well as in groups that might include peers and non-peers. Rather than considering this in terms of a deficit model, outlining what younger children cannot do, it is more fruitful to think in terms of what children can do. Although a statesperson-like stance is not to be expected until early adolescence or later, children at each age are capable of making contributions to group activity. Under the right conditions, even preschool children can recognize that others can have a point of view that differs from their own, although they do not consistently act in a way that reflects this understanding until about seven or eight years of age. Throughout preadolescence there is a gradually increasing capacity to coordinate one's own perspective with that of another person in a way that allows for anticipation of what the other might think, do, or feel. They come to be able to *sequentially* take another's perspective and recognize intent, but there is no *mutual* perspective taking. By adolescence, the individual is not only aware of the other person's thought, but also grows to be acutely aware that other people might be thinking of them. Such reflective capacities allow for strategic planning of interactions with others; anticipation of the others' moves in a chess game is an apt metaphor. These capacities also lead to the heightened sense of self-consciousness characteristic of early and middle adolescence. Several authors have noted the isolation and profound sense of relativity characterizing early adolescence (Chandler, 1977; Elkind, 1967; Selman, 1980) and this can be another factor in adolescent participation in groups.

Child-Adult Interactions

Children six to eight years old and younger tend to obey adult wishes in interactions, motivated by a desire for material rewards and maintenance of the relationship. Thus, prior to early adolescence, adult-child interactions may be characterized by authority relations and unilateral constraint, and significant transformation of the child-adult relationship does not usually emerge until early adolescence. At this point, children's perception of adults grows from that of authority figures to awareness of adults as individuals; adult deficiencies are now recognized and a greater range of relationships is made possible (Youniss, 1980).

Adults' social roles are an important influence on how adults are perceived by children. Social roles are commonly conceived of as fairly static ascriptions of function and power relations (Parsons and Shils, 1951), but they may also be thought of more broadly, in terms of behavioral possibilities sanctioned by society

(Sarbin and Allen, 1968). Although regularities may be found in social roles and situations (e.g., Abelson, 1975), they are not static; interacting individuals create conditions for each other's action, constraining social performance and enabling others either by explicitly guiding behavior (e.g., Rogoff and Wertsch, 1984; Vygotsky, 1978) or by implicitly creating expectations or possibilities for action (Goffman, 1969; Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1986) and feeling (Averill, 1979, De Rivera, 1977). Higgins (1992) argues that children acquire expectations for people in particular roles (e.g., teacher, principal, policeman, or hooligan). We would say that they come to expect particular ranges of behavior depending on the "other's" social location, i.e., their membership in a group defined by race and/or gender or a more tightly defined social position, such as middle-class African American single mothers.

Peer Relationships and Friendship Formation

In designing programs for children, it is important for us to know how they come together in groups, what patterns of association develop, how friendships are formed and what factors influence this. Peer groups may be characterized as those in which members share interests socially at regular intervals, hold their common values above those of society at large, and feel a mutual a sense of belonging (Sherif and Sherif, 1953). It has been recently estimated that during the elementary school years, children spend over 40% of their waking hours in the company of peers and during the teenage years they spend an average of 22 hours a week with their peers beyond the time they are together in school (Cole and Cole, 1993: 516; 583–584).

Researchers have identified a number of "roles" that children may occupy in their peer group, categorizing them as popular, sociable, withdrawn, isolated, neglected, unpopular, rejected, aggressive, controversial, and average. These categories may be divided more generally into peers who are accepted and those who are rejected, and they represent a significant organizational future of peer groups. However, observational studies have identified dominance relations as an equally important organizational feature that characterized peer groups from as early as preschool through middle childhood and adolescence (Abramovitch, 1976; Strayer and Strayer, 1976; Vaughn and Waters, 1981; Strayer, 1989; Savin-Williams, 1976; Weisfeld, Omark, and Cronin, 1980). Such dominance is more apparent among boys (Savin-Williams, 1976), but in adolescence, group structures are generally less influenced by physical strength than by characteristics that support the group's normative activities at the time. These patterns of social power within the group are distributed differently in different social situations, an important area for the organizers of youth programs to observe.

