What Is a Children's Policy, Anyway?

Sandra Meucci

Introduction

PUBLIC DISCOURSE ON CHILDREN'S NEEDS OFTEN ECHOES THE PHRASE "IT TAKES A village to raise a child." Children's advocates use the village as a metaphor for society's responsibility for children. However, if Hillary Clinton's book (Clinton, 1996) is an indication of what is meant by this metaphor, the village is the "location" of common-sense parenting practices based on moral rectitude, of programs and services for parents and children, but not policy per se.[1] This metaphor represents our confusion over the changing social contract between family and government responsibility for children, and our lack of social consensus about the necessity of policies for children. Yet without policy, children have only charity to rely upon, and in the words of Jonathan Kozol, "Charity is no substitute for justice!"[2]

By policy I mean social consensus and social change, generated through constituent organizing and enacted through legislation, regulation and ordinances, and their practice over time. Of course, children are affected by all policy, but social policy specifically affecting children, at least in the U.S., has historically not been conceived in this way. It has always been reactive. From the 19th-century factory acts regulating child labor to recent legislation on child abuse, adults have advocated for policies protecting children considered vulnerable to harmful circumstances. Rarely has policy been developed proactively to create circumstances and conditions that move beyond protection, to create environments beneficial to children's health and well-being.

In this article, I try to make a case for new approaches to policy development — approaches that do not rest on euphemisms like the "village," or even on adult notions of child "protection," do not necessarily imply that services are the solution to children's needs, and do not separate the content from the process of policy development. It is an approach to building social consensus for policies that often gets short shrift — and constituent participation in policy development is key. None of the landmark social or environmental policies (e.g., social security,

---

SANDRA MEUCCI (2230 Ward Street, Berkeley, CA 94705; e-mail: smeucci@earthlink.net), a Guest Editor of this issue and Ph.D. candidate in Sociology, is a teaching fellow and research associate with 20 years of experience in research, design, management, and evaluation of new program models for addressing social problems. She is currently performing evaluation research for the California Institute on Human Services and is teaching at the University of California, Santa Cruz.

disability access, labor laws, workplace health, clean air and water standards, women's rights and civil rights) came about through expert-driven lobbying in the absence of a political movement of ordinary people to animate them. Children and youth, as well as those who care for them and share concerns over the environment we all inhabit, are a vital and untapped policy constituency.

In a recent trenchant and supportive critique of the status of children's policy advocacy (Szerlog, 1996), it was pointed out that advocacy agencies are not building a grass-roots constituency for a children's policy agenda — despite large member organizations like the Child Welfare League of America, mass demonstrations like the Children's Defense Fund's "Stand for Children" day in Washington, and blast-faxing and spotlighting "Who's for Kids,"[3] not to mention the myriad Washington, D.C., and state-level policy institutes, with their combination of shaming, show, and statistics. Most adults seem unable to translate their concern for children "in the abstract" into grass-roots activism for better policies (*Ibid.*).

What is a children's policy, anyway? In the United States, there has never been a comprehensive children's policy, inclusive of all children and the many issues related to their health.[4] None of the existing domains in which children's policy is developed embraces what we know about the "ecology" of children's lives. For example, health and social welfare policy originate separately from environmental policy, despite the growing body of literature (Macintyre, Maciver, and Sooman, 1993) suggesting that local social and physical environments are directly related to children's health status. Labor policy, with its concerns about youth unemployment, originates from yet another bureau. Absent an integrated approach, many people in the policy arena propose schemes of coordination of isolated programs and fragmented services,[5] and some states have begun to improve families' access to health and social services, or income support, by centralizing the provision of services. This is welcome, but only one element of the changes that need to be made in policy for children. A policy model based solely on existing service categories rests on existing bodies of adult expertise and misses the organic relationships that are implicit between children and the environments they inhabit. In other words, it is neither participatory nor ecological.

Basic standards for healthful environments have been developed and the movement for healthy cities and communities has had an impact (Hancock, 1993). For example, the World Health Organization's Healthy Cities Project proposes a clean, safe, high-quality physical environment (including housing quality); an ecosystem that is stable and sustainable; the meeting of basic needs (food, water, shelter, income, safety, and work) for all the city's people; public participation in decision-making and public life; a diverse, vital, and innovative city economy; public health and sick-care services accessible to all; city structures that promote respectful contact, interactions, sharing of cultural heritage, and connectedness with the heritage of the city; and positive health status and low disease status of the city's people. Habitat II and the recent United Nations Conference on Human

Settlements have endorsed a similar profile specifically for children. Discussions of children's policy ought to include standards like these, but they do not.

The Children's Defense Fund also seeks to realize an integrated and ecological policy. Their approach makes "impact on children" a standard against which all policy is judged. To have meaning, though, this would require carefully examining the ways in which policies have a combined effect on children's environments! Some of these impacts can be gauged by experts, but children and their parents, in different environments, are often better informants. Moreover, it may not be possible to determine some impacts in any direct way; many would predictably differ depending upon children's age, class, location, race, and gender. Regardless, examining "impacts on children" would be an excellent way to raise consciousness about the effect of government decisions on children and to begin to develop policies comprehensively.

Currently, legislative analysis and development of policy impacts are confined to congressional corridors. Too often, this fails to reach the public, because policy is construed as an expertise-driven enterprise. Lamentably, this "top down," expert-driven approach lacks the voice, authority, and power that a popular constituency would supply. Children, youth, parents, grandparents, and many interested others are a potentially powerful constituency for policy development. Most policy groups and experts who speak for the interests of youth and children do so without involving them, or those who live and work close to them, either in the identification of the problems to be addressed or in the development of the solutions.[6] Survey data reveal that people are not resistant to the idea even of creating new federal programs when it comes to children's health.[7]

What has emerged from "expertise-driven" policy is a tangled web of discrete and often unrelated pieces of state and federal legislation, local ordinances, and political initiatives — a proverbial patchwork of provisions to families with children. The work of advocates is often reduced to narrow policy activities that can be managed within the narrow professions. Policy development over time reflects an infinite regress into increasingly narrow and competing interpretations of children's well-being, presided over by a retinue of policy experts.[8]

The consequence of lacking children-sensitive policies is that the economic well-being of children in the U.S. is less secure than in other industrialized nations,[9] and our children's health status also ranks surprisingly low. Poverty has been growing in all Western industrial nations since the mid-1970s and employment has become more insecure, despite robust economic growth rates. However, the depth and extent of poverty in the U.S. are unprecedented among comparable nations, due in large part to the absence of social policy provisions to address the problem. Children and lone mothers are most affected by these poverty trends (McFate, Smeeding, and Rainwater, 1995). Poverty is not the only threat. The United States is contaminating the physical environment at a remarkable rate, introducing thousands of new untested chemicals into the atmosphere every year.

