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# Children and the Environment: Young People's Participation In Social Change

**Sandra Meucci and Michael Schwab**

## Introduction

THIS SPECIAL EDITION IS ABOUT INVOLVING CHILDREN IN ENVIRONMENTAL PLANning and change. Taking children seriously as self-determining social actors is not a new idea. Within the past few decades, there has been increasing acceptance of children's place in movements to shape the future. Since the 1970s, local government planning departments in Europe, and to a lesser degree in the U.S., have involved children in designing urban spaces and policies for environmental improvement. In South American countries, such as Ecuador and Brazil, national movements of street and working children are influencing policies on the allocation of public space (Hart, 1977). Young people are also involved in city planning throughout the Philippines.[1]

Much of this work is conducted using participatory action research and is based on the late Paulo Freire's ideas about raising political consciousness through open dialogue (Freire, 1970). Though it has often been co-opted for other ends, participatory action research can be an effective tool for the cultivation of personal and social awareness, better equipping people to cope with their world and to change it (Rahnema, 1990). The production of serious and trustworthy knowledge with and for youth can help them engage in transforming power relations.

Another area where participatory approaches have found support is public health. The participation of community members is now widely recognized as a

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critical factor in planning successful public programs (Green and Kreuter, 1991; Schwab et al., 1992). Simultaneously, new grass-roots constituents of the environmental movement have been arising to fend off toxic assaults to their communities' health. As a result, new participatory forms of research have emerged to challenge the autocracy of traditional boundaries. "Environment" is being redefined more democratically and more ecologically, to include more facets of our everyday lives, and whole communities are becoming involved in health projects that concern them — to prevent AIDS, to ban smoking in public places, to fight local water pollution, or to address the fear and violence that pervade our culture. It seems only natural that children and young people should be encouraged to participate in these kinds of practices, developing their own research and campaigns around issues that affect them.

In January 1995, the California Wellness Foundation embarked on the planning of a $20 million initiative to improve children's environments. The editors of this volume were members of a planning group commissioned to perform relevant research and to develop the parameters of this five-year initiative. Our charge was to prepare an ecological model of a healthy environment for children and to select those elements to be addressed by the initiative. The process began with a series of workshops to discuss various approaches to conceptualizing the environment of the child. Some 70 people took part — community organizers, teachers, physicians, epidemiologists, sociologists, artists, psychologists, social workers, policy analysts, journalists, and city planners.

The process was fraught with problems. First, what is a "child"? Or rather, who are "children"? We were challenged to examine our various assumptions. There are widely differing conceptions of childhood and of what children need and are capable of in different developmental periods. Most of the relevant literature on this topic ignores the cultural context in which children throughout the world are embedded. What sense can be made of the fact that children as young as 10 in Liberia, for example, are both victims and perpetrators of war (Whitman and Fleischman, 1994)? Clearly, it is not enough to fall back on age as childhood's defining feature; to say that a child is under 18, as does the *International Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations, 1989), glosses over many distinctions, such as gender. In a world where power tends to correlate with masculinity, to speak of "children," rather than of girls and boys, can be an act of complicity in structures of inequality (Walkerdine, 1987).

The term "environment" also raised difficulties of interpretation. It conjures up images of the natural world before the built world, the countryside before the city, rain forest before roadway. As our understanding grows, so does the web of interrelated aspects of our lives. Children's environments include *all* the physical places where children go or are placed, all that happens to them in these places, and their relationships with other people there. An ecological model would need to take account of children's homes, streets, parks, shopping malls, day care, and

basketball courts; it would include the food, water, air, drugs, and TV programs that children consume; it would address the political and commercial climate in which decisions regarding all these are made.

Defined in this broad sense, the problems of children's environments are many and deep! Urban and rural degradation, social and economic inequality, unemployment, poverty, homelessness and hunger, exacerbated by thousands of potentially toxic chemicals being introduced into the air, water, and ground, are having devastating effects on us all, and especially on children and communities of color (Munguia and West, 1996; Lindheim and Syme, 1983). Respiratory diseases, for example, are increasing dramatically among children in the cities of America (Weiss, 1992; CDC, 1995). Children in poor neighborhoods, near freeways, refineries, and dumps are especially vulnerable.

The threats come from all sides, but our understanding of them is fragmented and our responses to them are reactive and short term. Social movements for children's welfare tend to be single-issue specific, without any communication or coordination between them. Policy is at best a patchwork of discrete pieces of state and federal legislation, or local ordinances and political initiatives. Most legislation affects children, yet its possible effects on them are rarely considered. Neither is there communication between children and the institutions that purport to serve them. This heightens the vulnerability of our children and of the world they are inheriting.

Though we succeeded in our planning project in developing the framework of an ecological model for a healthy children's environment, the limits of an interdisciplinary, ecological approach to planning an initiative became clear. There are so many salient features of a healthy environment for children. Within epidemiology, for example, which sets itself to map the ecology of health and disease, new variables are discovered every year; even racism and sexism are now recognized as determinants of infant mortality (Krieger et al., 1993). The web of causation quickly becomes a maze. How were we to navigate it? As Schwab and Syme (1997) have pointed out, an ecological approach leaves us far away from knowing what to do to best promote healthy environments.

The participation of children helped us resolve the dilemma. We suspected that without their points of view our efforts were likely to fail, and we decided to engage them directly in defining the significant features of their environments and the ways to improve them. Any serious appreciation of children and their environments, we agreed with Stephens (1994), had to be grounded in their own representations of the reality of their lives.

This idea resonated with all of us. We often talk about children being our future, but we rarely take their ideas and experiences into account in our work. Who more than children have an interest in the future of the environment? Not only do they inherit the legacy of our social and environmental policies, they are also often the markers of their damaging effects. Children's vulnerable bodies are

often first to be deformed by toxins. Their lives are cut short in disproportionate numbers by war, famine, and the culture of the gun. Yet in the movement toward community involvement in public health programs, children, who live in closest contact with so many of the problems, are virtually never consulted. Like women a century ago, our young people are for the most part unheard. The effects can be devastating: "When nobody listens, your self-esteem goes low," says one 15-year-old African-American boy. "You feel like trash. It can make you snap" (Face to Face, 1995). Children's tremendous energy, boldness, and creativity are rarely tapped by adults with interest and expertise on public health and environmental issues.

We decided to move ahead by working directly with young people, engaging them in community action research projects throughout California. Building on methods developed by Moore (1990) and Hart (1997) for environmental community action, we engaged children and youth to define what were relevant environments for them and possible solutions to problems affecting them. Using a variety of approaches, the young people defined their identities within their community, mapped problems they found relevant, interviewed residents and local officials, analyzed the issues, and formulated strategies through problem-based learning, theater, video production, and community organizing. Their efforts were bolstered by making specialists in media, policy analysis, and research available to them. An interdisciplinary group of researchers also worked with the young people to document the process and its outcomes.

These pilot projects, and parallel literature research, made us acutely aware how the public discourse about children's health and social welfare — as it emerges from science, government, and the media — is nearly always framed by experts and special interest groups. What appears in the popular print media about youth characterizes them as "fugitive cultures" (Giroux, 1996) and the "scapegoat generation" (Males, 1996), even by authors sympathetic to their alienation and estrangement. It is not clear that young people see themselves in any of these ways, or that they identify as "Generation X," another prototypical adult description of the children of the 1990s. Moreover, these depictions were not helpful as we moved to engage young people in planning healthier environments.

Some of our theoretical work addressed the interplay between children's personal development and social change. These dimensions are rarely addressed simultaneously, yet the development of loving, creative children, capable of thinking ecologically, working together, and acting from strong-hearted conviction, appeared to us as necessary for the improvement of our environment, as is the organization of social movements and political constituencies for better policies.

Throughout the planning process, we met with coworkers from the U.S. and overseas. They gradually helped us became aware of an incipient but worldwide children's environmental movement that is partly based on the expanding notion

of children's rights. Since the enactment of the *International Convention on the Rights of the Child* (which the United States has yet to endorse), town councils in many countries have been soliciting and incorporating the input of young people — often themselves organized as youth councils.[2] The long-term support of a major foundation could, we felt, do much to advance and document this trend, which promises to promote public health and social justice as the women's movement and the disability movement have done in the past.

In each of our pilot projects, the children spontaneously raised the need to reverse the erosion of safe common spaces in which young people can gather, work, and play together. There is a broad literature on the changing nature of our public spaces and on how it causes problems for children in particular (CERG, 1991). We found that the engagement of young people on this issue was passionate, and their ideas were worth listening to. They clearly showed themselves to have relevant, perceptive, and creative contributions to make to a public discourse that is otherwise generally distorted by fear and ideology. Currently, the fear-driven discourse and action devoted to "gang prevention" could be usefully informed by the way the children themselves define their need for safe spaces where friendships, recreation, scholarship, and self-determination will flourish.[3] We concluded that children and youth have a major contribution to make to research, public debate, environmental planning, and to contemporary theories about the social and spatial dimensions of life at the end of the 20th century.[4]

The articles in this special edition describe research conducted in various parts of the planning project, including participatory action research by and with teenagers in four community pilot projects, as well as statements by international colleagues whose work influenced us along the way.

The first article, Michael Schwab's "Sharing Power: Participatory Public Health Research with California Teens," describes the work of young people in four pilot projects conducted as part of the planning project. Young people from Richmond, Oakland, and Los Angeles developed strategies to address issues that they selected — for example, violence in their community, a lack of recreation centers, and local water pollution. With help from adult "coordinators," they explored their own identities in relation to their issues, created media representations of their findings, and developed strategies for advocacy and change. The implications of this kind of work for public health are discussed.

Roger Hart and the Children's Environments Research Group have done pioneering work in this field. "Developmental Theory and Children's Participation in Community Organizations" discusses the changing ecology of children from different cultures as their identity and their understanding of the social world take shape. Identity is essentially a social concept, one that feminist psychological theorists link to political struggle, and children need to be involved in community in order to better develop self-concept, autonomy, social competence, social responsi-

bility, community identity, and political self-determination. This review of the psychological literature also addresses how and why children establish youth cultures.

"Working Children in Ecuador Mobilize for Change," an interview with María Fernanda Espinosa, provides a startling and moving account of her work with urban children who are the most marginalized. Together, over a period of many years, working children as young as eight were able to organize themselves in alternative spaces and draw attention to their rights. UNICEF supported their efforts.

The importance of media in the lives of children has received considerable attention. From theater to radio, and video to self-published zines, young people's self-representations yield images, caricatures, and myths that shape public opinion. Refocusing the lens of current debates on media and youth — the effects of TV watching on youth violence and the impact of corporate media power — we were interested to learn how youth are revisioning the possibilities of using media for their agendas. In "Navigating the Media Environment: How Youth Claim a Place Through Zines," Julie Chu depicts the subculture created within the tens of thousands of zines produced by youth. The rise in zine production exemplifies the new social networks and forms of community that have been emerging since the 1980s. Chu analyzes the importance and content of zines as a window into youth subjectivity in the 1990s.

The script "Mantel on the Table," written and performed by the young people in one of the pilot projects, the Sangre Latina Youth Theater Group, provides another window into children's subjective expression of environmental concerns. In this sophisticated satire, a television talk show becomes the backdrop for these Latino teenagers to say something about their community in Richmond, California — a registered Superfund site. They want to see toxic chemicals, rather than youth, discussed as the public enemies! This pilot project used theater as a venue for showcasing the results of their participatory action research.

Yet another medium used by young people to express themselves is video. In "Invisible Youth Reappear!" Dana Saunders reviews two youth-produced videos, one about life in a refugee camp in Bosnia, the other about racism. Material of this kind is increasingly finding its way to mass audiences, opening up new possibilities for children's voices to be heard. The techniques and travails of young people's video production are discussed.

In "What Is a Children's Policy, Anyway?" Sandra Meucci shows how children's needs for protection is a problematic basis for social policy. Not only does "child protection" derive from an implicitly patronizing power relationship with children, but "protective" policy has also historically been driven by adult fears over the "dangerous classes" of immigrant children, illiteracy, and degeneracy. In almost equal measure, children's policy designed to protect children from neglect, exploitation, and abuse has resulted in the displacement and

incarceration of young people into juvenile correctional facilities. The author draws implications from this policy legacy for more promising ways to develop new policy issues and constituencies within the current children's policy landscape.

Adults fear for the safety of children is a central theme of Don Reneau's "Z and Me," an excursion into the author's relationship with his two-year-old son. Bewitched by a society in which children's perceptions and abilities (especially those under five, six, or seven) are vastly underrated, we adults have become accustomed to projecting our own observations, attitudes, values, desires, and fears onto our youngsters. Of course, these observations and attitudes are heavily conditioned by the media. This article juxtaposes the bright, uncluttered observations of a young child with the seasoned reflections of a sensitive scholar to raise disturbing questions about our own fear for our children's safety and the reality of their experience.

In "Safe Spaces: California Children Enter a Policy Debate," Sandra Meucci and Jim Redmon discuss how the teenagers involved in our pilot projects are defining their need for "safe spaces" in ways that usefully inform the current policy debate about community safety. Rather than the focus on prohibition and incarceration implicit in current policies, these adolescents are interested in the multi-generational effects of toxic pollution and in preserving public spaces and youth programs *for safety's sake*. They offer a fresh analysis on the causes of youth crime that do not further instantiate community policing, youth curfews, and tougher sentencing as the only solutions, and provide compelling reasons for bringing policy analysts together with youth and community constituencies to define and explore policy issues from young people's perspectives.

In "Children of Incarcerated Parents," Diane and Edward Reed alert us to the plight of the five million children who are victimized by the criminalization of their parents. Often they lose one or both of their parents, their homes, and all that anchors them; many respond with sadness, withdrawal, depression, diminished school performance, alcohol and drug use, and aggressive behavior, thus setting themselves up to be the next generation of incarcerated parents. This hidden population of traumatized children and youth is increasing in number, as trends in criminal "justice" punish even minor offenses with incarceration. The Reeds faithfully document the extent, causes, and effects of the plight of these children, describe the few programs that offer some solutions, and outline the need for more attentive, relevant, and effective policies.

"How Oakland Turns Its Back on Teens: A Youth Perspective," by Jermaine Ashley, Dawn Samaniego, and Lian Cheun, describes how Youth for Oakland United, the site of another of our pilot projects, is working for positive alternatives to crime and incarceration. Speaking of the critical need for safe common spaces for teens and citing preventative measures in cities across America, they comment: "A lot of elders like to point fingers and talk down to us...if the city helps

one, he'll help another and she'll help another, and that will make a difference." They researched and analyzed problems with existing recreation centers in Oakland, surveyed and documented what youth in Oakland want, and used this documentation to successfully launch a citizen ballot initiative for resources for Oakland youth.

Children are engaged in community environmental action and policy work around the world. In "Children's Rights and the Building of Democracy: A Dialogue on the International Movement for Children's Participation," Michael Schwab and Roger Hart provide a heartening and incisive account of this trend, from the movement of street children in Brazil, which resulted in a plethora of national policies for children, to children's urban planning in France and Italy, where young people are beginning to constitute themselves as a force within city governance, environmental planning, and social policy. The authors grapple with questions about whether this activity constitutes a "children's movement."

One Italian project of this kind is described by Ilaria Salvadori in "A Dragon in the Neighborhood: City Planning with Children in Milan, Italy." This was part of an international UNICEF-sponsored research program to engage children in planning activities to improve their environments. The author records and analyzes how children in one district in Milan became involved in traffic-flow design when a new freeway was planned near their school. These children, who formerly had little knowledge of their own neighborhood, worked with architects experienced in environmental education to research their issues, create maps and models of local streets, and present their findings to the community and the mayor. The dialogue between the children and the public administration over the children's plans is ongoing.