Friendship formation among preschoolers has been found to grow out of a mutual attraction through which partners reciprocate and complement each other's behaviors, leading to a "climate of agreement" (Howes, 1987). Youniss

and his colleagues (1980) found that six- and seven-year-olds describe “friends” as children with whom they share activities and things (Youniss, 1980). By the time they are nine or 10 years of age, children say that friends are people they know well, have compatible personalities, and with whom they share interests or similar abilities. Though participation in common activities remains an important basis for friendship formation in adolescence, it becomes a much more reasoned relationship, with many shared values and similar interests, behaviors, and attitudes toward school, academic performance, dating, drug use, drinking, and delinquency (McCord, 1990).

Gender is an important variable in children’s associative contacts (Asher, Singleton, and Taylor, 1982). Friendships become increasingly sex-segregated as boys and girls move from middle childhood to preadolescence. When asked to choose a best friend, roughly 68% of six-year-olds chose a child of the same sex, while almost 90% of 12-year-olds chose a child of the same sex (Daniels-Beirness, 1989). Clear differences have been found in the patterns of friendship among girls in contrast to boys during middle childhood (nine to 12 years): girls generally have fewer friends and make friends less rapidly than boys (Eder and Hallinan, 1978) and more commonly share their feelings (Waldrop and Halverson, 1975). Boys usually spend time in larger groups and have more friends of different ages. On playgrounds, girls usually form groups of two or three, while boys gather in “swarms” (Daniels-Beirness, 1989). Boys commonly prefer more active play and competitive games and prefer to spend more time away from direct adult supervision. Furthermore, the socialization of boys seems to be marked by competitiveness and conformity to “rules” within activities, while that of girls is marked by cooperation and sensitivity to each other; any rules are only implicit (Cole and Cole, 1993).

Development of Social Cooperation and Democratic Participation

There are two basic stances on how children benefit from group activity. One is that the mechanism involves some sort of copying of others, for example, by modeling or internalizing others’ behavior (Bandura, 1969). There is no transformation of the modeled behavior, except perhaps through omission or misunderstanding. A more subtle stance comes from the Vygotskian (1978) tradition and emphasizes the appropriation of social and cultural material as tools for, and the stuff of, thought. A good deal of research from this tradition has focused on guided participation: adults or older children interacting with a child try to structure it so as to encourage the child’s autonomous development.

Of particular relevance to children’s organizations are differences in the interactions between child and adult and between peers (Piaget, 1965). Adult-child interactions are usually characterized by one-way instruction or guidance from adults. Interactions among peers are considered to provide greater developmental opportunities because of a greater degree of bi-directional give-and-take.

The greater flexibility afforded by peer interaction allows children to test their understandings and adapt them to the requirements of ongoing interaction. Although same-age interactions might provide optimal conditions for such experiences, other benefits may be derived from mixed-age interactions. Though too great a difference in ages (e.g., adolescents and preschool children) can yield the same differential of power and knowledge that characterizes adult-child interactions, mixed-age groupings are generally beneficial for all participants. Research on mixed-ability and mixed-age groupings has found that school work in such groups benefits children of lower ability or younger age by exposing them to more sophisticated approaches to tasks. There is no aversive effect on the most sophisticated children in the group, who may even benefit from an opportunity to demonstrate their abilities or even assume an instructional role, but without the power associated with adult instructors.

The greater equality of peer relations offers the opportunity for peers to truly listen to each other and attempt to resolve disagreements to reach a common understanding. As a result, advances in person perception occur earlier in peer relations. Moreover, although emphasis has been placed on the importance of disagreements in cognitive growth (Mead, 1934; Piaget, 1932; Vygotsky, 1978; Doise and Mugny, 1984), the individual's coordination of his/her actions with those of others also plays a crucial role in the growth of thought and social action. In Piaget's writings on moral development (1965), he emphasizes the construction of a principled morality that can supersede narrow self-interest, and this morality emerges from peer relations that function with the expectation of reciprocity (Youniss, 1980).

Children aged six to eight tend to act with a strict reciprocity. That is, an act is responded to in exactly the same way. Older children gradually attend to psychological factors, including the intent and personality of the actor as well as the action itself, so that reciprocity is maintained in more complex ways. By nine to 11 years of age, reciprocity operates in a broader way, so that cooperation becomes based on expectations of equality between participants. Youniss links this transition to the observation that after about eight years of age, other children begin to be recognized as individuals and in comparative terms, such as in relation to differences in possessions, ability in school, and popularity. In this way, peers mutually come to recognize each other's deficits as well as strengths, which in turn encourages them to be honest about themselves and assume that they will be received with understanding and acceptance (*Ibid.*: 166). This development continues into adolescence and beyond.