Children in poor neighborhoods or near freeways, refineries, and dumps are especially vulnerable to toxic exposure.[10]

Some political scientists (Block et al., 1987) describe the current political climate in the U.S. as "The Mean Season," whereby social policy is increasingly hostile to children, especially those from low-income and immigrant families. The effects of eliminating single-parent immigrant families from welfare eligibility (Super et al., 1996), for example, have yet to be realized.[11] Simultaneous with the loss of social protections is the amplification of social control. In response to the rise in juvenile and youth crime, a spate of "get tough" measures has been enacted, including substantial increases in funding for law enforcement and corrections, increased penalties for juveniles convicted of offenses, and curfews targeting teenagers. These are the most popular, but not the most promising approaches to youth crime (Noguera, 1995).[12] Why is policy taking these directions despite public opinion favoring legislation for programs helping children?[13]

Since a unified children's policy, as such, does not exist, there is no critical literature on its history.[14] Rather, there are landmark policies affecting children from which we can ascertain "policy themes" or "policy legacies." Examination reveals how notions of children's "protection" have been codified into law and legislation and how constituted frames of reference have been used to legitimize state interventions on behalf of children. These themes and legacies form not only legislative precedents, but also entire current "ideological fields" within which discussions about children's needs and government responsibilities coexist.

Policy Themes and Legacies

The Double Meaning of Child Protection

Policy themes for children in the U.S. have historically been based on notions of "protection" — both *of* children and *against* children. The legacy began in Colonial New England, when the North American colonists moved away from English common law and developed their own *Body of Liberties* code in 1641. It provided for the punishment of fractious children. The Puritans were severe about correct moral conduct, interpreting children's play as a sinful waste of time. The law contained penalties for disobedience against parents, giving magistrates the power to summon "any such offender, and upon conviction of such misdemeanors...sentence him to endure...corporal punishment, by whipping or otherwise...." Even lying by children, suggests Joseph Hawes (1971), was punishable with a fine.

The courts mostly held for the parents against their own children. Though seemingly contradictory, the law also afforded children some protection from abuse, but there were no cases of children winning against their parents in court (Hawes, 1991). What constituted physical abuse and cruelty to children was defined by the agents of protection, often former policemen (Hawes, 1971), and

disagreements arose over proper childbearing. In general, parents were victorious in corporal punishment cases where children were considered unruly, but cruelties were also defined in terms of the conditions of poverty. Malnourished children, children left unattended by parents at work, or not warmly dressed, for example, were determined to be abused (Gordon, 1988; Pleck, 1987), and one-third of these children were taken from their families and placed in institutions as a result (Pleck, 1987).

The early 19th century saw the creation of public schools for children to mold the young into loyal and useful American citizens and assist them in developing and fulfilling their capabilities.[15] Children on the street gradually came to be seen as threatening the social order. Mostly Northern European immigrants, these children were feared; reformers thought they would become "the dangerous classes" (Brace, 1889), imprisoned by their poverty and circumstances. These concerns were at the heart of the Children's Aid Society, which was the progenitor of today's child welfare agencies and represented the middle-class response to the problem of lower-class children on the city streets. Believed to be vagrants, these children from immigrant families were seen as thriftless, beggared, and dissolute — even though many of them were probably working. As a result, many were indentured to foster families. Institutions for "dependent and delinquent children" expanded in number and significance. Delinquency became identified with pauperism. In 1824, the Society for the Prevention of Pauperism changed its title to the Society for the Prevention of Delinquency. The first call for separating youthful criminals from adults and creating the first segregated institutional setting for law-breaking children occurred as part of the House of Refuge (Abbott, 1932).

Teddy Roosevelt warned at the White House Conference on Dependent Children in 1909 that the "ranks of criminals and other enemies of the state are recruited in an altogether undue proportion from children bereft of their natural homes and left without sufficient care." By this time in the U.S., there were 93,000 institutionalized dependent children, 50,000 additional neglected and dependent children in private homes, and 25,000 so-called juvenile delinquents.[16] The first juvenile-court law, an accomplishment of Jane Addams, Julia Lathrop, and Lucy Flower, was passed in Illinois in 1899. Special programs for delinquents and dependent and neglected children emerged from this reform (Platt, 1969). Under this law the child offender's wayward tendencies were reinterpreted from "criminal" to "misguided," to be met with aid rather than punishment (Abbott, 1938a). For decades after this, reformatories, rather than penitentiaries, housed so-called delinquent youth. The differences were subtle, though. They amounted to new ideas of individualizing treatment and were progressive forms of prison discipline applied to adolescents. Delinquency was taken up as a mental problem initially by the child psychiatry movement in the 1920s and 1930s as part of a trend toward the medicalization of social problems (Richardson, 1989).

In the early 20th century, many children living in U.S. cities did spend a great deal of time in the streets and, as now, reformers sought various ways to get them "off" the street. The history of public policy toward the urban public environment has been a continual restricting of children's use of the streets and loss of children's public play space. For instance, the Police Athletics Leagues closed off hundreds of streets from children in cities like New York from 1920 to 1940. Urban planning and policy that seek to protect society from children by protecting children's access to safe public spaces, or that are even conscious of children's needs, have been absent from the national scene for the past 60 years (Gaster, 1992).