The eclipse of children's access to the out of doors and its implications for their development are the subject of Robin Moore's "Childhood Without Nature: The Right to Experience." Moore enumerates factors restricting access to the outdoors as he discusses social and environmental aspects of the changing ecology of childhood. He calls for a new sense of child-biosphere relations and points to the international conventions and other venues where this theme is being taken up.

Even when they can go outdoors, new immigrant families often find themselves living in heavily polluted neighborhoods, where the water is not safe for drinking or fishing and the soil is too contaminated to garden. The children often become aware of the dangers before their parents. The last article is a poignant interview with one Southeast Asian teenage girl, who is growing up in a chemically highly toxic environment. "And Do You Feel Like This Is Your Country?" documents the voice of Sipfou Saechao, who found her way into the Asian Pacific Environmental Network. Her comments on America offer a provocative challenge to us all.

## NOTES

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

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

3. The findings from our participatory action research projects suggest that Jankowski (1991) was correct about the needs that "gangs" are created to fulfill. If, as Jankowski suggests, children form gangs as a way to establish social cohesiveness and cultural identity, and if gang behavior is directed toward neighborhood protection and economic enfranchisement, then giving children "alternative spaces" where these needs can be met and where their creativity can flourish in nonviolent directions — as we did in our pilot projects — is a way to marshal the energy of the children to create "safe spaces."

4. The implications for children of these monumental changes are rarely discussed. For example, David Harvey's review, *The Condition of Post-Modernity*, provides the most thoroughgoing analysis of contemporary changes in space and time, but contains barely a reference to the effects of these changes on children! Likewise, feminist and women scholars focused on the effects of globalization on women, for example, in *Conceiving the New World Order: The Global Politics of Reproduction* (Faye Ginsburg and Rayna Rapp, eds., University of California Press, 1995).

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# Sharing Power: Participatory Public Health Research with California Teens

## Michael Schwab

### Introduction

We all want the power to determine events that affect our lives. It is a basic human right and an important determinant of health. The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* recognizes everyone's right to freedom of opinion, expression, association, and the right to take part in government (United Nations, 1958); there is a large eclectic body of scientific research showing the connections between self-determination and health (e.g., Syme, 1990; Kerasek et al., 1981). In reality, of course, power is unevenly distributed, with children — especially children from poor communities, and girls in particular — at the bottom of the heap. Despite rhetoric to the contrary and a slowly emerging awareness of children's rights as laid down in the 1989 *International Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations, 1989),[1] our young people seldom have the opportunity to participate in making decisions that deeply effect their lives. It was therefore something most welcome and unusual when the California Wellness Foundation decided that children should participate in developing its new statewide public health initiative on children and the environment.

Community participation is not the normal business of public health. Decisions about research and program planning are almost invariably laid down by experts (researchers, planners, policy analysts), using the reductive, technocratic processes of science; this usually results in an extremely narrow definition of problems and solutions. Epidemiology, for example, which is charged with defining the causes of disease, focuses on relationships between specific "risk factors" (e.g., toxic exposures or bad diet) and specific disease outcomes (e.g., cancer), while public health programs — known by the medico-military term "interventions" — are designed to reduce the prevalence of these risk factors. It is a matter of increasing concern that interventions based on this paradigm have often not been successful (Schwab and Syme, 1997).

An alternative approach is offered by practitioners of the "new public health," which rejects the reductive paradigm of what Kuhn (1962) calls "normal science," in

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favor of an ecological and participatory paradigm that acknowledges a web of determinants of health — personal, social, and political — and calls for the involvement of community members in defining and advancing research and action. This paradigm was endorsed by member states at the famous WHO/UNICEF Conference on Primary Health Care in Alma Ata (1978), and again at the WHO Conference on Health Promotion in Ottawa (1986). Since the 1980s, hundreds of community-based projects, in virtually every country in the world, have tried some variation of community participation — in water-supply projects, forest protection, AIDS prevention, lead abatement, and alcohol and drug programs. Though evaluation is still embryonic, evidence is growing that these programs, defined and planned with members of the community, tend to be better informed, more appropriate, better received, and thus more effective (e.g., Tonon, 1980; Martin, 1983; Eng et al., 1990; Green and Kreuter, 1991; Wallerstein and Berstein, 1988).

The situation is complicated by the many kinds and degrees of participation that can take place. Sherry Arnstein (1969) developed a typology for citizen participation in the U.S. Office of Economic Opportunity in the 1960s, based on a scale from low participation "passive acceptance" through "tokenism" to "control," and Roger Hart (1992) has adapted this scale for children's participation. He reports (Hart, 1997) that much of what passes as children's participation in public affairs is tokenistic, i.e., controlled by adults and limited to elites. All kinds of children, he argues, need to participate and their contributions — whether in identifying and researching problems that affect them, or working for social or political change — need to be grounded in their own experience:

> We need fewer trite examples of children speaking and singing out of how they are the future, and how they alone best understand global environmental problems, and more models which genuinely recognize the untapped competencies of children to play a significant role in community-based sustainable development (Hart, 1997).

This article describes the work of a multicultural, transdisciplinary research and planning group of adults and young people in developing a model for young people's participation in the California Wellness Foundation's initiative. Our methods drew on four principal sources, all of which require an ecological and participatory approach: participatory action research, self-directed problem-based learning, environmental education, and community organizing.

Participatory action research is an empowering form of communal inquiry often associated with the work of the late Brazilian educator, Paolo Freire. Led by a community "promoter," it validates local knowledge rather than imported expert knowledge and is consciously directed toward community action to improve local conditions (Freire, 1974). It involves elements of research, community organizing, planning, and advocacy. Practitioners claim that it can, under certain circumstances, help make individuals more aware and equip them to cope with and change their

world (Rahnema, 1990), and that it produces serious and trustworthy knowledge that can open the way for new forms of creative collaboration and alternatives to authoritarian structures and traditional patterns of exploitation (Fals-Borda, 1994).

Our second source was self-directed learning, also called “creative,” “student-centered,” and “problem-based,” in which students explore “in the field,” starting with and building on what they know (Barrows and Tamblyn, 1980; Hungerford et al., 1990). These methods have been effectively used with students and children of all ages in the classroom. The role of the teacher is to stimulate awareness, teach research skills, and encourage critical thinking and problem solving. Students involved in these participatory forms of learning tend to be more highly motivated and self-directed than those learning by rote, and they transfer concepts to new problems more effectively (Norman and Schmidt, 1992). Parents and other adults from the community are sometimes drawn into the process, especially in those schools committed to community links.

A third source, which provided many practical techniques for our project, was environmental psychology and education. In many countries, children have taken part in environmental design and city planning using surveys, mapping, model-making, art, media, and other techniques to explore problems and solutions (seminal works include Lynch, 1960; Moore, 1974; and Hart, 1977). This work is supported by a body of research in developmental and environmental psychology on the benefits to children of working and playing in these ways, including greater awareness of themselves and their environment, self-esteem, and respect for people and nature.[2]

Finally, we drew on and were inspired by the theory and practice of community organizing, advocacy and action, with their roots in movements for social justice over the last century — in particular the labor, women’s, civil rights, and disability movements. All have succeeded though grass-roots self-determination, rather than relying on others to advance their course, and it may be that this will be the case for children, who traditionally have always had to rely on adults to represent them. Child advocates, the example, rarely connect their concerns for children with grass-roots activities, though the need for a grass-roots constituency for children’s policy is now gradually being recognized (Szerlag, 1996). Indeed, there is an incipient international children’s movement, which positions itself as adults standing with children speaking for themselves, rather than as adults speaking on behalf of children.[3]

At the same time, we remain sober in our expectations. The history of participatory research and action as a way to reduce inequities of power, especially between government agencies and their “target populations” (another military term that reifies the power imbalance), is not encouraging. People with little power, especially children, cannot easily resist when traditional authorities insist. “Participation” is easily rendered tokenistic and used to hold oppressed communities responsible for their own conditions (Merzel, 1991). This has sometimes, perhaps often, been the case in public health projects purporting to involve communities (Steckler et al., 1981; Grace, 1991). In Third World development projects, community participation has

often met a similar fate (Fals-Borda and Rahmann, 1991; Escobar, 1984). As Majid Rahnema (1990) writes:

> It was a powerful instrument in reviving old ideals of a livelihood based on love, conviviality, and simplicity, but the participatory ideal ended up being co-opted by those who had always yielded power, and used to legitimize that power.

Recognizing the real possibility of children's participation becoming tokenistic in a long-term Wellness Foundation initiative, we nevertheless set out to place young people at the center of our research in this planning project. The vast literature on children's health, development, education, and environments is notable for its lack of attention to children's points of view (Kalins et al., 1992). Patience is rarely taken to help them formulate their own thoughts and develop their own reflected, informed responses to important social questions. At the same time, they are routinely stereotyped in the mass media in ways that belie their intelligence, creativity, and diversity (e.g., Giroux, 1996). We set out to make children not the object of our research, but equal co-investigators.

## Children in California

The young people in this study came from different backgrounds, but most were from low-income families, a population that has grown dramatically in California over the last 15 years. Since the early 1980s — ironically, a time of rapid growth for the state's economy — the percentage of children living in poverty has grown from 15.2% in 1980 to 24.4% in 1993 (CDF, 1994). By the year 2000, over 30% are expected to be living in poverty and periodic hunger (Neuhauser et al., 1995). The children behind these statistics are at multiple risk — of poor housing, dangerous streets, social injustice, unemployment, cuts in social services and schools, and a loss of safe common spaces and community institutions. They are the children most likely to develop respiratory diseases, which are increasing dramatically in the cities (Weiss, 1992; CDC, 1995); they are the most likely to be suffering from the trauma and uncertainties of being children of incarcerated parents;[4] they are the first to suffer in the current political climate, which is increasingly hostile to children; and they are predominantly children of color.

Teenagers are in particular trouble. California's education system, once a model for the nation, has declined in all measures of quality. High school drop out rates, per pupil spending, and class size are either last or near last among the 50 states (NEA, 1994). Since the late 1980s, jobs have grown scarcer and youth unemployment has doubled, from 13.9% in 1989 to 26.5% in 1993 (CEDD, 1994). In the face of such figures, children are entitled to be fearful, not only for their own future, but also because they have become the objects of fear, manifested in tougher sentencing and incarceration of youth, amplification of policing and curfews, and the building of

more prisons at the direct expense of our public education system. California has the highest rate of juvenile incarceration in the U.S., double the national average (USDJ, 1993). As part of this punitive approach to youth, the mass media are awash with inauthentic and negative images of teens, especially Black and Latino males (Giroux, 1996). For California, with its wonderfully diverse population and rapidly changing immigration patterns, combating racism and learning to bridge cultural differences are especially vital.

## Four Pilot Projects

Funding was allocated for four pilot projects in which teenagers from poor urban neighborhoods would be brought together daily for six to eight weeks during the 1995 summer vacation. Each project was to undertake some form of participatory action research, with the young people selecting an issue or problem in their environment that was important to them, researching it, and presenting their findings to their communities. A small number of adults were to take part, assisting and guiding as needed, and documenting the process, but not directing. All the projects were encouraged to use a variety of research and media tools and to explore policy directions in which to advance their findings. All participants, adults and young people, were to be paid for their work.

Our central Planning Group in Berkeley selected the project sites using various community health and youth networks. Criteria included ethnic, gender, and geographical variation, organizational capacity, and a willingness to engage in an intense exploratory partnership involving ecological thinking, participatory research, and youth empowerment. Two sites were selected in Richmond (one Asian and one Latino), one in Oakland (multicultural), and one in East Los Angeles (Latino). Forty-eight young people took part.

Each project consisted of 10 to 15 teens and three adults. Two of the adults were coordinators with youth experience and either research or community organizing skills. They were responsible for day-to-day activities, the meeting place, administration, meals, and sometimes transportation. The third adult at each site acted as a monitor, maintaining an ethnographic narrative account of events as they occurred, largely through participant observation, and a tally of specific behaviors (Moore et al., 1996). The adults also conducted daily debriefings, weekly reviews with the young people, and post-project interviews with all participants, including parents (Fong and Reed, 1996). Other adults (e.g., a researcher, videographer, artist, environmental specialist, and computer specialist) provided technical assistance as needed. Finally, each project was assigned an Associate from the Planning Group, to provide ongoing liaison, technical assistance, and consultation at each site and to help develop the overall model for the Foundation.

Our principle research question was: How can adults engage young people in community-based public health research and action to improve their environments? Specific questions included: What is the appropriate role of adults? What help (if any)

do adults or children need in this kind or work? What kinds of problems do young people select to work on? What kinds of solutions do they propose? And what benefits to children, their communities, and their environments might be expected from this kind of work?

Four fundamental objectives guiding these projects were: to respect children's subjective experiences, to increase children's awareness of themselves in their environments, to help the children and their communities with competence and hopefulness in making positive change, and to foster respect for cultural diversity.

**Asian Pacific Environmental Network, Richmond**

The Asian Pacific Environmental Network (APEN), a national organization that addresses environmental issues affecting Asian-Pacific Islander communities, worked with a group of Laotian girls, aged 13 to 14, whose families have emigrated to the United States. The girls live in the Richmond area of western Contra Costa County, which contains over 350 industrial facilities, including waste incinerators, oil refineries, and pesticide, fertilizer, and other chemical manufacturers, many of which are associated with federally designated toxic sites (Belliveau et al., 1989). There is a growing body of literature pointing to the links between exposure to toxicants and breast cancer (Epstein, 1994), and APEN is especially concerned about the rates of breast cancer among Laotian-American women. Many of the Laotian newcomers who have concentrated in Richmond in the past 15 years are extremely poor.

The girls' work took two principal approaches. One was an exploration of their own identity as Laotian-Americans and girls, through discussion, collages, and journals, and exercises designed to open perception and cultivate their awareness of themselves and their culture. The second was their environmental research: through field trips and the development of maps and charts, they began to define the environment in which they lived, learned, and played. Both approaches enabled the girls to gain a better understanding of the complex relationship between themselves and their surroundings, as well as a more ecological perspective on their lives. As one participant noted: "I learned about keeping myself safe, my body and what's around me."

The APEN girls focused on toxic sites close to their homes. During one local tour, the girls became upset about its highly toxic state. "How can they dump toxic chemicals into the bay?" asked one. "It gets into the fish and we get sick because we eat fish." For some, this fostered a strong interest in understanding the situation and taking some form of action. One young woman said:

> I learned that it is hard to clean oil spills and toxic air up, and why refineries are here in Richmond. I also learned that not only white adults can change the environment, but Asian girls can do it also.

Suzanne Arms

As they became more self-confident and began to find their voices, they spoke freely about issues relating to their identity as Asian Americans. Although they came from different Laotian groups, they found they shared a great deal. Said one:

> I've learned that I'm not the only one that feels pressure from my culture or background.... It's easy to act American, but you can't forget your roots...and I've learned that being a woman doesn't mean that I'm weak.

The girls surveyed 100 young people and interviewed local residents to determine what were the "safe" and "unsafe" places in their community. Fear of violence in their community and the death of young people surfaced as critical issues. In subsequent discussions, the girls felt that this would be helped by having more gathering places in the community.

As their awareness grew and their horizons extended, the girls showed increasing interest in broader environmental issues. When they were invited to attend the U.N. Environmental Youth Forum, which was taking place in California, most attended and were tremendously impressed by the gathering. They made a presentation on safe spaces, in which they recommended that there be more youth centers and more public toilets, that railroad tracks be fenced off to protect young children who play there, and

that environmental education include urban concerns and environmental racism, not just conservation and preservation issues.