How Children's Organizations Can Facilitate Social Cooperation

It is commonplace for adults working with children to think that the best way to teach students how to do something difficult is to "model" the behavior. Yet modeling is antithetical to encouraging free and democratic inquiry; by showing

the one way or preferred way to do something, students are encouraged to replicate rather than construct their own solutions to tasks (Kritt, 1993). More appropriate methods for promoting democratic participation are based on dialogue of several types. If we assume that children are not naturally democratic (or that it has been drilled out of them in schools), we might consider guided explication of activities as an appropriate method for promoting democratic participation. For example, in an attempt to make an assessment of more democratic activity in classrooms, the “Arts Propel” model for portfolios of student work encourages students to talk about what is important to them, display work of their own choosing, and tell about it — perhaps how they did it or why they did it the way they did (Wolf, 1989; Camp, 1990).

Children and adolescents become more aware of their own and others’ perspectives in disputes with peers and attempts to convince others, as well as through differences of opinion that emerge in the course of discussions. Although the guidance of an adult may be necessary at times, the participants should be encouraged to construct their own democracy as much as possible. Smith, Boulton, and Cowie (1993) studied the implementation of a Cooperative Group Work program in classrooms of eight and nine year olds and identified key conditions that optimize cooperation within groups: first, there must be recognition that cooperation facilitates learning and the opportunity to explore new ideas; second, successful groups consider alternative suggestions from different members when discussing an idea, and include the qualities of reasonableness, orderliness, respect for others’ feelings, equality, freedom to take risks, and the capacity to listen. Both “connectedness” and empowerment are vital to individual development as well as to community progress, but to facilitate social cooperation, there is a need to emphasize group connectedness above individual empowerment.

Another important issue is that of rewards. If a competitive structure is set up where individuals are appraised only for their own efforts, this is the kind of work that they will do. On the other hand, if team efforts are appraised, and the effort is truly teamwork, not just rhetoric, then cooperative efforts will be promoted. Providing group-oriented reinforcement contingencies (for example, offering a collective reward to a class even if one individual gives a correct answer) has been found to be associated with a higher degree of cooperation than providing individual reinforcement contingencies (Williamson, Williamson, Watkins, and Hughes, 1992).

Authority, Decision-Making, and Rules

Mehaffey and Sandberg (1992: 63) concluded from interventional research with children who are rejected by their peers that “elementary-age students need a clear statement of rules and consequences” and that “these should be reviewed and displayed on a large piece of paper during each session.” The rules used in this study were “(1) Only one person speaks at a time; (2) All group members will listen to the speaker; (3) No physical contact of any kind between children; (4) No name

calling or put downs.” This article does not, however, discuss children’s participation in the rule-making, which is important if one wishes children to embrace and promote democratic self-governance as a long-term strategy for cooperation. Even preschool children as young as three and one-half or four can be encouraged to generate rules for behavior in their classrooms (De Vries and Zan, 1993). These rules may include such wise injunctions as, “Do not break the toys. Do not bite. Share things.” The value of such simple exercises in democratic self-governance becomes apparent when such a classroom is contrasted with a typical early childhood or elementary school classroom where all rules are imposed by the teacher and the teacher is the sole arbiter of punishable infractions.

Before adolescence, children tend to think that societal decisions emanate from the free will of individuals; they do not recognize the formal impersonal component of role relations. Nevertheless, the limitations of authority are understood by very young children. A number of studies indicate that children as young as six years of age will believe an authority figure only to the extent that the person’s request is morally justifiable (Damon, 1977; Turiel, 1983; Tisak, 1986; Piaget, 1932). Emler (1992: 69–70) offers a criticism of the notion of a strictly individual construction by which children acquire beliefs about formal organization and formal authority:

...every child, like every adult, is immersed not just in his or her own experience, but also in the accounts, explanations, and interpretations of the social world that circulate in any human community. Thus, children acquire knowledge of the social environment itself and also of these various “social representations” of the environment.

For example, by 11 years old, children understand that there is a hierarchy and authoritative roles in schools and that even their teachers have to answer to a higher authority.