Child Labor — Illiterate Citizenry

The protection *of* children surely has its place in our policy history as well. From the mid-19th to the turn of the 20th century, a time when women and children were entering the industrial labor force in droves, women reformers became concerned about the perils of child labor in the newly emergent manufactories and home sweatshops. Children were, according to historian Trattner (1970), among the first factory workers in the United States, preferred because they were cheap labor and thought to be "more tractable, reliable and industrious, quicker, neater, and more careful, and less likely to go on strike." By the early 20th century, more than one-third of the textile jobs in the southern textile factories were held by children, and over half were between 10 and 13 years of age (Bremner, 1974). Reformers were concerned that children working for wages at too early an age would become illiterate. It was also feared that they would depress the wage rate for adults. Jane Addams asserted that "the boy who attempts prematurely to support his widowed mother may lower wages, add an illiterate member to the community, and arrest the development of a capable workman."[17]

Thus, reformers drew up child labor laws requiring a certain amount of schooling for children. By the middle of the 19th century, a web of legislation regulating child labor had been passed in northern states based on the idea that a "child had a right to secure an education and to be protected from exploitation" (Trattner, 1970). Though Black children toiling in Mississippi cotton fields or Georgia peach orchards were outside the consciousness of those pushing for legislative remedies to factory abuses (Rosner, 1993), some states individually passed Factory Acts[18] that prohibited younger children from factory work. In 1916, a federal child labor bill was passed. This law was fiercely contested by organized business interests, such as the Southern Cotton Manufacturers Association, and regulating child labor was left up to the individual states until the Roosevelt administration enacted New Deal Fair Labor Standards (Hawes, 1991) in the 1930s. These standards included minimum wage and maximum hour laws, and form the basis of child labor law today.

Forcing children to toil in harsh conditions, as was the case during the Industrial Revolution in the U.S. and remains the case in many countries today, is

at one extreme of an ambivalence we as a society have concerning child labor. A rising fear of idle young people, beginning in the postwar period, led many in the child guidance movement to glorify work as a mechanism for young people to gain skills, learn routines, and practice good habits. Work was also believed to be an alternative to life on the streets. Unemployment, especially for poor, urban African-American youth, is almost universally understood as a root cause of social unrest and community breakdown. While white youth are cautioned to choose their jobs carefully and to limit their work routines so as not to interfere with school, African-American youth have tended to be presented with images of manual labor that emphasize the worthiness inherent in low-paying and back-braking jobs (Rosner, 1993).

Assimilation of the Lower-Class Immigrants

Protecting children from labor exploitation was enveloped by concerns over an illegitimate citizenry and fears of unassimilatable lower-class immigrants. Dependent child protections were also enacted for aims other than purely to "protect" children. When the 1908 Conference on the Care of Dependent Children endorsed aid for children of poor parents "of worthy character," it was in the form of income subsidies, based upon the mother's fitness, and was afforded mostly to immigrant women. The ostensible aim of these Mother's Pensions (the precursors to AFDC) was to assure that the children were fit to perpetuate the American democracy (Mink, 1996).

The assimilation agenda fit with another movement, for sanitary reform, within the field of public health in the 1870s. Industrial life was a health hazard, but discourses about the broad, deep, and systemic causes[19] were quickly narrowed. Infant mortality emerged as a proxy for the larger problem and became a focus of public concern (Schwab, 1996). The systematic causes of infant mortality — poverty, unemployment, poor housing, racism, etc. — were ignored in favor of services for poor mothers and their babies. Scientific progress through public hygiene became the orienting cultural logic for public health interventions throughout Europe and the United States. One focal point for public health intervention was the clean milk movement; "distribution depots" of pasteurized milk were set up and physicians visited these stations at regular hours to advise mothers on the feeding and care of their children. S. Josephine Baker, the first director of New York City's Division of Child Hygiene, recognized the need to also encourage mothers to breast feed. She introduced maternal and child health services that included prenatal counseling, breast-feeding promotion, and nutrition education for "little mothers" (*Ibid.*). Most of the women who received these services were immigrants, with children to be "sanitized."

Children's interests were again conflated with the aim of cultural reform through the first maternal and child health policies in the United States. The Sheppard-Towner Bill, the nation's first maternity legislation passed in 1921

(Haasis, 1919; Perkins, 1918; Mink; 1996),[20] tied preventive health services to family reform. It was a model of "infancy protection through Americanization," by providing home education to mothers, advice and instruction, as well as supervision and uplift. In the words of future Labor Secretary Francis Perkins, infant hygiene work was an "entering wedge for Americanization," an opportunity to mitigate the "prejudices and superstitions...of primitive peoples" and "instruct foreign-born women...in regard to diet and dietetics" (Mink, 1996). S. Josephine Baker's hygiene program grafted nicely onto this agenda, as her classes on nutrition instruction became imbued with cultural standards for an "American diet" (Baker, 1918).

Through public health nursing, traveling "clinics," and health demonstration centers, mothers were shown how better to care for their children. The agents of reform were mostly Anglo-American nurses who regulated the practice of midwifery by immigrant women, with the effect at times of driving the practice of midwifery underground. The model for better care for mothers was that it be rendered through Mother's Classes, where mothers were supervised, and through medical and nursing facilities, where "adequate maternity and infancy supervision will be available to all who need it."[21] The prevailing attitude was one of "maternalism" toward mother-clients. Materialism, an ideology of the "exalted" social role of women as mothers, was based upon rigid normative notions about what constitutes proper mother's care, nurturance, and values (Kovel and Michel, 1993). Thus it was that middle-class Anglo-American women reformers and social workers came to instruct "ethnic" mothers in cultural practices such as cooking, using a discourse about mothers contributing children/citizens to the nation-state. "Maternalism" notwithstanding, these classes did provide some support, particularly to rural mothers suffering from cultural isolation (Mink, 1996). However, after only eight years of operation the American Medical Association exerted its influence to end Sheppard-Towner.