For their community presentation, the girls planned and organized a rich program. They displayed maps of their community, showing polluted waterways, and they warned their Laotian community and family members against fishing there. As is often the case with immigrant children, these Laotian girls were taking the lead in teaching their families about their new environment. After the summer project ended, many of the girls maintained their involvement in APEN, recruited new girls for next summer's program, and held public speaking engagements in the local high school to inform other teenage girls about the threats to their reproductive health posed by the chemicalized environment in the Richmond area and about the need for greater environmental justice throughout California.

### Center for Third World Organizing, Oakland

The Center for Third World Organizing (CTWO) is a well-established community organizer training institute in Oakland. Through its various community campaigns, CTWO has demonstrated that people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds can effectively come together to address threats to their health and to that of their community. Their project, which involved 11 teenagers (12 to 19 years), was focused on youth empowerment and leadership development. The young people came from African, Asian, European, Latin, and Native American backgrounds; most brought with them some degree of community or leadership experience and skills in media arts.

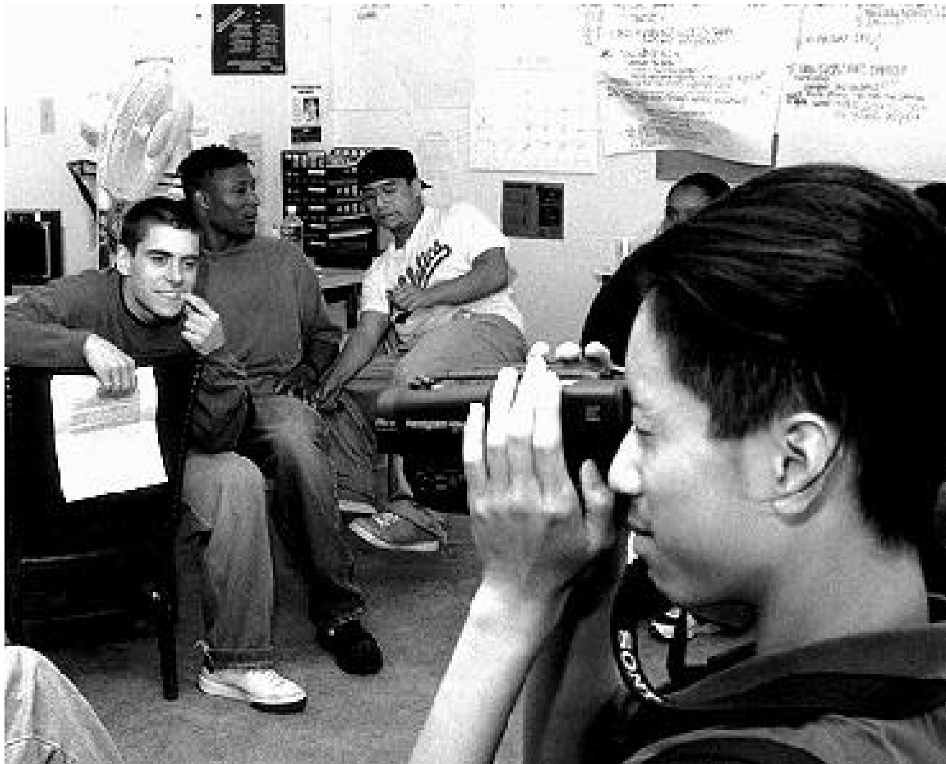
Their project began with a three-day orientation, where the group used story telling, mask-making, and other group processes to explore their own identity, team-building, community organizing, and environmental themes. Having identified a range of critical issues in their communities, the young people chose as their primary focus "safe places that support youth participation and development." They then split into three groups to do action research, to make a video, and to prepare silk-screen images of their findings.

The three groups worked in tandem, visiting various youth recreation centers throughout the city and analyzing the services they did, or did not, offer. Said one female participant:

> What I learned is that there is nothing to do here in the flats, but up in the hills they got every little thing. They just reach their hands out and they got it. Around here, you have to look for it — dig holes and you can't find it. There's nothing to do around the community and if there is...people don't know about it. Period.

The adults in the project gave the young people space to express their resentment and to explore solutions for change. This involved interviewing public officials,

including members of the city council. Said one about the exercise: “Goin’ out there and being in the real world.... You’re talking to important people.... That was real and it was an important experience.”



Suzanne Arms

The evolution of the young people’s confidence was documented by the monitor. Within a month, she noted: “A sense of responsibility has already been instilled in every youth participant. They prepared their own questions and took on the role of questioning other youth and officials at Parks and Recreation, often spontaneously.” The parents noted this, too; one mother said about her daughter: “She became most responsible and confident, talking and speaking with others.... She grew up.”

Again, media provided critical tools for research, collaborative self-expression, and community action. The young people developed charts and graphics, a written report, a video exposé, and silk-screened T-shirts to demonstrate their findings. Local dissemination of these kinds of products is part of CTWO’s ongoing public education, community action, and advocacy for positive social change. A showcase event on the theme of youth recreation centers, produced by the youth, attracted more than 150 people, including two television and two radio stations. It also raised more than $500 for the group through T-shirt and food sales and contributions. A final statement, prepared by the young people, contained recommendations for teen centers and young people’s participation in the city of Oakland’s decision-making processes.[5]

After the project ended, the youth were invited to sit on three different city task forces, and joined a coalition to obtain new funding for teen programs. Their efforts led to the formulation of Measure K, an allocation of 2.5% of the city budget to youth activities and services, which was passed by voters in the 1996 elections. In this way, the project enabled the young people to become a significant force in local political decision-making. As one young man concluded: "If we come together and pick one goal.... There's nothing that can stop us."

### East Los Angeles Project

East LA is a community composed predominantly of Mexican-Americans and Latino and Mexican immigrants. The pilot project here was organized by two community leaders working collaboratively with several local organizations. The 13 young people taking part were recruited through a local Health Education Center and through Father Gregory Boyle's Mission Dolores Project for gang-involved teens (see Fremon, 1994).

In the initial two weeks, the group met every day for three to four hours, during which exercises were led by the adults to explore the young people's identities and to help the young participants realize their common ground. Though they shared geographical proximity and were mostly Latinos and Latinas, all had different life and cultural experiences. Ecological thinking exercises were also held, such as "map your environment," where the children drew and later explained their individual "map." This led to a brain-storming to identify the issues the teens wish to address. Some 20 issues and problems were raised, including poverty, pollution, crime, and teen pregnancy. The next step, which was the most difficult for them at this initial stage, was to prioritize and select issues.

The youth chose two issues and separated into two groups to address them. One group, mostly older teens, chose to research the city's plans to close local public libraries, which they identified as safe, quiet spaces to study, do homework, and read magazines they couldn't afford to buy. Said one participant: "Libraries are important to me.... I go there to pick out books and also to read up for my reports." The other group worked on the widespread availability and use of drugs and alcohol in their community. A typical comment from one young man, who had come to see his environment differently, was this: "On every corner there's, like, a bar...and that doesn't make me feel good, because it's my community."

At this stage, the adults asked their Associate from the Berkeley Planning Group to help them develop a framework for investigating the selected issues. He suggested problem-based learning and conducted a workshop to introduce it, initially to the adults and then to the teens. They welcomed this framework, recognizing its usefulness, and began to apply it to their exploration. Over the next five weeks they met three times a week for periods of two to three hours, using libraries and community experts contacted by the adults to refine their knowledge.

Hanna Elias

The library closure group started by mapping out the location of libraries and their hours and days of operation, and discovered the shrinking number of hours that libraries in East L.A. are open. They went on to explore the siting and zoning of libraries and discovered that libraries are located in response to petitions signed by the people in a neighborhood. They interviewed city council members and other elected officials about the budget to learn more about the recent trends toward cuts in health and education and expansions to law enforcement and correctional facilities. They noticed that library cutbacks occurred even when the city budget was not in deficit, which led them to investigate California's Proposition 13, which lowered property taxes, starting a domino effect in public service cuts. With help from an outside researcher, they also learned how similar cuts in the Merced County budget, and the subsequent closure of all the public libraries, had led to community resistance. This prompted them to develop a petition in their community, which they did with the help of a local legal advocacy group. In the last week of the project, the children and other supporters successfully gathered 1,100 signatures, which they presented to the city council.

The drug and alcohol group started by critically researching the definition of different drugs, illegal and legal, the effects of different drugs on the body, the reasons people use them, and different kinds of dependence. Interviewing youth and adults about their drug use, they went on to discover that alcohol use and abuse is the major

drug problem affecting their community. They went on to map the location of liquor stores in their community and compared it to a more affluent neighborhood in terms of number and hours of operation. From this they concluded that the number of stores selling alcohol is higher in their neighborhoods and that they remain open much later. They visited a drug rehab and treatment facility in their neighborhood and asked staff and clients about the adequacy and accessibility of these services, and whether they operate in culturally sensitive manner for the population of the neighborhood. They soon realized that "peer pressure" is found not only among young people, but also among adults, that alcohol use by parents affects children through its effect on family dynamics, and that parental use stimulates use by their children. This led them to design a "parent education curriculum" that children could use to educate their own parents about the dangers of alcohol use, both to themselves and to their children.

Again, the youth used media to do their work — drawing, photography, and journal writing. With strong support and technical advice from a local filmmaker, they also made a video, which they showed at their final presentation. Parents, community leaders, and two TV cameramen listened, sometimes incredulously, to the sophisticated reflections of the young people, whom many were used to seeing as part of the problem rather than a source of inspiration for solutions. The young people were tremendously enthused. One young woman commented: "After this, I'm not willing to just sit there and let everything go. I'd like to end my life with a good battle. That's it."

**Sangre Latina, Richmond**

Our fourth project was conducted by Sangre Latina, a small theatrical company whose mission is to help young people from a very low-income and troubled neighborhood to find better lives through the theater arts. The members of this company explore the external conditions of their lives, identify their feelings about those conditions, and work to find a satisfying expression of them. Group discussion and improvisation provide the young people with important opportunities for telling often painful personal experiences and having their stories heard and acknowledged, and these stories are used to construct their scripts for dramatic performances.

Eight young people, ages 10 to 17, some of them former gang members, were selected to participate in this project. They made local excursions, finding conditions ranging from neglect of public spaces to violence and pollution, then returned to the theater for improvisation sessions based on what they had encountered. The neighborhood excursions left a big impression on at least one participant: "I learned that my environment is much worse than how I looked at it before." They examined relationships between the community and environmental pollution, and between different ethnic groups on pollution issues. Gradually they realized a sense of their own ability to make things better. One notable group decision was to clean up a neighborhood park. Said one participant, a newcomer to California:

> When I came to this country the park on First Street was OK. You know, basketball hoops, playground, you know, clean. Now it's dirty and it's been that way for four years. When our group formed a posse and cleaned the park...it looked better.

This task included obtaining permission and cleaning equipment from the city, choosing paint, doing the job, and contacting local media to cover the event. It was impressive that these young people, who are generally stereotyped in the most negative ways, found the confidence to interact with government and media officials so positively.

As in the other projects, the group itself was a safe place for these teenagers to share their problems and opinions, to become more aware of themselves in the world, and to find support when they were in difficult situations. In the words of one young man:

> You know, you don't talk much about problems to your parents or family. You don't want to...because they'll probably scream at you or hit you or something.... That's why we come to this group to talk to Luz (the coordinator) and them (others in the group).... They help us out. They can understand us.

Like the APEN girls, the Sangre kids attended the U.N. Environmental Youth Forum in Berkeley, where they met young people from all over the world. "Things can change if you get more people involved," said one 15-year-old girl afterwards. "If people want to change, it's got to be people in the community to make that change."

They concluded their project with a production of their play "Mantel on the Table," a political satire about cultural identity and local environmental politics, which they performed at a major community cultural center.[6] Judging by their comments afterwards, audience members clearly found the performance to be a moving testimony to the deep reflections of these young people living in difficult circumstances. Sangre Latina went on to write another dramatic piece as part of a series on a local Youth Radio station.

### Post-Project Assessments

The young people commented on their experience at weekly debriefings throughout the projects and after the summer. The quality and extent of their self-reflection became increasingly impressive and revealing. By the end of their projects, some appeared deeply changed by their experience, and expressed satisfaction at having had a voice in important issues. Central to this was their experience of having shared power. Said one: "When you tell your story, you grow!" Many reported feeling more respected and accepted, validated by the feedback of family and friends, and prouder of their culture and community. Most acknowledged the respectful, attentive coordination by the adults. Of the very few negative comments, one that recurred was a

feeling of being rushed; another was the intensity of doing the work *and* cooperating with the ongoing evaluation monitoring. Without exception, they wanted to continue that kind of work, and most expressed interest in being funded under the Foundation initiative if it went forward.

At a three-month follow-up workshop, the young people showed us how these projects had led them to see the relationship between self-esteem, social awareness, and social responsibility. They talked about their sense of powerlessness in the face of racism, police brutality, lack of jobs, and environmental degradation, and how they felt encouraged to work together for positive change. The issues they spoke most strongly about were power and discrimination. Adults working within powerful institutions — schools, churches, police, the media — tend to forget the role of their own power in shaping their relationships with children and youth. Teens, by contrast, seem to be very aware of power relations and of how they need to be addressed and changed, if open communication is to be established.

These young people also alerted us to the importance of a number of critical practical needs for this kind of work: a stable, safe space that they could in some way own; some form of payment, which many needed to supplement the family income; their need for sufficient time for discussion; and the availability of adults, including parents, to help with financial issues, networking, media, and policy skills. The regular participation of older youth, who could act as mentors, was an especially popular recommendation.

Parents' views were surveyed by telephone interviews. Twenty parents were asked about their involvement in the projects, what changes they saw in their children, and how children's viewpoints should be considered. All reported positive changes in the young people, including significant personal growth, new skills, and increased knowledge about their environments. One parent noted of her son: "I hoped it would give him a chance to interact with different types of people and give him a sense of self-worth, find meaning, and begin to develop himself as a young person...and it did!" Another said of her son: "Before the summer he was shy about going up to the group, he was afraid to talk. At the end he opened up so much. Our communication is better. He is more confident and open with me."

Some parents said they would have liked to be more involved themselves, having only had the chance to play a limited role — transporting kids, attending special events, and providing food. Others said they were too busy. Some emphasized that parental involvement should be "secondary" to the youth: they wanted the young people to lead; they did not want to interfere in their space, or with their decision-making process. As one parent noted after her daughter's community presentation: "The responsibility and talent is there.... I didn't know when I came in here this morning that I was going to leave with so much hope...." Several volunteered that they had never realized how much children could contribute to solving community problems. Said one: "Many times the kids are right, they have the answers we the adults have forgotten!"

## Overall Findings

This study was designed to learn if and how teenagers could be engaged as equal co-investigators in public health research and action, not just the brightest young people from safe communities, but those who are often marginalized in our society. The young people were invited and helped to select the issues to explore and to direct the course of their research and action. Our overall findings, summarized below, were extremely positive.

1. *Young people are eager and competent to participate in solving problems*: Young people, including those from troubled homes and deprived communities, are eager and competent to engage in activities that hold the promise of improving their environments and creating social justice. All four projects revealed the enormous capacity of teenagers for thoughtful, systematic research and creative solutions to problems they encountered. Participatory action research and similar problem-based research strategies, combined with community organizing, proved to be an excellent framework for them.