The most commonly used classification of child-rearing strategy defines three distinct child-rearing styles: authoritarian, permissive, and authoritative (Baumrind, 1971; 1975). Though the boundaries between these categories are not firm and approach ideal typologies, “authoritarian” parents are described as those who value obedience as a virtue and favor punitive and forceful measures. “Permissive” parents are those who allow their children to regulate their own activities. “Authoritative” parents, on the other hand, are those who provide grievances and boundaries while recognizing the child’s own interests. They encourage verbal “give-and-take” and share the reasoning behind their policies with the child. Of these styles, Baumrind strongly favors the authoritative style. It is clearly the ideology most relevant to the focus of this article on children’s democratic participation, though there appears to be no research on the relationship between child-rearing ideology at home and children’s participation in other settings, such as child and youth organizations.

In summary, the orientation of children and adolescents to authority is not taught, but is the result of interaction with a larger “political environment.” An important influence on adolescents’ political involvement is the degree to which political rules or policies that they experience personally are considered to be fair, particularly when they have an influence on psychological, social, or economic well-being (Sigel and Hoskin, 1981; Tyler, 1986). Thus, nothing short of creating an experience within a social setting that models an alternative political structure is likely to help adolescents confront the prevailing social order with a more open and enlightened political consciousness. Fostering the skills of democratic participation is an important antidote to traditional educational practice, which runs the risk of leaving youth alienated and open to manipulation. Through genuine participation in local community projects that involve solutions to real problems, young people develop the skills of critical reflection and comparison of perspectives that are essential to the self-determination of political beliefs. The benefit is twofold: to the self-realization of the child and to the democratization of the society.

Learning in Democratic Versus Hierarchically Structured Settings

Many would argue that schools are no place for politics, but schools are always political, though in their typically authoritarian mode they are not explicit about this. There are different definitions of democratic education. Some stress individual empowerment. Empowerment here is defined as helping students to “become eager and successful learners, determine their own futures, participate productively in society, and play an active role in making society a better place for all” (Ross, Bondy, and Kyle, 1993: 3). This would seem to place insufficient stress on learning to cooperate and help create democratic communities (Goodlad, 1984; Seigel and Rockwood, 1993).

There have been many experiments to create democratic learning environments, in which young people are involved in the practice of democracy. It was John Dewey’s notion that democracy should be “a way of life” and that an individual’s learning should be explicitly connected to experience (Dewey, 1933). This is supported by many authors (e.g., Tyler, 1986; Grambs and Carr, 1979; Benne, 1987; Seigel and Rockwood, 1993). From this perspective individual participation and active engagement are essential to learning. Some assert that students will only feel empowered if their actions make a difference (Seigel and Rockwood, 1993). Though this thinking seems to be self-evidently true, it has led many people to believe that children’s projects should always end with some kind of physical change in order for them to feel effective; yet children can also feel empowered through research that reveals new information for others (see Hart, 1997).

A more radical view of education that stresses its potential to liberate is offered by the late Paulo Freire. In his view, education is a struggle for meaning and a

struggle over power relations (Freire, 1985). He seeks to transform education from a dominating, dehumanizing process whereby consciousness is merely an empty receptacle to be filled, to a humanistic and liberating one in which the educator invites the learner to discover reality critically. Freire stresses that it is critical even with very poor children to stress throughout their growing sense of empowerment, or "consciensization" as he calls it, that they maintain a concern for others lest the oppressed become the oppressors.

Individual Differences in Ways of Knowing, Thinking, and Behaving

While it is useful for the designer of children's programs to understand some of the general patterns of children's development, it is equally important to be aware of divergence in the ways of thinking and acting of individual children. Furthermore, there are special considerations one must make to maximize the participation of children with "disabilities." Most of the research on individual differences has been carried out in school settings, but it has a broader relevance.

Children and teachers also have different learning or cognitive styles (Connett, C., 1983; Brown and Hayden, 1980; Goldstein and Blackman, 1978). Becoming aware of one's learning style (or cognitive style) is an important aspect of preparing to work with children exhibiting diverse cognitive styles. Lack of awareness of one's own cognitive style and of the existence of diverse cognitive styles can lead to a number of problems:

1. Intolerance of children's cognitive styles that differ from one's own;
2. Misunderstanding of children with a different cognitive style;
3. Preference for students with a similar cognitive style; and
4. Mislabeled children as "at risk," "attention deficit," or "slow," instead of seeing them in terms of different cognitive styles that may be incongruent with instructional style (Reiff, 1992).

This type of environment may lead children to feel inadequate and different in a very negative way. The facilitators of children's programs, like teachers, need to learn more of their own styles.