Professionalizing Child Work

The growth of the welfare bureaucracies between 1889 and 1920 led to the expansion of caretaking professions dominated by women, such as social work, health visiting, and district nursing. Women reformers of the Progressive Era sought not only uplift for others and harmony for the society, but also a role for themselves, as figures of authority. New experts carved out a terrain for themselves in the Women's Joint Congressional Committee and claimed their authority over the definition of good motherhood and the conditions necessary to raise children. Their reach can be seen in the maternalist agenda, which included Mothers Pensions, a federal Department of Education, the Sheppard-Towner Bill, enforcement of prohibition, pure-milk laws, regulation of the coal industry, federal control over water resources in national parks, property rights, and medical education (Gordon, 1994).

Though we know less about the part women clients played in policy formation (Ladd-Taylor, 1993), U.S. policy activists such as Florence Kelley, Julia Lathrop, Grace Abbott, Edith Abbott, and Sophonisba Breckinridge were the first to craft social policies aimed at mothers and children. They made it necessary for a stratum of new professionals, nurses, social workers, and public health officials to adjudicate the quality of parenting. Regarding Mother's Pensions, home inspections had to be done because:

> If the home is degrading, if the mother shows herself unwilling or incapable of raising tit to the level which we feel we have the right to expect it to reach, then the pension is not justified. The aim of the law is to benefit the child, not the assistance of the mother.[22]

The extension of legal protections to children and the increase in the agents of social control over families and children characterize not only Progressive Era reforms, but also present-day professionalization of work with children. Social work, for example, was defined as "a developing science of the socialized personality" and casework as a process that includes detailed interviewing of the client, and often the client's family, to determine "diagnosis" of the problem and "treatment" (Sheffeld, 1920).

Medicalization of social problems became a standard way to narrow social discourse and advance professionalism. Once the medical profession identified "the battered child syndrome" in the 1950s, for example, it lobbied every state to revise existing laws on child abuse and required individuals to report cases of it. The upshot was the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act of 1973, which required child welfare agencies to remove a child from a family for three days if the agency believed the child to be in danger (Pleck, 1987). This law guaranteed protection of the children, but also state intrusion into the home. Ironically, the American Civil Liberties Union, which represented the children's civil rights against the social workers in 1990, deemed children to be in need of protection from the very social welfare establishment that was set up to intervene on their behalf (Hawes, 1991).

The medicalization and professionalization of juvenile delinquency were also ostensibly undertaken to protect children. The juvenile court system "personalized" the administration of justice by approaching "troublesome" youth in medical-therapeutic terms. This in turn resulted in more juveniles being committed to penal institutions where indeterminate sentencing and other arbitrary and punitive procedures went unchecked, though the courts did make a countermove to ensure due process to juveniles and provide them with legal counsel.[23] Involving more lawyers in juvenile delinquency procedures, however, has had little affect on the reduction of delinquency.[24] On the contrary, it promises little more than expediting social control and protection against youth, through a hardening of official anti-delinquency programs.

Urban youth today are being professionally surveilled and under suspicion for potential gang activity.[25] Youth crime, the only type of crime that is on the rise,[26] is now met with yet another professionalized solution, that of increasing the number of police to get more children off the street. Recently, President Clinton was quick to issue a statement on how well current policies are working: "because of our tough and smart decisions to put more cops on the street and get *kids*, guns, and drugs off the street, we are now beginning to reverse the trend in violent crime."[27] The problem is, for youth, that it just isn't so. These approaches do not address the root causes of violence, but instead increase the power of professionals over lower-class youth and contribute to young people's subordinate status.[28]

There is an awareness of the problem of violence as a public health issue within the U.S. administration, as evidenced by an address given in 1993 by Donna Shalala, the Secretary of Health and Human Services. She argues for violence prevention through measures such as:

> improving anti-violence curricula and mediation training in schools; connecting adolescents to adult mentors and role models, building bridges to the job market and creating year-round academic enrichment and recreation opportunities; improving alternative sentencing mechanisms for youth on the brink of serious trouble; supporting the Brady Bill; and enlisting news and entertainment media to reexamine their depiction of violence (Shalala, 1993).

Yet these are public health approaches. They differ from the criminal justice approach — policing, restrictive curfews, tougher sentencing, and boot camps — now under study by the legislature, according to U.S. Representative William J. Hughes (D.-N.J.), as the main approach for dealing with the growing crime wave among youth (Hawes, 1991).[29]

Children's Policy and Adult Fears

The children's policy themes of today have legacies at least a century old — especially attitudes toward youth as potential delinquents — and they have developed in response to cultural pressures coming from several directions at once. The social control of "the dangerous classes" was the first cultural pressure, manifested in children's juvenile delinquency policy. Second, cultural pressure for regulating ethnic motherhood toward an Americanized ideal was the explicit aim of the first maternal and child health policies. Third, regulating the conditions of labor was most salient to maintaining a political economic order. Child labor, seen as necessary for maintaining the family economy in the mostly agrarian-based society of the 18th century, became a problem as the "satanic mills" of the industrialized 19th century increasingly placed children in harm's way. Children thus became the first markers of the deleterious excesses of industrialism.

Subsequent policies were motivated by adult fears over crime by lower-class juveniles, over unassimilatable immigration, and over the rapacious destruction of human health by industrial capitalism.

Fears about immigration remain salient in the contemporary policy landscape. Social policy is unlikely to take a better turn as long as we remain a culture divided. Because good policy for children requires a consensus about all children being equally deserving, politics that rest on divisions among people pose deep challenges to consensus building. Immigration politics and policies in the 1990s reinscribe fears that are a century old.