2. *Adults need training in how to share power with children*: The skills and sensibilities of adults involved in this kind of work are critical. In our projects, adults were intended not to have "directed" the process in each group; they were to be helpers, guides, teachers-learners. This is not the same as adults running programs for young people, even if the distinction is not always easy to discern. In these projects, the adults strongly influenced the course of events, especially with the younger teens, and especially in the early weeks. However, the teens played an increasingly powerful role as they gained comfort and competence in contending for power on their own behalf. With a little training, we believe that many adults who work with and like young people can adapt to this kind of child– or youth-driven approach. Much can be adapted from the training of street workers and adventure playground leaders, as described by Hart (1997). Training should include exposure to the many techniques developed for environmental education, problem-based learning, community organization, and small group dynamics.

3. *The age of the young people limits the responsibility they can take*: The four projects were very different, depending on many factors, including the age and background of the teenagers, the personality, skills, and experience of the adults, the environment involved, and the cultural and political agenda of the organization concerned. For example, APEN, with 13– and 14-year-old girls from a newcomer community, and a strong interest in reproductive health and environmental justice, took a very different course from CTWO, with its older teenagers from a more established community, and its extensive experience of community organizing. However, age seems to have been a critical factor in determining equality of power. Both organizations were committed to youth decision-making in their process, and both provided a great deal of education along the way, but the older children at CTWO set their agenda for environmental improvements in the first week of the project, and

they consistently organized for local policy change until they accomplished their aim; the younger girls at APEN needed more help determining their approach to community organizing and had to spend more time on issues related to their personal and family lives.

4. *Being heard is good for young people*: The public health literature is rich with evidence that being heard and validated, and having the opportunity to direct in some measure events that affect our lives, is essential for the mental health of individuals and communities. These projects confirmed this view, giving every appearance of engendering self-awareness, self-esteem, and positive attitudes toward their community among the teenagers, whatever their age. At least two sites addressed gender discrimination, with discussion of the ways that girls can be more assertive and boys more receptive. All spoke extensively about race and discrimination in ways that helped the young people deal with these issues more effectively. In addition, all showed the promise of young people and adults coming together in a spirit of respectful democratic practice, acting together for the good of their communities. Presentation of their work to their communities seemed especially effective in promoting recognition of the young people's views and the importance of including them in public life.

5. *Parents also have a role to play*: One of the projects, Sangre Latina, was led by a parent whose children also took part. This alerted us to the real possibility of parents initiating, or at least playing a larger role than was the case in these pilot projects, where parents were only involved in providing approval, transportation, and sometimes food. This was confirmed in subsequent interviews; several said they would have welcomed greater participation. Some said that this would be feasible for them if younger children were also welcomed; others felt it should be left to the kids to decide. While recognizing that children sometimes need a space of retreat from their family, we concluded that parents and other family members could play an important supportive role in this kind of work.

6. *It is helpful and fair to pay the teens if funds are available*: In our projects, the young people were paid, both because we felt it ethically correct to pay them for their work and to encourage them to take it seriously. All welcomed this, especially those who would otherwise have had to find some other paid employment. However, some felt that pay was not central, so long as the work was fun. We concluded that for some children pay is not essential; follow-up interviews confirmed that perceived self-interest can be a good incentive too.

7. *Media tools are invaluable for self-expression and advocacy*: In this study, all four projects made extensive use of arts and media, ranging from masks, journals, cartoons, silk-screening, and dramatic improvisation to explore the many aspects of their identities, to mapping and video production in their community research. The benefits of young people being equipped with these tools cannot be overemphasized. They include individual gains in self-understanding and confidence, the creation of information and images that truly represent young people's lives, and the use of this

material for public education, networking, and advocacy to advance policy change. Most of the teens felt that media work was especially important in helping to establish a positive presence for them in the community.

8. *Participatory research with teens can lead to environmental improvement*: The effects of these four projects on the young people's broader environment were modest in the greater scheme of things, but substantial after only 10 weeks. Two projects went on to have a substantial impact. In East L.A., the youth petition subsequently led the city council to increase library hours at times when the young people were out of school. CTWO joined with other advocacy groups to promote sustained city funding for youth activities and services; the fruit of their labor was a measure, approved by the voters at the November 1996 elections, to allocate five million dollars a year for youth mentoring, facilities, and services in Oakland over the next 12 years.

9. *Young people need safe and accessible places*: A major theme reinforced by the teenagers was the importance of safe spaces where they can come together to speak openly and honestly about their lives, build their own culture, and join forces with others to chart a course for social and environmental action.[7] For the kinds of projects described in this article, the young people should have some ownership of the space. It needs to be a consistent space; in East L.A., the group had to move several times. Transportation can also be critical; many teens in our inner cities cannot safely walk through neighborhoods that lie between their home and school or a community center. Finally, food is an important ingredient! It brings people together, and helps them understand each other's cultures; for kids who do not get a healthy diet, it can also provide a helpful dietary supplement.

## Conclusion

Research, policies, and practices about children and youth — in public health, social welfare, education, and throughout the social sciences — virtually never take account of the opinions and reflections of young people themselves. This study demonstrates that teenagers, including those living in very difficult circumstances, can make a strong contribution to research and action on their own behalf, if given the opportunity, respect, and support they need.

Allowing them to select and frame their own issues seems to be a crucial element. In our study, the issues they chose — pollution of a bay where their families fish, a lack of youth recreation places, library closures, alcoholism at home, and local environmental politics — all pointed to children's increasing lack of and need for "safe spaces." For them, the growing enclosure and contamination of our common spaces, and with it a dying communal spirit, is a self-evident critical problem. All four groups established safe spaces for themselves and went on to extend those spaces in their communities. Their actions were necessarily local, but all held the promise for broader effects. They showed, particularly in the Oakland project, that if energy and resources are directed toward networking and community organizing, public education, and advocacy, dramatic effects can be achieved.

However, young people alone cannot be expected to change the world. They need adult help, and of a particular kind. Adults doing this kind of work must be prepared to share decision-making in a meaningful way, with boys *and* girls, and hold themselves accountable to the young people, in some serious measure, for their decisions. This means respecting children in ways that run counter to the experience of many adults when they were children. Similarly, experts who are charged with children's well-being, in research and policy, for example, need to find a new willingness to learn about the experienced reality of the young people whose lives they are dealing with. This will require a reversal of powerful, longstanding prejudices. Within the confines of this planning project, it was impressive how far the teens were able to go in public advocacy without help from professional child advocates or child policy experts.

Participatory research requires power-sharing, but there is always a risk, when participatory work is funded, that those closest to the money end up with a disproportionate share of the power. History has shown that community participation among adults can easily become tokenistic, as in many projects funded by international development agencies. All the more is this a risk with children, who are easily co-opted into adults' agendas. There is, for example, an international network of "child-to-child" public health projects in which children work as educators and counselors; while the principles behind this approach recommend children's participation in exploring issues and developing messages based on their experience, in reality the kids often end up disseminating messages developed entirely by adults, the children having no say over what is to be taught or how (Hawes and Scotchmer, 1993). This kind of participation may carry some benefits to some children, but it relies on adult perceptions and priorities; nothing new, except children's participation in business as usual, can be expected from it. Our recommendations were accepted by the California Wellness Foundation as a basis for their new $20 million Children and Youth Community Health Initiative; we watch with interest to see the extent to which they are put into practice.

When people are directly involved in identifying problems in their own terms, they have a greater investment in seeking solutions: this is a fundamental tenet of community organizing. When communities take part in selecting and developing projects to improve their own conditions, those projects tend to be more successful: this is a tenet of "the new public health." We extend both to include children. When they engage in their own research and action, they themselves become invested. They willingly learn to think critically and trust their own capacities. Moreover, their research can add to serious and trustworthy knowledge and to creative solutions to problems that adults seem unable to solve. Popular participation has been the basis for social movements that have transformed public health policy on physical disability, lead abatement, AIDS, and women's health. We conclude that the same could happen for children. If given the chance, they can contribute to new forms of community capacity, new understandings of young people's needs, more effective

use of public funds to help satisfy those needs, and a long-term movement for children's rights and environmental justice.

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## NOTES

1. The *International Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations, 1989), which defines a child as 18 years old or under, "assures to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child" (Article 1), and the right to freedom of expression, including "freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing, or in print, in the form of art, or through other media of the child's choice" (Article 2).
2. See "Developmental Theory and Children's Participation in Community Organization," by Roger Hart et al., in this volume.
3. See "Children's Rights and the Building of Democracy," by Roger Hart and Michael Schwab, in this volume.
4. See "Children of Incarcerated Parents," by Diane and Edward Reed, in this volume.
5. See "How Oakland Turns Its Back on Teens," by Jermaine Ashley et al., in this volume.
6. See "Mantel on the Table," by Sangre Latina, in this volume.
7. See "Safe Spaces: California Children Enter the Policy Debate," by Sandra Meucci and Jim Redmon, in this volume.

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# 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 averse 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. Mislabeling of 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** | |
| *(approximately ages 3 to 7)* | | |
| 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** | |
| *(approximately ages 4 to 9)* | | |
| 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** | |
| *(approximately ages 6 to 12)* | | |
| 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** | |
| *(approximately ages 9 to 15)* | | |
| 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** | |
| *(approximately 12 to adulthood)* | | |
| 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. |

# Working Children in Ecuador Mobilize for Change

## María Fernanda Espinosa Talks to Michael Schwab

MICHAEL: IN ECUADOR, LOW-INCOME WORKING CHILDREN LIVING IN VERY difficult circumstances have organized themselves to create better conditions and better environments for themselves. Some tens of thousands have become involved over the last 10 years. You're from Ecuador — you are well known there as an environmentalist, a broadcaster, and a poet — and have worked with these children. Tell us about your work with them.

**María**: I should start out by saying that this program for working children, PMT (*Programa Muchacho Trabajador*), is organized around the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and it operates like a nongovernment organization. It receives funding from UNICEF and the Central Bank of Ecuador, but it has a non-defined status, which gives it lots of freedom. PMT's work has more than 10 years of trajectory working on children's rights issues: advocacy, action-research projects, plus public awareness and information campaigns. PMT is directly working with children in difficult circumstances to empower them so they become their own rights advocates.

I was brought to the program as an environmentalist to look at the contents, feasibility, and methodologies for environmental action-research that was to be designed and implemented by the children. My role was to facilitate the "thinking" and "acting" on environmental issues. I had to learn to keep a very open mind about the scope and boundaries of what was being defined by the children as "environmental" — from violence to urban pollution.

What PMT does is create "alternative spaces" for working children. These are in between a school and a home, physical spaces where the children can go, talk about their problems, reflect about their rights, and exchange their experiences with other children, who are aged from four or five years old to 18. Representatives of alternative spaces from all over the country meet once a year at a national summit. The delegation process is very complex and very democratic. They select who they want to represent themselves, first locally, at the neighborhood level, then at a city level, then regionally, and finally at the national level, through interest elections.

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At the national meetings, the children set their working agenda, which is based on the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. They discuss and choose one of the rights in the Convention and decide how to work on it. For example, in the first year, 1985, the children voted to address their right against maltreatment. They decided to devote a year to working against maltreatment on all levels, from the family level to the community level, to the school level, to the national level. For example, they decided to work with the bus drivers. The children said, "We are very maltreated by the drivers of the buses. We're pushed. We're very maltreated." So they launched a national campaign against maltreatment.

At the second summit, the children decided to devote themselves to the article that talks about the quality of life, which for them meant a healthy environment, and that is when I was brought into the project. There were many factors in our favor — e.g., social structures already in place such as the alternative spaces, as well as children and families sensitized to the rights of the child — and my task was to help bring in the environmental theme into the discussions and actions.

When I first went to these alternative spaces and started to interact with the kids, I asked, "What do you think the environment is?" At first, they didn't answer, but then they would say, "Well, environment, trees, environment, forest." It should be said that environmental education in our country is very formal and instructive. We tell children: "Don't litter. Don't cut down trees. Don't...." We give them information and that is where they get their ideas about the environment as "trees." However, for low-income, working children, children in difficult circumstances, the reality of their environment is certainly not trees.

PMT and the children started with a sensitizing phase to awaken the senses of the kids to their own environment — what was next to them, what they were dealing with at home, where the water they were drinking came from, or if they didn't have water, why not? If they had light, where did this electricity come from? If they were working in the streets and having problems breathing, why was this happening to them? It was an attempt to lay the groundwork for an awareness of their environment. Since this was a national project, the sensitizing processes were very different in different places. Children living in the city had different issues from those in rural communities.

Then we went through the phase of problem identification, so the children designed some forms to orient the process. The cost was minimal, since we used very inexpensive materials — just a few sheets of paper to record the major problems of the community, to interview the elders, to interview other people in the community, to hold discussions in their alternative space, and to fill out forms. We had the most amazing research sheets, very thorough, very serious. And I'm talking about people who, for the most part, almost don't know how to read and write. It was amazing what they were able to do in terms of identifying their own problems, which were vast and diverse. Some problems were related to nutrition, while others were related to the pollution of their water, and still others were

related to violence in their neighborhoods. Violence, by the way, is a major environmental problem, especially in suburban neighborhoods. So we had sheets of paper and children exchanging experiences about the problems. It was the children who decided what were the major problems of the community, the problem they were going deal with.

They decided on several points to address. One of the major points was how to involve the authorities, how to have a voice with them, how to sensitize them and change their behaviors. We wanted the children to see that they had the *right* to live in a healthy environment, so that they could say: "We're not asking for favors anymore, this is our right."

The children designed micro-action at the community level, sometimes with a school, or with neighbors, depending on what they were talking about. The projects were very diverse. For example, in the rural areas, there were reforestation projects in very dangerous, steep hillsides with illegal settlements. But the children didn't do the forestation by themselves. They decided to get help from middle-class children in primary school, going up the mountains and planting trees with them and trying to solve the problem together. This social mobilization was very important and politically significant.

In the cities, a major problem is garbage in the markets. Children work with their parents in the markets, selling food and meat, and the conditions there are terrible. So in one city the children mobilized a whole market to improve the garbage collection system and the garbage containers. They mapped the areas that had this problem and used the maps to work out their solutions. They had meetings with the adults, since they know we have to work on problems together, and that neither the state nor the mayor is going to help. They knew that it was up to them to make the first response. We organized meetings where the participants of the project in each city met together. The children brought what they had done at the neighborhood level, and they shared. We had 18, 19 kids representing their neighborhood, their alternative spaces. They exchanged their experiences and then started to think globally, not thinking anymore about their neighborhoods, their alternative spaces, their homes, but thinking about the city as a whole and discussing the larger issues. They finally reorganized the garbage collection system of the markets in a city of a million and a half people.

We had these meetings in 21 cities and it was amazing to watch these working children talking together, one saying, "Well, I think the major issue is such and such, and we should improve our quality of life in such and such a way," and another saying, "No, I think what we have is this problem." Gradually, they did begin to think broadly together. We were working with a very big age range and the teenagers between 15 and 18 years old were the facilitators. They would lead the meetings to a consensus to identify the major problem of the city and to develop a planning process for macro-action involving the city, the politicians, and the commitment of many adults. Gradually everyone learned to see further than their

immediate surroundings, but the process was very different according to the situation in each city.

The case of Quito will serve to explain it better. Working children, especially shoeshiners, decided that the major problem in Quito was air pollution. They came to this conclusion because they were having breathing problems from spending 10 hours in the street in the old part of Quito, a very closed area where the pollution problem is very severe.

They decided that this was the main issue for the city and that they should hold public demonstrations, talk with the police and sign an agreement with them, and run a campaign to stop the cars from polluting the air. They wanted to work together with the police and that is symbolically very important, because a lot of the maltreatment of street and working children comes from the police. According to an agreement with the police, the kids would stop cars that were polluting and put a sticker on them saying, "I don't want to pollute." The cars with the sticker had three weeks to go to the police station and have their engines fixed so they wouldn't pollute. The children also made a petition to the mayor, asking him to pass stronger regulations in order to set new standards for car emissions.