Children may have special needs because of orthopedic, visual, auditory, or mental challenges. Because of this range, somewhat different accommodations must be made to include the children. Children with orthopedic challenges have no overt impediment to fully participating in meetings or in office work. They may differ (on an individual basis) in the field activities in which they can comfortably participate. For example, in a community playground building project, assignment of jobs might take into consideration that a child in a wheelchair cannot climb steps to hand materials to someone. This need not be done in a paternalistic manner either; by consistently describing tasks before asking for volunteers, for example, situations awkward to a child can be avoided. Visual and auditory challenges are also of great concern in making full and natural communication possible, but

having children involved in the challenge of inclusive membership brings enormous rewards for their improved social perspective.

Most young children may not be able to anticipate how others feel, or may not be able to modify their behavior to take into account their understandings of other persons' feelings. As reported elsewhere, although some evidence of empathy has been found among children as young as three years of age, young children are not able to coordinate their thinking with someone else's; when there is an incongruence between the thoughts of self and other, one's own thoughts and feelings inevitably take precedence. Only later are children able to reflect upon their thoughts and actions so that they can use their knowledge strategically in interactions (Goffman, 1969; Elkind, 1967).

There are also irrational fears. To the extent that the social cognitive processes that contribute to the aforementioned prosocial behaviors rely on comparison of self to others, these same processes may be the source of fears and antipathies. If it is explained that a child is "just like you," except for some observable difference such as a wheelchair, leg braces, loss of a limb, or blindness, it is understandable that another child might want to assert how he is indeed different from that child. Indeed, it has been reported that rejection of children with more minor disfigurements (e.g., missing a few fingers) is more intense and widespread than rejection of children in wheelchairs.

Summary of Benefits of Participation in Community-Based Programs

Safe Spaces for Children and Youth: Opportunities for children to freely spend time with their peers in unprogrammed activities are very important for their development. Unfortunately, these are decreasing due to parental fears for children's safety and related restrictions on children's freedom, as well as to changing family structure and work.

Development of Thinking: Participation in group activity is central to children's cognitive development. In particular, children develop by synthesizing new approaches as they confront differing perspectives, opinions, and ways of doing things on their own.

Development of Autonomy: Children require opportunities to develop autonomy. The transition from adult authority requires opportunities for establishing rules through relationships with mutual respect. Children's participation programs can offer these opportunities.

Development of Self-Concept and Identity: In late childhood and adolescence, group membership is crucial for different reasons. Children ages eight through 12 develop their sense of competence, independence, and self-worth in the context of social interchange that provides opportunities for mirroring, which children require to test their self-concepts. Adolescents engaged in the consolidation and differentiation of their ego identities seek group membership, which allows for symbolic work with the possible identities they are constructing, as well as to meet

basic affective interpersonal needs. Thus, for adolescents, groups serve, in part, as a stage for the identities they are creating, while for younger children groups serve more as work places, in which they demonstrate competence and the first flourishes of independence.

Community Identity and Community Development: Participating in community projects can be a valuable way for children to express their common interests to one another, and thereby help them forge a sense of group or community. Allowing young people to redesign and transform the place where they meet is an obvious first step for any group in the establishment of community identity.

Development of Social Competence and Social Responsibility: Adolescents struggle to find meaningful roles in society. If they do not find opportunities to develop their competence in ways that are responsible, they will find others that are irresponsible. Involvement of young people in projects leads to a sense of responsibility for the maintenance and protection of those products that are created through participation.

Summary of Guiding Principles for Children's Participation

Supporting Children's Developing Sense of Competence

Environments that steer the middle course “between play and work, between childhood and adulthood, between old-fashioned and progressive education” serve children best in resolving the crisis of industry versus inferiority — developing a sense of competence that is a milestone of healthy personality development during the school-age years. Children ages eight through 12 should have opportunities for their sense of industry to flourish. The projects must be viewed as authentic and manageable by children so that the competing tension at this age — the tendency to feel inferior if their efforts are thwarted — does not overwhelm and paralyze their sense of industry. Early adolescents focus more internally, so their projects need to allow for and ideally build upon their need to do extensive comparison and contrast of self/other in emotionally intense contexts. Thus, participation in artistic and dramatic humanitarian projects may be most attractive to adolescents. As with younger children, the organization must provide the psychological and social space to allow developmental contexts to play themselves out in safe ways.