Unprecedented human migration characterizes our reach toward the 21st century. As the millennium closes, a global economy and border wars create migration from homelands at a pace and rate unprecedented in human history. The challenge of assimilation posed in the Progressive Era was but a warm up to the "human flashflood" of the 1990s, in Richard Walker's terms. The number of "foreign born" in California alone leapt by an astounding 80% in the 1990s (Walker, 1995), representing a greater population shift in one decade in one state than the entire nation experienced at the turn of the century. Over half of all immigrants reside in just seven cities: Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, Miami, San Diego, Houston, and San Francisco.[30] This concentration of immigration poses challenges to erstwhile honest attempts at inclusionary policies. These challenges are borne by the immigrant families themselves (e.g., language and custom) and by the educational system (Walker, 1995)[31] and medical service delivery system.

If that weren't difficult enough, racial tensions and antipathy toward immigrants have also become defining features of the political climate in the 1990s. Despite strong evidence on the positive economic impact of immigration,[32] there is a deep reaction against the cultural transformation implied by immigration. This is expressed in popular print media[33] and more forcefully in major new immigration legislation that restricts all public benefits for new immigrants and tightens the borders against illegal immigration. While restricting health and other public benefits to legal immigrants and authorizing thousands of border control agents, these measures also exclude children of illegal immigrants from school.[34]

A New Theme: Policy Through Participatory Democracy

The legacy of these various policy themes for children is instructive. Absent a democratic grass-roots movement and constituency for children's policies, a stratum of experts has emerged to define the interests of children. They do so in ways that conflate the interests of children with other social agendas. The absence of a democratic constituency or a strong social consensus for policies affecting children will, if not rectified, perpetuate the status quo, that is, expert-driven and reactively derived legislation, resulting in worsening conditions for children. A new model of policy development is possible to imagine and achieve. It would be

based on optimizing conditions and potentials rather than on minimizing damaging effects, on proactive commitments to a better environment for all children, and on the input and experience of children.

Not only are children capable, they *do* participate in developing policy. Community projects that affect policy and involve children, often as young as eight years old, exist the world over. In France, for example, there are over 700 local youth councils. These are settings for dialogue between children, youth, adults, and local authorities. Unique to France is the effort made in every municipality to ensure that the children are elected by their peers to the councils. Council activities have resulted in bicycle paths and skateboard parks, play spaces and intergenerational open spaces in many towns, radio and television programs managed directly by youth, a permanent urban environmental laboratory, and numerous programs of environmental action and education (Hart, 1996).[35]

In Italy, children have an important political presence in 11 major cities where the city mayors have declared that they will take the proposals of children into account in every new urban plan and housing project.[36] This commitment sprang from the 1992 nationwide "congress" of children concerning the "future of the urban environment," which was held in a small city, Fano, on Italy's Adriatic coast. This campaign, entitled "Let's Take Back Our Cities," is a companion effort to the "Let's Imagine Our Future" and "Let's Design the Future" campaigns, in which thousands of children between the ages of eight and 12 participate in envisioning, analyzing, designing, and communicating alternative desirable futures for their local environments.

The kinds of things these children want in their environments include: to be able to roam freely throughout the city without serious risk; to experiment with sleeping out of doors, strolling together, kites between the houses, and bridges between the windows; spaces where they can play in the immediate vicinity of their homes; open spaces managed by people who have free time (e.g., the elderly); more places to meet new and different people, including the sick; cities with the possibility to find branches, twigs, leaves, mud, and stone to build huts and hiding places. The bids these children are making for open and public spaces with connectedness between people are not only reasonable and possible policy proposals, but they also prefigure a kind of social life where people are not afraid of one another or the environment in which they live. The aims of these Italian children resonate with what children worldwide want in their environments. The hunger for trees in particular is outspoken by children who live in cities as diverse as Salta in Brazil, Melbourne in Australia, Warsaw, Krakow, and Byrstra in Poland, and Ecatapec and Toluca in Mexico (Lynch, 1977).

In Ecuador, environmental projects involving 50,000 children exist in 21 provinces and 23 cities. These projects evolved out of a national movement, El Programa Muchacho Trabajador, where children learn about their histories and develop an identity in their multicultural society. Attracting the support of

families, neighborhood organizations, schools, and churches, these youth have raised consciousness within government institutions and among the public about children's rights. Using TV, radio, and the press, they have activated others in social mobilizations for their environmental plans.[37]

Since enactment of the U.N. *Declaration of the Rights of the Child*, which the United States has not yet endorsed, towns and city councils throughout the world have begun to involve teens in their decision-making bodies. Though no country has implemented this part of the U.N. Convention systematically,[38] youth are involved in city governance in northern Italy, Chile, Spain, and in every *parangyi* (city) in the Philippines.[39]

In the United States, where the professionalization of advocacy and services to children is perhaps the most advanced, the involvement of children is incipient. Though many advocacy groups consult with children and youth at strategic moments through focus groups and surveys, young people's participation in policy work is just beginning. Mostly relating to "environmental" issues and "sustainability," young people take the initiative to organize campaigns to affect policy.[40] Within California there are several cities (e.g., San Francisco, Oakland, and Los Angeles) where youth commissions are being constituted. One of the youth groups funded as part of our Children and the Environment planning project was successful in organizing a ballot initiative to set aside money from the general fund for its youth.[41] Several sporadic efforts have been made in cities such as Berkeley[42] and Santa Monica[43] to plan for city development with youth.

More typical in the U.S. is the enlistment of young people to authenticate advocacy activities undertaken by the adult-driven organizations ostensibly on their behalf. Access to care, Medi-Cal managed care, foster care, youth violence prevention, public safety, policy accountability, and economic justice are all policy arenas in which youth have been invited to engage.[44] In some instances, the young people have taken a different position on these issues than the parent organization (e.g., on the imposition of a youth curfew). A few organizations aim to build the skills of young people doing policy work[45] and, in one case, children in foster care wrote and lobbied the legislature to pass a Bill of Rights that they wrote themselves (Margonelli, 1994).

Policy work with youth is often limited to short-term involvement, or single-issue specific campaigns, due to funding availability only for policy work on single issues, where people come together around threats in a "rearguard" fashion. At times, out of a disaster comes an opportunity to involve youth in planning, such as the youth group that lobbied to have Rebuild L.A. (the South Central redevelopment project created in the aftermath of the Los Angeles uprising of 1992) include paid youth internships in businesses, libraries, and recreation centers.