It was amazing. Quito is a city of almost 1.5 million people and everybody was aware of the project. Everybody was looking at these stickers and you could hear conversations like this: "Do you have a sticker on your car?" "No, I don't." "Oh, you're lucky," since the polluting cars were the ones wearing a sticker....

**Michael**: What role were you and other adults playing along the way, in the matter of guidance, support, or training?

**María**: Sometimes it was the adults who made the first political connections, or dealt with the media, making the initial contacts and connections, making decisions all the time, organizing. They were all part of Team PMT, which is a national team made up of seven people, with others coming in and out doing mostly volunteer work. The people on the team come from several different backgrounds and included social communicators, anthropologists, a psychologist, and one heterogeneous person. I was the heterogeneous person, more environmental than anything else. Also, each alternative space has a facilitator, and these people are very important. They are people from the communities we go to. Sometimes they are paid modestly and sometimes they are not paid at all. Some got involved because they knew of other alternative spaces and wanted to have them in their own community or neighborhood; they organized a local alternative space, using the same principles and methods as the one they knew.

These working children and the facilitators have been receiving training from the PMT team about the rights of the child for about 10 years now. So they really know what they're talking about. They can speak out amazingly about their rights, about what they are doing, and about their problems and struggles.

**Michael**: You started with working children as a defined group, but you spread to other children. Did they all get drawn into the alternative spaces?

**María**: The alternative spaces can't accommodate 70,000 children. No, we did just the opposite. The children involved in the project in the first place, about 500, went into the schools to talk; they explained the project and tried to induce the schools to participate. We had many working children going to middle-class schools saying, "You know, we have rights. We're fighting for this and we would like you to join us." And it was quite a learning process with middle-class kids getting involved in environmental problems, not the classical environment as "tropical rain forest," but local issues that directly affected their lives and had deep political implications.

I took some of the children to a middle-class "white" school for the first time. I was frightened; they came with their slogans and started to talk with these middle-class kids, saying, "The environmental crisis is not just our problem. It's also your problem, and we have to work on this together." And I watched them work together. They decided to do reforestation to protect their living conditions with the middle-class kids. They climbed the mountain together, an hour and a half, and planted trees. They worked together during city and national meetings to share information and discuss broader environmental issues. The pedagogical and political impact of this is going to be a landmark for these kids, who normally don't have a chance to understand what is going on out there.

**Michael**: Given that these children work — sometimes 10 or 12 hours a day — where do they find the time in their lives to engage in these alternative spaces?

**María**: Alternative spaces are very diverse in every part of the country and in every neighborhood and in every region. The schedules and how frequently they meet depend on the community and on the time that the children have available. Their occupations play a role. Shoeshine boys have to be up early, you know! Sometimes they set sessions three times a week and they have a schedule for that. Those children that can make it, do make it. Otherwise, they set up their own meetings. "Are you free?" — "Yes, I'm free." — "I can't come." — "Okay, never mind." It's very flexible in terms of scheduling. PMT does not have set meeting times. It's not like a school-type thing. But this means the facilitator must be available and flexible. You may have alternative spaces meeting four times a week. Some have found the best time to be at nine o'clock at night, because it's when school is finished and their jobs are finished. Others only meet on the weekends.

**Michael**: When you say "alternative spaces," are they real spaces that you go to?

**María**: It depends. We wanted to try to put the alternative spaces inside some physical space in the community. PMT tried two main ideas. One was the schools; having these kids meeting and thinking and speaking there is symbolically very important. The other was to use the health care centers, one room. Sometimes we would use the community center. In some cases the community didn't have space available. So we would have the community get together to build a room for the alternative space with a very, very simple roof and wall and window space. This was in one or two cases.

**Michael**: Was it dedicated solely for this use?
**María**: Sometimes yes, sometimes no. For example, in one primary school we were using one classroom. It was very nice, because when you went to the school you knew where the alternative space was. All the walls were painted and there were flowers outside. It was just one classroom, and during the day it was used as a normal classroom.
**Michael**: How sustainable are these projects that the children develop?
**María**: The most difficult thing has been to transfer the projects to the communities in each city. I don't think there's a method for that. It's very complicated. We've worked with 21 cities in Ecuador, but as far as I know, we have had only four successful responses of communities saying, "Okay, we'll take care of this project. We already have the networks. We know how to do it." This is because it is not like an input/output project; instead, it's a very, very long process. To keep it in a larger perspective, you have to bring it to the community. Otherwise, we cannot guarantee a continuance, which is very important.
**Michael**: These four cities or communities that promised to take on a project — how did they manage that? Was it a political commitment by the mayor? Or some political process?
**María**: Every case was different. In one particular case, a local group transcended the alternative space idea and became a nongovernment local organization, with its own name, and got support from other environmental NGOs. In another case, we had a very committed mayor who was working with the project. This mayor created an island for the children to create a model called "the democratic republic for children," and part of this was to maintain continuity for the project. In another case, the alternative space made its own connections to get funding and support on the local level, so they could keep going on their own. It is different in each case. I don't know if there is one major characteristic, or one ingredient that makes it work.
**Michael**: Given that the project has been going for about 10 years, has anyone watched the kids? What has happened to them?
**María**: I think, again, there is no one single pattern. I've seen a generation of instructors and facilitators of alternative spaces working with the younger kids. One thing I can say is that they are very powerful; they're not the common everyday children and teenagers. They are not average and we have to accept that. They are still youth and children living in difficult circumstances, but taking their situation in a very different way, in a more self-reflective way, and trying to find solutions by themselves — not being part of the problem, but part of the solution. Sometimes it frightens me what we are doing with them, because they have so many hopes and expectations. We all know how disappointing and oppressive society, and the whole political and economic system, can be. We need to learn more about what happens to the children, and we also need to know more about the volunteer support given by grown-ups at the alternative spaces. These people

have been very helpful, organizing and speaking the same language with the kids. But many problems stand in the way of following up on what they all become and where they go.

**Michael**: What has been the role of UNICEF in all of this?

**María**: I was in charge of the planning process and the interaction with UNICEF for the project, and I was used to working with people from international environmental organizations, which are very fixed and strict. When you talk about an empowerment process that takes years, they tend to say, "You're crazy, I want input, output, outcomes." When I talked with UNICEF people, they were different. For example, the UNICEF director in Ecuador asked me how we were going to monitor and evaluate the project. I said, "Well, we haven't thought about that yet, because we have to discuss it with the kids and see what they're doing. This has to be a long-term process, and we're focusing more on processes right now and political attitude-changing." He accepted that. Mainstream funding organizations usually don't like to hear this vague stuff.

**Michael**: Does UNICEF support many of these kinds of children's programs?

**María**: In UNICEF, about 84% of the money goes to sectoral programs — immunization, breast feeding, oral rehydration programs, and so on — basically, to save lives. This is very important, obviously. But I believe more in community development. People in the field in UNICEF also believe that is the way to go, but only 16% of UNICEF money goes to it. We very much hope that the new director of UNICEF will move in that direction. It's a good opportunity to stop being so patronizing, in that paternalistic North/South way, and to start recognizing that communities and especially children can do a lot themselves to make healthy change.

I don't want to be prescriptive, but I believe that the only way to go is to work collaboratively in constructing self-reliant, politically critical and self-reflecting children and neighborhoods, especially among subaltern social sectors and communities.

# Navigating the Media Environment: How Youth Claim a Place Through Zines

## Julie Chu

### Introduction

> *Zine*: A small handmade amateur publication done purely out of passion, rarely making money or breaking even. Sounds like zeen. Not short for "magazine" or written with an apostrophe ('zine), though the derivation is from the word "fanzine."
>
> — R. Seth Friedman (1996), publisher of *Factsheet Five*

> [Zines are] where the action is, where information (and disinformation) is free...the few thousand publishers and the few million readers are the ones at the cutting edge of social change.
>
> — Mike Gunderloy (1990), founder of *Factsheet Five* and author of *The World of Zines*

> Zines...[are] fueled by the same sloppy solipsism that is transforming America into a land of self-obsessed jabber jaws....
>
> — Peder Zane (1995), *New York Times*

> Zines: most people seem to think they're "crap," while in fact they are a wondrous beast of great complexity.
>
> — *MSRRT Newsletter*

LIKE RAP MUSIC, GRAFFITI ART, AND OTHER FORMS OF YOUTH-INITIATED MEDIA, THE value of zines is hotly contested in the world of media. What can be agreed upon is how these self-published works provide one of the only independent sites for tens of thousands[1] of youth voices (usually under age 30) in a media environment otherwise dominated by corporate adult interests (Romenseko, 1993; Gunderloy, 1990). Beyond that, zines are simultaneously valorized by most youth participants and dismissed by most adult observers. My intention in this

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article is to examine what zines *mean* to the youths who produce and consume them.[2] The task is to seriously explore how young people take an active role in shaping their media environment and, particularly, how they view media in their everyday lives.

Traditional research on youth and media has generally been more preoccupied with what media *do* to young people, rather than what young people are doing with media. Though researchers may disagree on whether media influences are pro– or anti-social, they have typically dismissed youths as passive consumers who are easily influenced by media messages.[3] Young people are rarely seen as agents in their own lives, let alone as *producers* of media themselves. Instead, research commonly conflates changes in media content with changes in the quality of young people's lives. Aimee Dorr's optimistic conclusion to *Television and Children: A Special Medium for a Special Audience* is a case in point: "Options abound for making television a magic window, not an idiot box for children and *for making children brains not boobs*..." (Dorr, 1986, emphasis added).

Likewise, media policy debates concerning young people often ignore the lived experiences of youths. Rather than asking young people how media *matter* in their lives, advocates opt to speak for youth by privileging their own often uninformed interpretations of youth-oriented media. One example is the crusade of Tipper Gore's Parents Resource Music Center (PRMC) to curb youth suicides, pregnancy, and crime by censoring rock-and-roll lyrics. In response, Mike Males (1996) recounts how a 1988 PRMC video blaming youth social ills on rock music was "both fraudulent and for its slick production, and astonishingly ignorant of rock music":

> Its authors distorted the words to Ozzy Ozbourne's 1981 song "Suicide Solution" to make it appear pro-suicide (the song is not about suicide; "suicide solution" refers to the deadly dangers of alcoholism) and butchered statistics wholesale. To prove it wasn't stodgily anti-rock, the PRMC singled out two artists as "healthy and inspiring" for youths. One was Bruce Springsteen, whose earlier music is replete with realistic and evocative drug, sex, and violence themes (his 1982 "Nebraska" describes a murder spree by teenagers as "fun"). The other PRMC-approved group was Irish band U2. U2's song "Pistol Weighing Heavy" would be cited in 1991 by psychologist Park Deitz as prompting a deranged fan to murder actress Rebecca Schaeffer (the song is not about murdering actresses) (*Ibid.*).

Despite such shaky empirical foundations, policy and research alike have successfully framed media as one of the most daunting terrains for youths — one in which young people are powerless, constantly "at risk" of "corrupting" messages, and therefore requiring the close supervision and control of adults. Both the recent push for a "V-chip" to censor violent content on the Internet and the

institution of a new TV ratings system are informed by this vision of media as an environment of vulnerability and danger for today's youths. Yet what would this media environment look like if we actually *asked* youths about their media interests, rather than simply observing and objectifying them as a monolithic group of vulnerable couch potatoes?[4]

The research that follows evolved out of my exchanges with more than two dozen zine publishers who shared their thoughts, writings, or both through phones, e-mail, and snail mail. I also visited the local bookstores, record shops, and the usenet newsgroup *alt.zines*, as well as the occasional zine readings, workshops, and conferences where publishers and readers gather to trade zines, share tips, and form friendships and alliances.

The predominant vision of media that emerged from my conversations and interaction with young publishers is far from the foreboding terrain referred to in mainstream discussions. Rather, most zine publishers see media as one of the only hopeful environments in an era of increasing public retrenchment of material and moral support for young people. Zines, in particular, articulate young people's strong need for a place of their own, despite the vanishing of such public spaces from the material environment. For zine publishers, the media environment provides some of the few remaining resources and opportunities for youths to carve out a space for themselves.

In the following sections, I describe the historical context that gave rise to today's zines, with particular attention to repressive trends in the 1980s that zine makers suggest are critical to the boom of youth participation in self-publishing. I then explore how zine publishers navigate through the media environment and articulate a meaningful place for themselves within this terrain. Particularly, I show how zines not only highlight young people's active role in their media environment, but also their sophistication in critically engaging mainstream media and in addressing the limitations of material space. Finally, I explain how the process of producing a zine serves as an oppositional and potentially radical practice for young people by challenging the material constraints for participation in the media environment. Moreover, I argue for taking zines and other forms of youth-initiated media seriously as a place of productive meaning and action, especially as they articulate young people's disillusionment and loss of meaning in formal sectors like school and work.

## Zines in an Historical Context

Self-publishing is itself nothing new. Zines have long, multifarious roots. Their historical lineage can be traced back as far as 1517 when, on the brink of the Reformation, Martin Luther posted a "zine," his famous "Ninety-five Theses," on the Castle Church door at Wittenberg. In 18th-century Enlightenment France, Voltaire complained of "riffraff authors" who published personal diatribes against the literary and political elites.[5] Also, as Seth Friedman of *Factsheet Five* — the

reputable review of zines — has remarked, "Benjamin Franklin made zines" (Gross, 1994).

Various self-publishing efforts in this century have also been noted for influencing zines. These are most notably the *samizdats* circulated under Communist Soviet regimes, and from the U.S., the science fiction fanzines of the 1930s, literary chap books of the 1950s and 1960s, and underground high school newspapers of the late 1960s and 1970s.[6]

Though "zine" has become a catch-all term for self-published works covering everything from the broadly political to the extremely personal, what is particularly different about today's zines is the growing number of publications focusing not on a specific interest, but on the everyday life of the publisher. Music, comics, and literary zines tend to be the most prevalent, but topics ranging from eco-anarchism to gun owner's rights and from serial murders to bird watching have engendered their own publications. The youngest producers tend to publish personal zines or "perzines," which are very autobiographical and intimate in nature.[7]

Most zine makers point to the advent of cheap and accessible photocopiers and desktop publishing in the 1980s for the blossoming of self-publishing beyond the scope of political, literary, and fan interests. Credit (or for the disgruntled, the *blame*) for building the infrastructure of a booming zine network is also given to Mike Gunderloy, the founder of *Factsheet Five* (*F5*).[8] Making its debut in 1982, Gunderloy's *F5* grew from a two-page list of recommended zines for friends to a full-fledged, internationally distributed publication with nearly 140 pages in zine reviews and a circulation of 10,000. It became a prime resource for zine publishers and would-be publishers. By sending free copies of *Factsheet Five* to editors of zines reviewed in its pages, Gunderloy fostered "cross-pollination" not only among zinesters, but also among all sorts of mail artists, cartoonists, poets, and activists hungry for mass-produced media.

Yet while Gunderloy may have given some shape to the zine phenomenon and photocopying technology provides the tools for it, they alone cannot account for the *direction* of the growth in self-publishing. Why, for instance, has there been a proliferation of personal, confessional zines by teenage girls in the past two decades?[9] Or, to ask it another way, why *not* a boom in sports zines by middle-aged businessmen?