Supporting Identity Construction and Development of Youth Culture

Symbols function as the observable glue of youth cultures and these include aspects of language, dress, music, rituals, and activities. It is important for youth organizations to:

- Provide a context in which youth can establish a culture in ways that support personal and social identity;

- Ensure that members are seen as important and resourceful in diverse ways, with opportunities for mirroring and genuinely participating in decision-making;
- Allow for complexity — in particular, allowing young people’s participation in multiple cultures, multiple identities, defined in their own ways; and
- Create opportunities for young people to play a range of roles, as experts in these roles as well as apprentices.

Adults should not overdetermine the culture of the organization, but rather provide a trustworthy base, maintain a sense of purpose, and understand the issues, purposes, and needs of youth as they define them. Adults can honestly convey their values, but this should not take on the form of evaluation, which diminishes the sense of responsibility and identity work in the young people.

Incorporating Children’s Understanding of the Social World into Their Programs: The enormous differences in the degree of self-awareness and the ability to understand others from three years of age to 18 have direct implications for how a child is likely to interact in groups. Although a statesperson-like stance is not to be expected until early adolescence or later, children at each age are capable of making contributions to group activity.

Enabling Children to Critically Investigate Their Own Lives and Communities: The social and cultural history of communities and their physical expression through the locations, segregations, layouts, and densities of their housing influence with whom and in what ways children associate. Children’s organizations can play an important role in countering such social and cultural segregation. Knowing the ideologies that produced the spatial arrangements we live with is important in helping to articulate one’s own ideology. Children and youth can join in a critical evaluation of their own living conditions as a powerful means of rising above these constraints.

Enabling Mixed-Age Interactions: Interactions among peers provide greater developmental opportunities, whereas adult-child interactions are usually characterized by adult instruction of children, a one-way relationship. Peer relationships allow for a greater degree of bi-directional give-and-take. Children actively construct the parameters of these relationships, in contrast to primarily acquiring guidance from adults who assume positions of superior power and knowledge. Although too great a difference in ages (e.g., adolescents and preschool children) can yield the same differential of power and knowledge that characterizes adult-child interactions, mixed-age groupings are generally beneficial for all participants.

Supporting the Development of Social Cooperation Between Children: Participants should be encouraged to construct their own democracy as much as possible. Helping children find ways to better resolve disagreements to reach a common understanding is a fundamental role for adults to play from the sidelines,

and is one that is not generally done well by schools. Even preschool children as young as three and one-half or four can be encouraged to generate rules for group behavior. This process can be enhanced by the establishment of *group identity*, which encourages social cooperation much more than any individualistic motivations. The goal of any program should be to appeal to the highest levels of children's altruistic potential. Democratic process can be advanced by:

- Allowing ample time for democratic process to unfold, with a necessary tension between getting the job done and doing so in a way that maximizes democratic process and opportunities for the participants to grow;
- Encouraging equality of status among participants, as defined by participants, a great deal of latitude in how to proceed, and a variety of inputs to work with;
- Allowing flexibility so that group efforts are not structured by preconceived notions;
- Rewarding schemes that encourage the cooperative structure of the group, rather than competitive structures, which reward individuals for their own efforts; and
- Providing skills-training sessions, which include rules established cooperatively with children, with special attention given to cooperation among children who have difficulty getting along.

Adults coordinating this kind of work must consider the extent to which participants are truly functioning as equals. If some groups tend to dominate due to age or gender, it may be good to allow for subcommittee work where there is greater equality among participants; such experience may serve to empower participants within the larger group.

Neither "teaching" nor "modeling" are effective methods for promoting democratic participation. More appropriate methods involve dialogue of several types. Children and adolescents become more aware of their own and others' perspectives in disputes with peers and attempts to convince others, as well as differences of opinion that emerge in topical discussions. These reflective abilities can inform future social interactions. Although the guidance of an adult (in a moderator capacity) may be necessary at times, the participants should be encouraged to construct their own democracy as much as possible.

Including Children with Special Needs in the Design of Participatory Programs: Children may have special needs because of orthopedic, visual, auditory, or mental challenges. Accommodations must be made to include these children in ways that are neither tokenistic nor stigmatizing.