Conclusion

Though it would potentially open new vistas within a dim policy environment, involving children and youth in policymaking cannot by itself warm the political climate toward children. Neither will listening to children single-handedly transform the deeply ideological nature of policy debates. Though children are often more honest and direct in communicating their observations, less cynical in their judgments about what is possible, and clearer about the basic values that ought to govern policy decisions, they are not wholly exempt from the forces of ideology and political culture. In working with children toward building a constituency and identifying policy directions, it is important to maintain a critical consciousness about policy proposals.

In trying to shift emphasis to children's self-determination and representation, policy analysts and advocates have a uniquely valuable contribution to make. In building political power with the constituency they represent, policy "experts" can help youth deepen their analysis on the timing and manner of launching policy campaigns. For their part, youth make a unique contribution to the effort in that they tend to frame issues in new and more ecologically derived ways. Working together can open up new avenues of consideration in debates that are currently "locked up" along partisan lines. For example, the article "Safe Spaces: California Children Enter a Policy Debate" (by Meucci and Redmon) in this volume describes how young people reshape the policy dimensions of the community safety issue. Theirs is a formulation that appreciates the significance of toxic-free neighborhoods, abundant public facilities, public access, community control over development, tax revenues to support public space, etc. In one sense, they speak to a renewal of public and community spirit, which has been overshadowed by privatization of social space, as necessary for safety. What young people formulated is a policy based on well-being, rather than on "protection," and they assume the possibility of living in an environment structured to facilitate interaction, rather than to prohibit contact by people who fear one another. By removing the patronizing veneer of protection and embracing an ecological and participatory model of policy development, we open the door to new conceptualization and strategies. We also reinvigorate the energy and ideas about children's policy. The first step is to encourage the exchange of ideas with children and to actually listen to what they have to say.

NOTES

1. The only mention of policy she makes is of the Earned Income Tax Credit, as modifications to the Family Leave Act that Bill Clinton enacted. This contrasts with her entire chapter, entitled "The World Is in a Hurry, Children Are Not," on the importance of parents spending time with their children.
2. Address to "Grantmakers for Children and Youth Annual Conference" (September 30, 1996).

3. This is the approach of the Benton Foundation, which publishes the "score sheet" on congressional votes in a tabloid entitled *Who's for Kids and Who's Just Kidding*.

4. In the U.S., Minnesota is unique in its attempts to provide universal benefits, such as basic sliding-fee child care, universal health care, and regulation of corporate activities toward establishing a "living wage" to families with children. See Alexander (1995).

5. See "Fighting Fragmentation: Collaborative Efforts to Serve Children and Families in California's Counties," a joint publication of California Tomorrow and the Children and Youth Policy Project, U.C. Berkeley (1991) and "Delivering the Future: Recommendations from the AB 99 Steering Committee Regarding Health Care for Women, Children, and Adolescents in California," by the California State Department of Health Services (1992), for such attempts within one state. See "Children, Families, Communities: Children's Legislative Budget Updates and Issue Briefs Agenda 96," by the Child Welfare League of America, for an attempt to weave a tighter safety net with the threads of the existing service delivery system's policies for vulnerable children.

6. Our own survey of over 100 children's policy groups revealed that fewer than 10% of them consulted children and youth at all in their advocacy efforts. See *Research Memoranda,* "Policy Issues-Groups," as part of the *Children and the Environment Planning Document Series* (1996).

7. This was a finding in a 1991 national survey commissioned by the Coalition for America's Children. Lake Research, the Terrance Group Memorandum, explains this finding in their report on "Children, Health, and the Environment of the National Survey," in *Who's for Kids and Who's Just Kidding* (1995: 7).

8. Laws enacted in 1996 in California exemplify this narrowness of policy. They define "protection of children" as: fingerprinting child welfare workers (AB 247); permitting leading questions to be asked of children under 10 who are giving testimony in sexual abuse cases (AB 355) and prohibiting child molester visitation of the child victim (AB 1491) as part of judicial reform; reporting requirements on child death (AB 553) and on child abuse (AB 1440) as part social service administrative reform; and creating a grant program for extending school-day programs (AB 442) and funding pilot sites for child care (AB 335).

9. See "Children's Well-Being: An International Comparison," in *International Population Reports* Series P-95, No. 80, Bureau of the Census, U.S. Department of Commerce.

10. See Mary Lou Munguia and Susan West, "Children and Toxics — An Overview and Preliminary Policy Analysis," in the Children's Environmental Health Network, *Children and the Environment Planning Document* 12 (1996). See also R. Lindheim and Len Syme, "Environments, People, and Health," in the *Annual Review of Public Health* 4: 335–339.

11. U.S. child poverty is projected to increase from 9.7 to 10.85 million due to the new welfare law, with no entitlement of poor people to Aid to Families with Dependent Children, time limits and other restrictions on the ability of states to use Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (which replaced AFDC) for children of legal immigrants, reduced funds for Food Stamps, and tighter eligibility for Supplemental Security Income. Sources on poverty projections are from the analysis of the Urban Institute.

12. A growing body of research recommends policies that help local governments and schools devise alternative strategies that address the cultural conditions that normalize violent behavior and involve young people in the development and implementation of an intervention program.

13. The June 3, 1996, edition of *Time* features an article on children's policy entitled "The Children's Crusade" (p. 31). In it, a public opinion poll revealed that 73% of the 1,011 surveyed favor spending more of their tax dollars on programs to help children.

14. See an older documentary collection by Abbott (1938a).

15. The impulse toward cultural assimilation of immigrant children as the foundation of the public education system is addressed by Demos (1970) and Schultz (1973). Mink (1996) extends the analysis of this assimilationist agenda through the Progressive Era, when schools were reformed. During this era, she contends, the maternalist gender and cultural agendas were most fully played out.