If we accept the common assertion of zine publishers that the history and the medium itself belong to young people, then we need to contextualize youths according to the era that serves as zines' historical marker: the 1980s.[10] Gunderloy himself points us to that context. In *The World of Zines*, he writes, "the Reagan years, with their legacy of a tattered safety net, have encouraged people to depend more on their own talents and abilities for everything from survival to entertainment" (Gunderloy and Janice, 1992). Elsewhere, Jerod Pore, a current *F5* staff member and zine publisher, adds this insight:

> The mid-1980s saw a fairly large number of young, disaffected, reasonably well-educated (or otherwise bright) people consigned to temporary jobs (thanks to rapid growth in various corporations, leveraged buyouts, and such) with little or no hope of advancement. These people were exposed to desktop publishing, a solution looking for a problem... (Pore, 1995: 132).

Two trends in the 1980s, it seems, affected the content of zines: an increasing retrenchment of public support for youths, coupled with an escalating campaign of labor and moral discipline. The culmination of these two trends is exemplified by Clinton's recent signing of a welfare reform bill that will send a million more children into poverty, and by the continual popularity of William Bennett's best-selling *Book of Virtues*, a neoconservative bible for improving the moral and work ethics of young people.

With the anti-tax revolt set in motion by the 1978 passage of Proposition 13 in California, young people since the 1980s have faced increasing policies that slash public programs for them in favor of tax breaks for older generations; that defund education in favor of prisons; and cut public assistance to the poorest among them. Given these trends, it is no surprise that youth poverty rates — cut by half through the 1960s and 1970s — began rising again in the 1980s and have since reached their peak in this decade in states like California (Males, 1996).

Along with soaring costs in higher education and drops in real wages, young people in the 1980s also began to see declining prospects for secure employment and the rising dominance of temporary employment agencies like Manpower, Inc.[11] Youths in droves have increasingly found themselves in dead-end jobs *and,* at the same time, blamed for being too lazy, indifferent, and cynical about their larger social environments. Douglas Coupland coined the term for this impression of youths in the 1980s: "Generation X." Moreover, young people were not only increasingly demonized as lazy and in need of labor discipline. In the 1980s, they were also being cast as morally bankrupt and even pathological by *nature*. Males describes how youth "treatment industries" blossomed to establish "adolescence itself as a diseased state" during the 1980s. As he writes:

> Officials, programs, and agencies...teamed up to perpetuate the image that every teenager is a suicide, homicide, pregnancy, and AIDS case in the making, a kinetic calamity manifested in the tiniest signs: mood change, a falling grade, an outburst, a quietude, sadness, exuberance, unexpected behavior or emotion, unexpected stability and calm, just being an adolescent (Males, 1996).

Despite trends of declining economic prospects, the message to youths in the 1980s and, more importantly, *about* them can be summed up by Nancy Reagan's anti-drug crusade: "Just say no."

We should also note that deregulation of media industries took place in the 1980s under the Reagan administration. That move allowed for increasing commercialization of youth culture and such recent mergers of industry giants like Disney and ABC (Kline, 1993). The 1980s was also an era of vanishing public gathering places (especially for poor youths of color), with police enforcement of anti-loitering and curfew laws, and the rise of quasi-public spaces such as the heavily secured and surveyed "panopticon" shopping malls (Davis, 1990).

It is perhaps no surprise, then, that the youngest zine publishers have been most likely to assert very personal and intimate details of themselves during times of increasing isolation and objectification of youths. Eras of increasing surveillance and repression, as noted by Michel Foucault (1978), often give rise to a multiplication of discourses rather than "a plain and simple imposition of silence." Hence, alongside the proliferation of medical, policy, and criminal justice discourses aimed at managing and delimiting youth agency ("Just say no"), a new mode of youth discourse also developed in the 1980s via the zine network. For those like Andrea Lambert who believed "...there is this evil creeping feeling of voicelessness that will get me for good if I don't do something," zine publishing provided an outlet for youth expression (Owens, 1995). Outside the watchful gaze of adult institutions, these self-made works carved out an intimate arena for young publishers to make their *own* sense of "youth."

### Sellouts Versus Outcasts: Articulating a Place for Youths

> ....when i walk into the grocery store and stare at the magazine rack all i see is propaganda: lies and standards set by people in power...and i'll walk out empty-handed and run home to my mailbox to see what new zines i got that day. i'll curl up in my room, free from all the people that tell me i'm just a kid/i'm just a girl/i can't change the world, and read.... i'll read the truths of so many kids that finally have an uncensored forum to yell and cry and heal and inform and incite, free from the burdens of adultism.... so while your average jane/joe teenager is out partying all night, there are a whole slew of kids overtaking the copy shops and crowding mail boxes for the love of the zine and the hope and action it inspires.
>
> — Witknee Hubbs, publisher of *AWOL*, *Youth for Peace and Revolution*

Zines have recently been "discovered" by the mainstream press as a new authentic voice of youths. In the past few years, these self-made publications have received increasing coverage in the press for their "quirky," "irreverent," "hip," attitude — in short, for their subjective stance. *Rolling Stone* declared zines to be "a novel form of communication" (Sherril, 1995). *Time* praised them for "mak[ing] words on paper radical again" (Gross, 1994).

For the most part, zine makers have taken these compliments with an equal part of suspicion and unease. Some have frowned on the press' knowledge of zines, pointing out that zines are neither new in form nor special in radical content. Others have been quick to distance themselves from particular media images. "*Details* have declared zines the hip trend for young alternative kids," Jeff Stark of *Stew* complains. "[But] we're no more alternative than the kid who drove the black Camero and blasted Led Zeppelin at my high school" (bellerue, 1994). Still many more are angered not specifically by what is being said, but by *who* is doing the speaking:

> ...[the mainstream press] come knocking on your door, asking Hey What's Going On? & You're s'posed to be polite to them? Share your know-how, that's American Ingenuity or Christian Charity or something, whatever. The TV comes to Real Life, and brings back stunning footage of Real People Doing Real Things on Their Own Time Because They Love To...(Not just dramatics! Real Feeling! Opinions!) (bellerue, 1994).

There is a deep suspicion in the zine world that mass veneration of "Real People Doing Real Things" is somehow specious and manipulative. No doubt some zine makers have welcomed press coverage. Many others, however, fear that all this media attention works to co-opt rather than to privilege their voices. As Bobby S. Fred, publisher of *Bobby Is Fred*, tells *Time* magazine, "Look, this is a nation of disenfranchised kids. The reason we don't talk to the mainstream media is because we want to guard the few places we have left, like our zines" (Gross, 1994).

This articulation of zines as a "place" for "disenfranchised kids" — and not as a commodity, interest, or activity — is critical to understanding how young publishers have defined their stakes in the media environment and in the larger debates over the social conditions of being young today. Publishers of zines reiterate this notion of zines as a "place" by variously describing their need to "create a forum," "build a network," and "form a community." As a "place," zines lay claim to a less transitory and more definite location for youths in the media environment. As one of the "*few* places left," zines also provide a critical space for young people. Particularly, by *defying* material space, this "place" of zines stands as a tacit critique of the limitations for youths in the larger social environment.

The vocabulary of "sellouts" versus "outcasts" that demarcates the boundaries of this "place" provides particular insight into how young people perceive themselves in relation to mainstream media and other institutions of power. In my conversations with zine makers, self-publishing is rarely framed as a stepping stone toward acceptance in mainstream channels. In fact, those who publish with such motivations are commonly branded as "sellouts" and excluded from membership in the zine world.

Instead, publishers perceive zines as a discrete and peripheral "network" away from the gaze of mainstream media and other established institutions.

> These things you call "zeens" are written/put together by people who are doing nothing that would be considered by most to be newsworthy. Small people living inconsequential lives, not shooting people or planning corporate mergers or anything important like that.... It is our own way of networking in an increasingly impersonal world.[12]

The ironic identification with "small people living inconsequential lives" highlights a common perception among zine publishers that mainstream media devalue their interests and their everyday lives. Zine publishing, in contrast, reclaims the importance of "small people" by articulating a place where those on the margins of power and, particularly, "outcasts" are central to the vitality of the space.

> As an active voice of various cultural minorities, [zines] serve social and political diversity.... The variety of flavors one can find in the zine scene belies a veritable buffet of the bizarre and smorgasbord of the subversive (Andy "Sunfrog" Smith, publisher of *Babyfish*...lost its momma).

Fifteen-year-old Yael Grauer echoes the sense of marginalization many young zine publishers feel when she explains her need to "create a forum for my own opinions."[13] As she puts it, "I...hate assumptions made about my generation under 20 and our view of music and politics. We are intelligent and a lot of us do have a good handle on what's going on" (Owens, 1995).

The assertion of zines as a "place" for "disenfranchised kids" is also an assertion for an alternative vision of young people as intelligent actors and shapers of their media environment. Moreover, the fact that this space so clearly differentiates itself from mainstream media ("sellouts" versus "outcasts") sheds significant light on young publishers, not only as actors and shapers, but also as astute critics of their media environment.

Particularly, zine publishers are very aware of the domination of mainstream media over communication. Notions like "media monopoly," as coined by Ben Bagdikian, and "manufacturing consent," as popularized by Noam Chomsky, are well known in the zine world. With circulations usually between 15 and 2,500, zine publishers recognize that they cannot compete with the magnitude of mainstream media circulations. In fact, by claiming a separate "place" for themselves, zine publishers do not even try to compete with mainstream media.

Rather, publishers strive to redefine the dynamics of their media environment by envisioning a place that is free from the domination of mainstream media. The explicit "for love, not profit" stance of most zine publishers is one strong example of how they attempt to disengage from the corporate dynamics of mainstream media. In my conversations with zine publishers, two common "for love, not profit" practices were consistently noted: the anti-copyright policy that many publishers espouse and the barter system by which many exchange one zine for

another rather than through money. These two practices encourage publishers to read each others' zines. More critically, they also encourage new readers to become publishers.

> *Con(tra)science* is in full support of honest, truly independent, do-it-yourself projects. Take control, ultilize your surroundings and your mind, create art, make music, write, read, communicate (Bryan, 1995).

What the last excerpt most clearly indicates is how attuned most zine publishers are to the link between communication and power. The fact that a copy machine serves as the central icon of power also attests to young publishers' sense of limitation from more full participation in the larger social environment. As Lloyd Dunn points out in *The World of Zines*, "one publishes because one must; which is to say that *I* publish because I don't know what *else* to do to make my voice heard outside of the narrow confines of my home turf" (Gunderloy and Janice, 1992).

By claiming a separate place for youths, the disengagement of zine publishers can be seen as a response to the limitations of material space. Moreover, it captures the common disillusionment of young publishers toward participation in the larger social environment. As Erik Farseth, publisher of *The J. Cruelty Catalog*, explains,

> We have no time for an increasingly homogenized adult world that tries to skim whatever it can off the surface of the underculture and then sell it back to us as the latest flavor-of-the-month (Owens, 1995).

Truly, under the harsh lights of media coverage, the passion and meaning in zines are often trivialized and commercialized as another passing youth fashion statement. In contrast, my own review of mainstream press coverage did not yield even one insight into the arduous and intensive *process* of publishing, a process that is common to all. As Mike Gunderloy points out:

> There are many reasons for publishing various kinds of zines, but there is one overall purpose: people are building networks independent of big business, big government, and big media.... While a few mass media continue to dominate the communication channels, there are plenty of holes between their coverage where the dedicated and passionate small publisher can make a difference. Most zines start out with the realization that one need no longer be merely a passive consumer of media. Everyone can be a producer! (Gunderloy and Janice, 1992).

With all the trivial talk of zines as a hip trend or quirky statement, what mainstream media continually elide is this process of production — the exact thing that makes zines so oppositional to the currents of mainstream media practices.

**"Do-It-Yourself" Publishing: The Serious Work in "Play"**

> Most of us make magazines to communicate our message or manifesto to the world, but sending our writing out to other publishers, or even a conventional letter-to-the-editor, could accomplish that. Something deep, profound, sublime, ridiculous, radical, irrational, irrepressible, incredibly meaningful, or important drives us back to the typewriter or computer, x-acto knives, and glue each time.
>
> — Andy "Sunfrog" Smith, publisher of *Babyfish*...lost its momma

> We're tired of being fucked over by small-minded vicious editors and publishers...ruled by these unbreakable commandments: Do it cheap, do it quick, and don't offend advertisers. We say it's time to fight back.
>
> — The publishers of *Sabot Times* (Romenesko, 1993).

> If your parents are still paying for your voice you've got a problem....
>
> — Brinda Coleman, publisher of *Multiball*

Youth culture cannot be reduced to mere fun and games. For "there is work, even desperate work, in play."[14] The process of zine publishing demonstrates the serious efforts involved in such "playful" youth endeavors. When publishers I encountered asserted the old punk principle of "do-it-yourself" (DIY for short), they *really* meant taking control of the entire publishing process — from funding their projects to distributing the finished publications. As zine publisher Andy "Sunfrog" Smith notes:

> Most zine publishers take responsibility for every aspect of production — writing, typesetting, layout, fundraising, printing, collating, stapling, mailing, selling, distributing — the work done by dozens of paid people at professional magazines. And we maintain a "real" life of relationships, school, and work responsibilities as well. Our vocational demands include sleep deprivation and insatiable inspiration (Smith, 1995).

Indeed, zine publishing is *very* hard work. Eric Nakamura, publisher of the popular *Giant Robot*, told me that he spent approximately 100 hours in getting the writing, photos, and layout together for his fourth issue. While holding down a day job, he devoted nights on end to zine publishing. Like most zine publishers, moreover, Nakamura was footing the bill for production. When I talked to him before *GR* #4 hit the stands, he was still waiting to recuperate the money he lost on issue #3. Nakamura, though, is probably one of the few whose zine circulation has continued to swell since our interview. Others may not be so lucky. "My zine has me $8,000 in debt," writes D.B. Velveeta, publisher of *Quimby Presents*

(bellerue, 1994). Such a zine debt may be extreme, though on top of all the hard work, zine publishing clearly can be quite a drain on the pocketbook. "It takes a lot of individual effort and motivation," Nakamura said. "You need to do it fast and get it out fast before your fire burns out."[15]

"Burnout" is quite common in zine publishing. Though plenty of new zines appear everyday, many also vanish after one or two issues. According to bob bellerue (1994),

> The biggest drawback to being an independent charmer is the burnout that ends up consuming your innocent abilities when faced with the increasing demands for publication. This is the bind of the zine martyr: how to keep up with the outside world as the hobby takes over your space and still remain as interested in your project as you were when it was a simple thing you did after work or parties with your friends. (Long hours in late-night copy centers make for unsightly eye baggage.)

Why, then, all the effort and resources for sustaining something the mainstream media dismisses as a passing youth trend? "The hours are long, publications infrequent, and tangible rewards few," says Smith, "but the immeasurable satisfaction most of us glean from making our zine is an ineffable intoxicant rarely equaled in other aspects of daily life" (Smith, 1995). That satisfaction in the process of production largely stems from a sense of independence, an independence from what Gunderloy calls "big business, big government, and big media" (Gunderloy and Janice, 1992). Jeb Branin, publisher of *The Crass Menagerie* and *Not Fragile*, offers this explanation:

> Why publish without big financial backing? Being independent allows me the control I want and need. It also makes me accountable.... I find that responsibility desirable and inspiring. My work promotes exactly what I want it to. There is no catering to others because they hold the purse string (bellerue, 1994).

Zine makers often joke about how zines are "published by someone with an ego bigger than a budget" (Corsaro, in bellerue, 1994). Yet there is an implicit recognition in this joke that the assertion of "ego" is not merely gratuitous. Rather, zine publishers are naming an oppositional self, one that poses itself as "bigger than a budget" and challenges the material constraints to who can publish. It is this construction of an oppositional "self" that makes self-publishing potentially radical. In bell hooks' (1989) words, "It is that act of speech, of 'talking back,' that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of our movement from object to subject...."