Recognizing Gender Differences in Peer Relations and Friendship Formation: Many differences exist in the peer relationships of girls as opposed to boys and friendships become increasingly sex-segregated as boys and girls move from

middle childhood to preadolescence. Both boys and girls desire friendship that is amiable and cooperative, where friends can control their impulses and share common interests with them. Children's organizations can recognize these culturally defined differences, while also providing more opportunities than traditional settings for young people to form associations across gender lines in the pursuit of common community goals.

Recognizing Individual Differences in Ways of Knowing, Thinking, and Behaving: For a child or youth organization to involve all children, it needs to recognize individual differences in ways of knowing, thinking, and behaving. Becoming aware of one's own learning style is an important aspect of preparing to work as a facilitator with children with a wide range of styles. Certain types of intelligences have been reinforced in society by labeling children as "gifted," "learning disabled," or "at risk." Rather than defining intelligence as something that can be measured by an I.Q. test, it should be defined as the ability to create products or solve problems that are valued in different cultural settings.

Very young children are constrained in their ability to communicate because of their rudimentary language skills. Children who are three to seven years of age speak well, but use communication differently from older children and adults. Their verbal facility evidences their somewhat simplistic use of language, primarily to express their own thoughts, experiences, feelings, and desires. At first blush this is impressive, but they are unable to tailor their messages for an audience due to their inability to take in the perspective of other persons. This limitation precludes such useful communicative tools as diplomacy in phrasing messages to avoid unnecessary confrontation, understanding the other's point of view toward a compromise or negotiation, and full consideration for the feelings of others. Children from seven or eight years of age begin to do these things and there is great improvement over the next few years, but these communicative skills continue to develop through adolescence, even into adulthood.

Conclusion

A review of theory in child and adolescent development reveals that providing opportunities for young people to be democratically involved in community-based organizations can offer great values for their development as well as for that of their communities. These benefits include the development of their sense of personal identity and identity with their community, their social competence and skills of participation, and their degree of political self-determination.

Children need opportunities to engage with peers and adults who are models of the competence and social efficacy that children seek. However, they will only feel empowered if their actions make a difference. If organizations are to attract young people to serve their communities, they need to allow "youth culture" to flourish and to allow for diversity of children in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, physical and mental ability, and sexual orientation. Only in this way will the

organization support personal and social identity. Adults in young people's organizations need to provide a trustworthy base, maintain a sense of purpose, and understand the issues and needs of children as children define them. When children or youth critically evaluate their own living conditions and identify the underlying causes of problems, they become more able to rise above the constraints imposed by their environment.

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**Table 1:
Developmental Levels of Perspective-Taking and
How They Are Reflected in Social Relationships (after Selman, 1980)**

Developmental Level in Coordination of Perspectives	Close Friendships	Peer Group
Level 0	Stage 0	
<i>(approximately ages 3 to 7)</i>		
Egocentric or undifferentiated perspective. Other's perspective not differentiated from one's own perspective.	Momentary physical interaction.	Emphasis on physical connections and overt action (e.g., "a big team," "play games").
Level 1	Stage 1	
<i>(approximately ages 4 to 9)</i>		
Subjective or differentiated perspectives. Recognition of differences in perspective.	One-way assistance, e.g., someone who plays your favorite games with you.	A series of unilateral relations. Group activities thought of in terms of outcomes that benefit self or please others. Reciprocity based on physical acts only.
Level 2	Stage 2	
<i>(approximately ages 6 to 12)</i>		
Self-reflective or reciprocal perspective. Awareness of how others might view one's thoughts and feelings.	Fair-weather cooperation. Cooperation around incidents or issues. Relationships tend to break up over arguments.	Bilateral (reciprocal) partnerships. Interlocking dyads. Reciprocal feelings of affection "extend a chain from one dyad to another."
Level 3	Stage 3	
<i>(approximately ages 9 to 15)</i>		
Third-person or mutual perspective. Ability to understand a neutral perspective.	Intimate and mutual sharing. A system, not isolated. Possessiveness and jealousy often characterize this stage.	Concept of the group distinct from particular relationships. Cohesive because of common interests and beliefs. Expectation of unanimity suppresses differences of opinion.
Level 4	Stage 4	
<i>(approximately 12 to adulthood)</i>		
Societal or in-depth perspective. Ability to take the perspective of what is good for society; a legal or moral perspective.	Autonomous, interdependent, i.e., relational systems that are flexible and change.	Interdependence of group process and individual differences are recognized. A pluralistic community united behind common goals, while recognizing diversity.