16. Theodore Roosevelt, "Conclusions of the White House Conference on Dependent Children, Special Message by the President of the United States," *Proceedings of the Conference on the Care of Dependent Children,* Sixtieth Congress, 2nd. ss., Senate Doc, No 721 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1909: 8–14).

17. Jane Addams, "The Subtle Problems of Charity," *Atlantic Monthly* 83 (February 1899: 170). So, too, did Lillian Wald (1934: 146) note in passing, "it is perhaps unnecessary to mention the obvious fact that the child worker is in competition with the adult and drags down his wages."

18. As early as 1813, Connecticut required basic instruction for children in factories. Massachusetts passed a similar law in 1836; by 1850, so had Rhode Island and Pennsylvania. See Trattner (1970: 29).

19. Friedrich Engels' classic text *Report on the Conditions of the Working Class* in 1844 is one example of the complexity of the public health hazards posed by industrialization.

20. This bill was written by Children's Bureau Chief Julia Lathrop and it provided federal matching grants to the states for information and instruction on nutrition and hygiene, prenatal and child-health clinics, and visiting nurses for pregnant women and new mothers.

21. See Abbott (1926: 8–9).

22. Quoted in Mink (1996) from Mrs. Otto Wittpenn, President, New Jersey State Board of Children's Guardians, "Experiences in Administration of Mothers' Pensions," *Proceedings of the Conference on Social Insurance* (p. 807).

23. This was a 1967 Supreme Court ruling *In Re Gault*, 387 U.S. I.

24. See Joel F. Handler, "The Role of Legal Research and Legal Education in Social Welfare" (Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin, unpublished paper, 1967).

25. See Davis (1992: 271–321) on the role of the police in the creation of what we've come to know as "gangs" and Levin's (1968: 16–18) account of the harassment of the Blackstone Rangers by the police.

26. Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Uniform Crime Reports* 1996.

27. See *New York Times,* "Major Crimes Fell in 1995, Early Data by F.B.I. Indicate" (May 12, 1996). Emphasis added.

28. There has been a recent increase in curfew laws that prohibit teenagers under 18 years of age from being on public property and amusement and eating places after 10 P.M., coupled with an increase in the number of police patrolling the street for youth crime. See "Adolescence and the Cultural Landscape: Public Policy, Design Decisions, and Popular Press Reporting," by Patsy Eubanks in *Landscape and Urban Planning 1994*.

29. William J. Hughes (D.-N.J.) in *Washington Post* (January 9, 1994).

30. See Stephen Moore's "Immigration and the Rise and Decline of American Cities," written for a Symposium at Hoover Institution, Stanford (October 1996).

31. In the Los Angeles school district, for example, in the 1990s children speak over 105 different native languages.

32. For a review of the overall economic impact of immigration, see Simon (1990), Briggs and Moore (1994), and U.S. Department of Labor (1990). As a counterpoint, see the Federation for American Immigration Reform (1995).

33. *Newsweek* raises alarm for California with the headline "Los Angeles 2010: A Latino Subcontinent" (Meyer, 1992) and *Business Week* with "Who Picks up the Tab for Aliens?" (March 28, 1994).

34. See *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* (May 4, 1996, Volume 54, No. 18: 1221–1223).

35. See also the article in this volume by Hart and Schwab.

36. From the Italian Mayors' Declaration of Intention on Children (Rome, April 23, 1994), available from the World Wildlife Fund in Italy.

37. See the interview in this volume with María Fernanda Espinosa.

38. Personal discussion with Ernesto Caffo, President of the International Forum of Child Welfare (March 1996).

39. Personal discussion with Amina Rasul Bernardo, Presidential Advisor on Youth in the Philippines (March 1996).

40. See Saunders (1996).

41. This initiative, known as Measure K, was passed by the voters in November 1996 after a strong organizing drive by the children in our pilot project, PUEBLO. The money would be directed to after-school programs, music and art tutoring, and other services for Oakland youth ages 10 to 21. See articles by Meucci and Redmon and by Schwab in this volume.

42. See "Berkeley Youth Downtown Planning Project: Findings and Recommendations" (July 1985, Moore Iacofano Goltsman, MIG, 1802 Fifth Street, Berkeley, CA 94710).

43. See "Kid's City Report on Santa Monica Youth in Action," available through the City of Santa Monica (Department of Community and Cultural Services, 1685 Main Street, P.O. Box 2200, Santa Monica, CA 90407; 310–485–8310).

44. L. Mitchell, "Youth in Policy," *Children and the Environment Research Memorandum* 8 (1995); S. Meucci and J. Redmon, "Review of Policy Organizations and Their Activities," *Children and the Environment Research Memorandum* 13 (1995).

45. For example, ASPIRA is a program where Latino/a youth are apprenticed to U.S. senators and congresspersons; AGENDA in California structures policy internships to teach young people research through library search, interviews, record searches, and community outreach.

REFERENCES

Abbott, Grace

1938a "The State and Labor Legislation." In The Child and the State, Volume I: Legal Status in the Family Apprenticeship and Child Labor. Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 363.

1938b The Child and the State, Volumes I and II. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

1932 The Child and the State, Volume II. Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 345–346.

1926 Report to the Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, U.S. House of Representatives, Hearings on the Extension of Public Protection of Maternity and Infancy Act (H.R. 7555), 69th Congress, 1st Session. Washington, D.C.: 8–9.

Alexander, Shoshana

1995 "The Minnesota Model: Policies and Programs." Children and the Environment Planning Document 16.

Baker, S. Josephine

1918 "The Relation of the War to the Nourishment of Children." Woman's Medical Journal 18 (March): 52.

Block, F., R. Cloward, B. Ehrenreich, and F. Fox Piven

1987 The Mean Season: The Attack on the Welfare State. New York: Pantheon.

Brace, Charles Loring

1967 The Dangerous Classes of New York and Twenty Years Working Among Them. New York: Wynkoop and Hallenbeck, Third edition reprint from 1889 original: 52.