Particularly, the process of zine publishing can be seen as a counterpoint to the common image of youths as passive consumers easily influenced by the media. In

asserting control over the tools of representation, young publishers not only show an active engagement with media, but also a *critical* engagement. Hence, beyond the actual physical work of typing, cutting, pasting, and distributing a zine, there is serious *symbolic* work in the production process.

The pleasure in "play" clearly stems from critiquing mainstream representations of power. Contrary to notions of "play" as a disengagement from critical thought and meaning, zines suggest that much of the pleasure in youth popular culture stems from the active critical work involved in the *production* of meaning. Zines like *I Hate Brenda*, a personal rant against one of the TV characters on the popular "Beverly Hills 90210," are testimony to the particular pleasure of opposition and criticism that many young people derive from a sophisticated engagement with mainstream media.

*"I won't play girl to your boy NO MORE" (Sudata, 1996)*

The above image also illustrates the extent to which zines provide young publishers a space to re-envision the power dynamics of their larger social environments. As much as they are critiques of mainstream media, zines also point to media as one of the last hopeful environments where young people can assert a sense of agency by redefining a social space in otherwise constraining material circumstances.

Perhaps more importantly, the amount of effort invested in these representational practices points to a disillusionment and loss of meaning for participation in formal realms like school and work. This common sentiment toward work is captured by Mike Thain, publisher of *Sleepy Foot*, who explains,

> For five or six bucks an hour an employer can buy my time — I have no choice but to sell it. But it would take far more than any employer can afford to buy my enthusiasm, motivation, and care (in bellerue, 1994).

Elsewhere in zines, rants about the lack of meaning in school are commonplace. Ultimately, the tremendous work, both the material and the symbolic, in zines points to the significant value and meaning that young people attach to forms of popular youth culture. Since they articulate the disillusionment with formal sectors like school and work, zines and other youth-initiated media call for our serious attention.

## Conclusion

Much of this special edition of *Social Justice* emphasizes a framework for involving youth and children in extant projects and social movements like environmentalism. My research on zines ultimately attempts to go a step beyond involving youth by asking how *we* can involve *ourselves* in the projects young people are initiating on their own. If it is true that we take young people seriously

as "self-determining social actors,"[16] then we must engage them as more than passive consumers of media or mere participants in adult-led movements.

Zines provide one way of interacting with youths as initiators and producers of their own social agendas...*and* representations. Particularly, the articulation of zines as a "place" for "disenfranchised kids" points to the type of ideal space young publishers envision for themselves. This is a space where neither mainstream media nor other institutions of power have the last word on youth and, particularly, on the value of young people's engagement with media.

Instead, zines attest to the importance of looking at youth-initiated media as realms of meaning and agency, particularly as they serve to illuminate young people's own perceptions of what is wrong with their larger social environments. Of course, zines are not the only "place" young people have claimed as their own. Some complaints of the predominance of "white boyz" within zine circles suggest that it would not be adequate only to engage the youth publishers in the zine world.[17] Other avenues for conversing with youths need to be explored. Within youth media culture, this may include youth-produced music such as hip-hop or punk, video poetry, and graffiti art.

As this article shows, the media as an environment for youths look tremendously different and *richer* when zine publishers' own perceptions are center stage. Further engagement by young musicians, artists, and other youths can only add much needed contours to the road map necessary for building better environments.

## NOTES

1. There are somewhere between 10,000 to 50,000 zines, mostly traded or sold through mail to an estimated readership of one to three million. These estimates do not take into account self-published works on the Internet, better known as "e-zines," which have rapidly proliferated in the past few years.

2. It is not my aim to offer an encyclopedia or taxonomy of zines; such reference books exist. See, for instance, Gunderloy and Janice (1992) and *ReSearch*. Several zines specialize in reviewing other zines. Particularly, see *Factsheet Five* (Box 170099, San Francisco, CA 94117–0099). Also see *MSRRT Newsletter* (4645 Columbus Ave., S., Minneapolis, MN 55407), *Obscure Publications* (Box 1334, Milwaukee, WI 53201), *Book Your Own Fucking Life* (The Bleeding Heart Collective, 4728 Spruce St., Box 354, Philadelphia, PA 19139), *Alternative Press Review* (Box 1446, Columbia, MO 65205–1446), and *Queer Zine Explosion* (Box 590488, San Francisco, CA 94159–0488). Also check out the following web sites: http: //www.well.com/mich/F5/f5index.html and http: //www.meer.net/~johnl/ezine-list/index.html.

3. See, for instance, Carmen Luke (1990) for a discussion of dominant constructions of children in media research. Also see Todd Gitlin (1978: 205–254) for a discussion of the behaviorist orientation of traditional media research.

4. Paul Willis (1990) is one of the few scholars whose research develops out of conversations with young people on what it *means* for them to engage with different media. Another researcher to actively engage young people in dialogue about media is David Buckingham (1993).

5. See James Corsaro, "A Micropress in Every Home," a manuscript of his address at the Society

of American Archivists Annual Meeting in New Orleans (September 4, 1993), reprinted in Jim Romenesko, *Obscure Publications* (P.O. Box 1334, Milwaukee, WI 53201), #29 (1993b).

6. For a history of zines, see Romenesko (1993b). Also, see bob bellerue (1994).

7. Interview with Seth Friedman (September 22, 1995).

8. *Factsheet Five* and Mike Gunderloy himself have been frequent subjects for praise and criticism. See, for instance, Jim Romenesko (1993); for a history of *Factsheet Five* and Gunderloy, see Romenesko and Gunderloy.

9. In my own review of zine literature, I came across a large number of perzines by teenage girls relative to other zines. These zines, sometimes tagged as "riot grrrl" or simply "grrrl" zines, have become so prevalent that they have warranted their own category for reviews in *Factsheet Five*.

10. For instance, see bellerue (1994: 30), where Lauren Martin, publisher of *Boredom Sucks*, writes, "Whose history is [zines]? Young, individual, revolutionary, alternative-thinking people...." Elsewhere, in an e-mail to me on September 28, 1995, Jim Romenesko writes: "I think young people see zines as THEIR mass medium...."

11. For a discussion of declining real income and of rising tuition at the University of California, see Males (1996: 12–13). For a discussion of temporary work, see the zine, *Temp Slave!* (Keffo, P.O. Box 8284, Madison, WI 53708–8284). Also note, for starters, that *Temp Slave!* consistently ranks at the top of *F5*'s "bestseller list."

12. Letter from Brinda Coleman, publisher of *Multiball*, to bob bellerue, reprinted in bellerue (1994: 35).

13. From phone interview with Yael Grauer (October 12, 1995).

14. See Willis (1990).

15. Phone interview with Eric Nakamura on October 12, 1995. See also *Giant Robot* (P.O. Box 2053, Los Angeles, CA 90064).

16. See the "Introduction" by Meucci and Schwab to this special edition.

17. See, for instance, James Romenesko, *Obscure Publications* 32 (September 1995), in which conflicts at the second annual Underground Press Conference are discussed. Particularly, see the description of one of the last panel discussions of the conference (p. 2). *Obscure* reports how all hell broke loose when conference organizer David Hernandez complained of too many "white boyz" in the zine world, to which Seth Friedman of *Factsheet Five* retorted, "If you have a network of Latino people, tell them to start zines."

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# Mantel on the Table

**Sangre Latina**

*On December 17, 1995, the Latino youth theater group Sangre Latina performed their play, "Mantel on the Table," at La Peña Cultural Center, in Berkeley, California. The play, written by the youth, was the culmination of a summer of research and improvisation done as part of the Children and the Environment Planning Project. The "Mantel Wimpey Show" serves as a backdrop for a satirical farce about the way young people are portrayed in relation to environmental problems in their community and the effects this portrayal has on their self-confidence and self-perception. Sangre Latina is one of many arts programs that enable young people to inhabit the realm of culture and media, using art to describe their relationship to their environment and as a venue for "public education." What follows is the script of the play.*

**Cast of Characters**

Walter (Rosendo) Rebuelo
Rolando (Kane) Rebuelo
Father (Luis Rebuelo)
Mother (Dolores Rebuelo)
Mantel Wimpey
Chief Esther Escoba
Lorenzo Bacalao
Dr. Wasteoftime
Grandma Georgie
Stage Manager
Camera Person
Make-up Lady
Audience Member 1
Audience Member 2
Audience Member 3
Audience Member 4
Audience Member 5

*Curtain opens on the TV set for the "Mantel Wimpey Show." Walter (Rosendo) is sitting on the floor chanting. The rest of the Rebuelo family enters: Rolando (Kane), Father, and Mother.*

**Father:** What are you doing?! Are you trying to be psychic again? Look! We finally made it on Mantel Wimpey. Try to act normal, O.K.? And please use your real name, Rosendo.

**Walter:** You're distracting my concentration. You are creating a block and my name is not Rosendo, it's Walter.

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Sangre Latina is a theatrical company of 10 children under the direction of Luz De La Riva (2800 8th Avenue, Oakland, CA 94610), whose mission is to help young people, many of them former gang members, find better lives through the medium of the theater arts. They have written and performed several plays on stage in community theaters and on youth radio in Northern California.

**Father:** Listen to me, Walter, or whatever you want to call yourself: don't embarrass the family today! Don't try to read any palms or start telling people's future! They are going to send you to a mental institution! Don't try to be like Walter Picado.
**Walter:** But I admire him. If I want to be like him, I'll be like him.
**Father:** Don't say anything about my personal life, or your mother's, or your brother's. He's a troublemaker. He's abnormal, that one! And you....
**Walter:** I'm normal.
**Father:** You are not normal. Trust me.... Don't do that on TV! Millions of people will be watching us. If you do, I'll send you out. (*Gesturing a punch*)
**Walter:** I'll call the spirits and bring back Grandma Georgie.
**Father:** Oh, no! Don't bring her back! You know what she'll do to the family.
**Walter:** Don't tell me you're afraid of spirits.
**Father:** I'm not, just leave her alone. She's dead.
**Walter:** Not for me. I'm her favorite. (*Starts chanting*) Grandma Georgie, come! Please Grandma, come.
**Father:** You're crazy! I can't argue with no psychic!
**Walter:** Hold it.... I got John Lennon!
**Father:** Oh yeah, sure!
**Walter:** I'm bringing him down. He's right beside you. (*Mumbles to himself*)
**Father:** If you keep this up, I'm going to block the 900 number for the Psychic Connection line! I've had it now.... What's that?
**Walter:** He's talking to me of nature and toxic waste and pollution (*Father gets impatient*) ...and about those purple and orange bellbottoms you wore on your first date....
**Father:** (*interrupting quickly*) O.K., O.K., I'm a believer! Let me talk to him...quickly.
**Walter:** Of course, you have to pay $3.99 per minute. (*As Father aims at him*).... That's what they charge on the program, Dad! I'm just trying to be a professional like Grandma Georgie taught me.
**Father:** (*putting arm around Walter*) You know, son...we might be able to work out a deal here. Think of it, your own negocio.
**Walter:** Wait a minute, tata! Are you trying to use my talents for financial gain? Ah, ha! You see a chance to get that vibrating chair from the Shopping Network.... You know...with la Vanna esa, tu sabes, with the big....
**Mother:** Huevon! I knew it! You been cheating on me with la pinche Vanna, quién? (*Father tries to protest, but in vain.*) Hijo de la chingada!
**Father:** Dolores, mi vida.... I don't know no Vanna.
**Walter:** Dad.... Dad.... I meant the one with the big earth.... (*Father slaps money into his hand to shut him up.*)
**Mother:** Oh, no, you're at it again! I told you to stop that nonsense! Now you're going to start talking about la Grandma Georgie. The next thing you know I won't be able to find my hair spray again because you feel guilty about holes in the sky and you'll be talking crazy again about how I "pollute" the little birdies, the flowers, and the

pinche bees! Don't you even think about bringing up any of that locura on the show. Keep your mouth closed.
(*During the end of her speech, MANTEL WIMPEY enters.*)
**MANTEL:** Is everybody O.K.? Is everybody all right? Don't be nervous, we are going to have a great show.
**STAGE MANAGER:** All right, everybody, stand by for places! (*Waits for everyone to take their place on the set.*) Five, four, three, two, one.... Music Cue!
(*Oprah Winfrey theme, "I'm Every Woman," comes on. Panelists continue to smile brightly, oblivious. STAGE MANAGER is furious.*)
**STAGE MANAGER:** No! No! No! The Wimpey music, you fools! This is the Mantel Wimpey Show! — Wimpey, not Winfrey, you illiterates!
**STAGE MANAGER:** (*under her breath*) Shit!
(*Winfrey theme comes to a screeching halt. MANTEL smiles murderously. Correct music comes on suddenly.*)
**STAGE MANAGER:** (*mouthing to Camera Person*) Fired! You're fired. It's Wimpey, you jerk!
**CAMERA PERSON:** Five, four, three, two, one...rolling!
(*A few minutes of music as MANTEL comes "on," dancing the merengue and flashing a huge smile to his audience.*)
**MANTEL:** Hello, how are you? Everybody up for a good time? Let's get up and move, come on, everybody, let's get warm. (*MANTEL invites the audience to dance; music dies down.*) Welcome to the Wimpey...Mantel Wimpey Show, where we lay it all out on the table.
(*applause*)
**MANTEL:** Our topic for today is "Children and the Environment." "Save the Environment" has become the battle cry of the decade. Are children the biggest pollution in our lives? Some people regard today's youth as toxic menaces to society. We have with us today an average American family: A loving mother, (*FATHER clears throat discreetly*), a hard-working *father* (*MOTHER rolls her eyes*), and two sons who the "well-adjusted" citizen might call a threat to the very core of the American dream...not a pretty sight, compadres! Please welcome Mr. and Mrs. Rebuelo, his 14-year-old son, Rosendo...
**WALTER:** *Walter*! (*FATHER hits him on the leg, trying to make it look "fatherly," and smiles.*)
**MANTEL:** Excuse me.... *Walter*...and his 11-year-old-son, Kane. (*Both parents look at each other in confused horror.*)
**MOTHER:** Excuse me, Señor Wimpey...his name is Rolando.
**ROLANDO:** No, it's not. (*ROLANDO starts kung-fu motions. MANTEL smiles, a little confused.*)
**MANTEL:** So tell us, Mr. Rebuelo, what is the problem with your kids that brings you the point of desperation, and how do you handle it?
**FATHER:** Well, Señora, we don't know what to do. My sons are out of control. One