Bremner, Robert

1974 Children and Youth in America: A Documentary History. Cambridge: Harvard University Press: 601.

Briggs, Vernon and Stephen Moore

1994 Still an Open Door? Washington, D.C.: American University Press.

Clinton, H.R.
1996 It Takes a Village: And Other Lessons Children Teach Us. New York: Simon and Schuster.
Davis, Mike
1992 City of Quartz. New York: Vintage: 271–321.
Demos, John
1970 A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony. New York: Oxford University Press.
Eubanks, Patsy
1994 "Adolescence and the Cultural Landscape: Public Policy, Design Decisions, and Popular Press Reporting." Landscape and Urban Planning.
Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR)
1995 "A Tale of Ten Cities: Immigration's Effect on the Family Environment in American Cities." Washington, D.C.: FAIR.
Gaster, Sanford
1992 "Historical Changes in Children's Access to U.S. Cities: A Critical Review." Children's Environments 9,2: 23–36.
Gordon, Linda
1994 Pitied But Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare. Glencoe: Free Press.
1988 Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence, Boston 1880–1960. New York: Viking.
Haasis, Bessie A.
1919 "Public Health Nursing, An Agent of Americanization." Americanization Conference Proceedings. Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Education, Department of the Interior: 383.
Hancock, T.
1993 "The Evolution of Impact and Significance of the Healthy Cities/Healthy Communities Movement." Journal of Public Health Policy 14,1: 5–18.
Hart, Roger
1996 "Children's Participation in Sustainable Development." Children's Environments Research Group, CUNY.
Hawes, Joseph M.
1991 The Children's Rights Movement: A History of Advocacy and Protection. Boston: Twayne Publishers: 1–10.
1971 Children in Urban Society. London: Oxford University Press: 14.
Hawes, Joseph and N. Ray Hiner
1985 American Childhood: A Research Guide and Historical Handbook. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press.
Hiner, N. Ray and Joseph Hawes
1985 Growing Up in America. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
Kovel, Seth and Sonya Michel (eds.)
1993 Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States. New York, London: Routledge.
Ladd-Taylor, Molly
1993 "My Work Came out of Agony and Grief: Mothers and the Making of the Sheppard-Towner Act." Seth Kovel and Sonya Michel (eds.), Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States. New York, London: Routledge.
Levin, Robert A.
1968 "Gang-Busting in Chicago." The New Republic (June 1): 16–18.
Lynch, Kevin
1977 Growing Up in Cities: Studies of the Spatial Environment of Adolescence in Krakow, Melbourne, Mexico City, Salta, Touca, and Warszawa. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press and London, Paris: UNESCO.

Macintyre, Sally, Shelia Maciver, and Anne Sooman
1993 "Area, Class, and Health: Should We Be Focusing on Places or People?" Journal of Social Policy 22 (Cambridge University Press).
Mannheim, Herrnann
1939 The Dilemma of Penal Reform. London: George Allen and Unwin.
Margonelli, Lisa
1994 "Foster Kids Draft Manifesto of Rights." Youth Law News 15,6 (November-December): 18.
McFate, Katherine, Roger Lawson, and William Julius Wilson
1995 "Markets and States: Poverty Trends and Transfer System Effectiveness in the 1980s." Katherine McFate, Timothy Smeeding, and Lee Rainwater (eds.), Poverty, Inequality, and the Future of Social Policy: Western States in the New World Order. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
McFate, Katherine, Timothy Smeeding, and Lee Rainwater (eds.)
1995 Poverty, Inequality, and the Future of Social Policy: Western States in the New World Order. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
Mink, Gwendolyn
1996 The Wages of Motherhood: Inequality in the Welfare State, 1917–1942. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.
Noguera, Pedro
1995 "Reducing and Preventing Youth Violence: An Analysis of Causes and Assessment of Successful Programs." California Wellness Lectures (The California Wellness Foundation and the University of California Wellness Lectures Program).
Perkins, Francis
1918 Maternity Center Association of New York, "Roundtable Conference in Cooperation with the National Study of Methods of Americanization." American Association for Study and Prevention of Infant Mortality Transactions of the Ninth Annual Meeting (December 5–7): 236–239.
Platt, Anthony M.
1969 The Child Savers: The Invention of Delinquency. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press: 10.
Pleck, Elizabeth
1987 Domestic Tyranny: The Making of Social Policy Against Family Violence from Colonial Times to the Present. New York: Oxford University Press.
Richardson, Theresa R.
1989 The Century of the Child: The Mental Hygiene Movement and Social Policy in the United States and Canada. New York: State University of New York Press: 15.
Rosner, David
1993 "Youth, Race, and Labor: Working Kids and Historical Ambivalence in Twentieth Century America." American Journal of Industrial Medicine 24: 275–281.
Saunders, D.
1996 "Review of Community Projects Involving Children: Primary Survey." Children and the Environment Planning Document 3.
Schultz, Stanley
1973 The Culture Factory: Boston Public Schools, 1789–1860. New York: Oxford University Press.
Schwab, Michael
1996 "Mechanical Milk: An Essay on the Social History of Infant Formula." Childhood (Winter).
Shalala, Donna
1993 "Perspective: Addressing the Crisis of Violence." Health Affairs (Winter): 41–46.

Sheffeld, Ada E.
1920 "Case Records in Family Agencies." NCSW Proceedings: 242.

Simon, Julian L.
1990 The Economic Consequences of Immigration. London: Basil Blackwell.

Super, David A., Sharon Parrott, Susan Steinmetz, and Cindy Mann
1996 "The New Welfare Law." Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (August).

Szerlag, Heather
1996 "Building a Children's Movement." Youth Today: The Newspaper on Youth Work 5,4.

Trattner, Walter I.
1970 Crusade for Children: A History of the National Child Labor Committee and Child Labor Reform in America. Chicago: Quadrangle Books: 27.

U.S. Department of Labor
1990 The Effects of Immigration on the U.S. Economy and Labor Market. Washington, D.C.: GPO.

Wald, Lillian
1934 Windows on Henry Street. Boston: Little Brown.

Walker, Richard
1995 "California Rages Against the Dying Light." New Left Review 209: 42–74.