doesn't like to go to school. He gets bored, he burns things down.... He got caught recently with a gun and then with a homemade grenade. Rosendo, he likes school, but he makes his teachers nervous. He chases after them, even into the teachers' lounge, after they drink their soda.
**Mantel:** Why does he do that?
**Father:** Would you believe to make sure they recycle their cans. And God forbid he finds one with a Styrofoam cup! Dios mío!
**Mother:** He's always telling us to think eco...eco...eco...que? (*to Father*)
**Walter:** Ecologically, mother.
**Mother:** Bueno, así! He's telling us that the vegetables I plant in the backyard are no good, that they're poisoned! Can you imagine that? I would never do that to my family! Señora, we don't have the money to fix our car. So it throws out a lot of smoke, what can we do? Now he's mad at me like it's my fault. And I can't even begin to tell you about the wild things he says...that I'm one of those who makes holes in the sky! Imagínese! And me so short, how could I reach that high?
**Mantel:** You got a point there...holes in the sky? (*confused*)
**Father:** Would you believe? She's becoming mentally ill over this. Es cosa seria!
**Mantel:** Walter...I mean, Rosendo...please explain the holes in the sky to us.
**Walter:** It's *Walter*. Well, my parents don't understand that our planet is in great danger. We live in an era of contamination. People are not conscious of how even sprays can destroy our protective ozone layer. Pretty soon we're going to be living in a planet like Venus with a greenhouse effect. Cancer is on the rise....
**Mother:** There he goes with his astrology again!
**Walter:** Mother! For once, let me talk! This is my chance, finally, to warn the world! Ozone is the layer that protects the earth from the harmful rays of the sun and from global warming. If we're not careful, the earth will become hotter and hotter and evaporate all the water. We will be like a desert and all the little children will be suffering from skin cancer at a very young age. Even now, kids in this community don't have shady trees to play under because we're cutting them down like mad. And the birds who live in the trees have no place to go now, so they're becoming extinct.
**Rolando:** We're all becoming extinct.
**Mantel:** Oh, no! Oh, no! I love birds. (*crying*) Oh, birds.
**Father:** Cosa seria!
**Mantel:** What's that?
**Mother:** (*Going to hug Mantel*) Ay, Señora Wimpey, the situation with Rolandito is unbearable! He smokes, he drinks; sometimes I think he's on drugs....
**Rolando:** I don't do drugs! It's a natural high!
**Mother:** Whatever you want to call it, it's not what you should be doing! He's in and out of juvenile hall — he knows all the cops by their first name. Last week the FBI paid a....
**Mantel:** The FBI!
**Mother:** Ssshh! Yes, they paid a visit to my husband. Would you believe that

somebody heard Rolando say he was going to burn down Governor Wilson's house? He has no respect! (*Beginning to cry*)
**FATHER:** Cálmate, gordita! (*ROLANDO reaches out to touch her and she slaps his hand.*)
**MANTEL:** We're going to take a commercial break, and when we come back, we'll talk with the Chief of Police and we'll hear Rolando "Kane" Rebuelo's side of the story on the Mantel Wimpey Show!
(*Guests leave. A father and son enter with fishing gear. They start fishing in front of a sign that reads "NO FISHING! TOXIC WATER!"*)
**FATHER:** Oye m'ijo, que dice en ese aviso?
**SON**: Ay! Yo no sé, papá.
**FATHER:** Hijo, le voy a enseñar a pescar cuando le pique, lo hala.
**SON**: Papá, papá! Me está picando.
**FATHER:** Pues rásquese, m'ijo.
**SON**: No papá, el pescado.
**FATHER:** (*todo contento*) Hálelo, hálelo, que el mío también me está picando.
**SON**: (*todo contento*) Mira que grande!
**FATHER:** Ay, m'ijo, mira el mío. No sirve. Está muerto.... Bueno, m'ijo, pero vamonos a casa que el suyo está bueno, bonito, y rechulo. (*Walking away, father stops and turns around.*) Oye, hijo, y que chingados dirá ahí.
**SON**: Ay, no sé, papá, vamos a comernos el pescado.
(*Return to MANTEL WIMPEY SHOW. The Rebuelo family is joined by CHIEF ESCOBA.*)
**CAMERA PERSON:** Three seconds Wimpey. Three, two, one....
**MANTEL:** Chief Escoba! We're so glad you could make it on today's show. By the way, what does your name mean in Spanish?
**CHIEF:** (*answering between teeth*) Broom.
**MANTEL:** Pardon?
**ROLANDO:** Broom!! As in vacuum cleaner.
**MANTEL:** Well, I think it's just so great that you came to the show. With the aftershock of last week's "incident," your campaign must be suffering. Those rumors were unreal!
**CHIEF:** Yes, well...
**MANTEL:** To say you ignored the 911 call, when the community is all aware of how strict your work policies are!
**CHIEF:** Yes, ridiculous! I...
**MANTEL:** And how you're so loyal to your officers when they're accused of discrimination and police brutality charges.
**CHIEF:** Discrimination and police brutality do not exist in my department.
**MANTEL:** And to prove the quality of your department, we have here one of your well-known delinquents, Rolando Kane Rebuelo.
**ROLANDO:** Hey, chief.
(*CHIEF looks mortified, but smiles.*)
**MANTEL:** Hey little Cholo! It seems you've made quite a name for yourself.

**Rolando:** I guess so.
**Mantel:** The FBI is following you around? I'm impressed! Cuénteme, what is this I hear about you wanting to torch Governor Wilson's house? Did I hear correctly?
**Rolando:** Man, don't even mention that viejo cochino!
**Father:** Cállese, menso!
**Walter:** (*admiringly*) All right!
**Chief:** Look, you little thug....
**Mantel:** Whoa! Where is this coming from?
**Rolando:** You know...we were here first, man! Before the borders, before la migra, and before Pete Wilson! He wants us outa here, or at least caged up till we die, just like the birds, man!
**Audience Member 1**: I am with Pete, you immigrant, you don't belong here! (*yelling out*)
**Rolando:** This used to be our land. Once, we were like the eagles, free, strong, and proud — we could sing, you know? My brother is right, we are becoming extinct just like the birds and nobody cares, not even my papa. So why should I care, man? Where will it get me?
**Mantel:** You're a smart kid. What's wrong with obeying the law and getting good grades? You could do it.
**Mother:** That's what I tell him.
**Rolando:** Wilson doesn't want us to get educated, man. We're not good enough.
**Audience. Member 1**: (*yelling out*) Because you don't want to learn, you little Cholo! Out of here!
**Mantel:** Be quiet you little audience, it's not your turn to talk. (*To Rolando*) Have you tried to see things from your parents' point of view?
**Rolando:** Well, I think I understand my parents better than they understand me.
**Mantel:** Why do you say that?
**Rolando:** I don't see why I shouldn't drink or smoke. My father drinks and smokes all the time...gets into fights. I pretty much do everything they do, I just do it bigger.
**Mother:** How could you say such a thing when I don't even know where you are.
**Rolando:** Well, I hang out with my homeboys.
**Mantel:** Do you hang out with your brother?
**Rolando:** Yeah, I listen to my brother talk about how everything is polluted and we need to fix things...but how are we going to fix things when the parents can't even pay the rent.
**Father:** Be quiet, don't say anything personal.... Besides, your mama pays the rent.
**Mantel:** Do you like school?
**Rolando:** I like school, but teachers get in the way, so why should I go?
**Mantel:** To go to college!
**Rolando:** But, we're so poor and I'll never be able to afford college. Might as well get used to my barrio and get ahead my way.
**Mantel:** And what is your way?

**ROLANDO:** Well.... (*thinking*) My homeboys and me, we invent things.
**MANTEL:** Yeah? Like what?
**ROLANDO:** Lots of things.... We've got this *tight* slingshot, man. It's hella big and takes out anything in its way!
**MANTEL:** What do you use it for?
**ROLANDO:** We use it to chase people that come around the neighborhood who don't belong. I gotta story to tell you about one of my homies, man. A coupla weeks ago, some of my brother's friends, some old dude and a couple of crazy rucas came by taking pictures of the barrio...didn't even ask permission, man!
**MANTEL:** Why should they ask for permission to walk around the barrio?
**ROLANDO:** I bet if I walk around your neighborhood I wouldn't get out of there without getting into trouble or getting arrested. So, we have our regulations, too. You know what I'm saying, so one of my homies took the camera from the old dude.
(*CHIEF sits up in sudden attention*)
**MANTEL:** Wait a minute! No one tried to stop him?
**ROLANDO:** Man, he clowned them big time! Kept saying he would take their picture and the old dude fell for it. It was kinda funny, you know? But my homeboy shouldn't have done that, man, even if those people were crazy: they was with my brother...and I heard later, he didn't get much money for it.
**CHIEF:** How do you know? Who was he? How much did he get?
**ROLANDO:** Hey! We got a code of honor, jefa! You know, I can't betray that. Anyway, I got im-mun-i-ty to come here. That's what la Wimpey told me.
**MANTEL:** (*as CHIEF rises, gripping her seat in anger*) Hold on, hold on, here! Chief Escoba, does this sort of robbery surprise you, right under your nose? What kind of solution do you propose.... What do you have to say to these kids?
**CHIEF:** First of all...this Walter is mentally ill. He's out of touch with reality and a potential danger to society. We don't have any toxic wastes in our neighborhoods! The city sees to that! And as for some ozone layer, spare me! I've got enough to worry about with vandals like his no-good brother, every time I turn around! That Rolando is a troublemaker. I have here warrants for his arrest: first of all, for violating his probation and now, for suspicion of arson.
**ROLANDO:** I got immunity.
**CHIEF:** Shut up, Kane. (*ROLANDO does a kung fu move of strength*)
**MOTHER:** Don't call him that! His name is Rolando!
**CHIEF:** We have to accept that these kids are losers. Whatever you do to help them is never enough. You can lock them up, but once they're out, they're back dealing drugs out of their school lockers. So much for education! We try to help them — at the taxpayer's expense, mind you! (*Motioning to herself and everyone in the room*) — we pay attention to them, we respect them...and it's never enough!
**MANTEL:** What, then, is the future for young Latinos?
**CHIEF:** I believe they won't live to see their kids grow up.
**MANTEL:** So what are you proposing, Chief?

**Chief:** Throw them all in boot camp! That's what I say! Throw their asses in the can and throw away the key.
**Audience Member 2**: Right on sister! Go girl, I'm with you. Kick them out!
**Mantel:** (*angry*) I told you to shut up. You realize that the price of vegetables is going to go up.... (*composing himself*) What's the solution, then?
**Chief:** Bypass the "three strikes and you're out" and enforce one strike you're in!
**Walter:** Whoa! You're crazy, lady! (*shakes his head*) I wouldn't say that with the election right around the corner, Chief!
**Chief:** Don't think the community doesn't agree with me!
**Mantel:** And here to talk about just how our neighborhoods feel is community leader and member of LACA, Lorenzo Bacalao. We will return following a commercial announcement. (*Chief buries her head in her hands for a minute and then stares expressionless straight ahead.*)
(*Guests leave the stage and Chief remains to deliver a campaign announcement.*)
**Chief:** (*All of the text in parentheses is recorded playback.*) Chief Escoba for Mayor! If you vote for me, I promise, I'll keep kids out of trouble. (Yeah, I'll put them all in jail.) I'll help to clean up the toxic waste. (Do they really think I'm gonna keep toxic waste out of this community?) We'll clean up crime and drugs from the streets. (Yeah sure, and stop my payoff.) I promise to clean up the streets from violence.
(*Return to Mantel Wimpey Show*)
**Mantel:** Welcome back to the show. (*Lorenzo begins to enter*) Let's give a warm welcome to Lorenzo Bacalao, secretary of the new LACA and PCA. Tell the audience a little about LACA, Lorenzo. To begin with, what does LACA stand for?
**Lorenzo:** Latinos for Agua and Clean Aire.
(*Walter, who has been slouching for the last while, sits up with great admiration and interest as soon as LACA is mentioned. Audience cheers. Lorenzo smiles.*)
**Mantel:** You certainly have a lot of supporters.
**Lorenzo:** Yes, sir. People have become more and more fed up with the pollution in our environment. Our numbers have grown, especially after last week's "incident."
**Walter:** Cool!
**Father:** What incident are you talking about?
**Chief:** Rumors! Pure rumors!
**Mantel:** (*trying to change the subject*) Why don't you tell us how LACA *started*, Mr. Bacalao?
**Lorenzo:** It all started six months ago when it came to our attention that the Slick and Smooth Paint Company had started paying people who became sick as a result of last year's chemical spill. So I thought about what was happening and came up with an answer.
**Mantel:** So, what's the answer?
**Walter:** (*waives his hand and says*) I know, I know....
**Mother:** Shut up, Rosendo.
**Lorenzo:** The answer was LACA: Latinos for Agua and Clean Aire. With this new

idea, I went to people's homes and asked them if they wanted to join me in this project. With LACA, I will try to get the people to help clean and fight against chemical and toxic companies. It's very interesting to hear you insist that there's no toxic waste, Esther. It's no secret that people can't even go fishing anymore because of the chemical pollutants — like lead — that cause massive poisoning.
**WALTER:** (*interrupting*) Yeah, yeah, I caught a dead fish.
**LORENZO:** In fact, Walter here keeps track of new problem sites for me. He's one of my hardest workers.
**MOTHER:** De veras?
**CHIEF:** That figures!
**WALTER:** Yeah! Mr. Bacalao lets me handle the Neighborhood Protest Hotline and I get to play detective to suspect offenders.
**MANTEL:** You do this all by yourself?
**WALTER:** Well, sometimes Grandma Georgie helps me.
**MANTEL:** Really? I thought you told the producers that your grandmom is dead.
**LORENZO:** We seem to have attracted several families with problem children. So we created a group called PCA: Problem Child Attack. In this group, problem children talk about their families and feelings. Sometimes we get kids who are in gangs and live their lives in Hell. I think these kids are really smart, but they need attention. I work with them everyday. I make them relax and they are encouraged to talk to each other.
**MANTEL:** So, what do they talk about?
**ROLANDO:** Girls.
**LORENZO:** Most of the time they talk about their problems, so I tell them to look for the good side. It works very well...most of the time. One of the first kids in our group has decided to become a doctor; and, as you can see, I'm very proud of Walter, here. This group is one of the best things a problem child can be a part of without creating hassles for others.
**MANTEL:** I think this gentleman deserves an applause!
**LORENZO:** I thank you!
**FATHER:** Wait a minute! Wait a minute! My life has been nothing but hassles. This group has turned my son into a Buddha! He's not Rosendo anymore.... No! He's ashamed of his background. He's gotta be el Walter Picado el goddamn síquico. (*WALTER glares at him.*)
**MANTEL:** So, he is a psychic. Well, Walter, I met this cute guy last night. Can you tell me if I should go for it?
**FATHER:** Don't waste your time, Mantel. Do you think he could slip me one little Lotto jackpot — but no! And the other one thinks he's the King Kong fu: el "Citizen Kane" gavacho ese, you know...who thinks he's a Chino? (*MOTHER cries.*) They've got an identity crisis. We try to understand them, but it's impossible. And we're the ones who get blamed, but it's not us! We didn't give them that kind of education. I'm with the Chief! Send them to boot camp!
**MOTHER:** (*with sudden strength*) No!! I'll take a chance with Mr. Bacalao. What else

can I do? I have two crazy kids and a husband who is always drinking beer and asking me for money. My husband hasn't worked a steady job for three years.
**Father:** Didn't I work for four straight days last summer?
**Mother:** It was four hours. He's always drunk and the kids are always getting in trouble at school. I make what little money I can with my job dry cleaning, but it's barely enough to buy food and maybe pay the bills, maybe not. I've gotten used to hiding the rent money from Luis, because when Luis feels depressed, he gambles.
**Father:** Who wouldn't get depressed with all your nagging.
**Mother:** My husband is always acting like we are rich and saying that we can buy anything because we have a lot of money. Yeah, sure! Who knows where else he gets it...or who else he spends it on. But my husband was not always like that. He changed. He says that the kids drive him crazy and that that's why he is like that. I feel like I don't have a family anymore! If la LACA can help me to change things, I'm for LACA.
**Mantel:** Somebody in the audience wants to ask a question. O.K., go ahead.
**Audience Member 3**: Mrs. Rebuelo, I think you should dump your husband and take care of your sons. I think that Walter sounds like a really good kid. Walter, honey, you shouldn't let anybody tell you you're mentally ill. I think following your teachers is wonderful. You, sir, go get a job! Stop living off your wife. And you, little Cholo, change your clothes.
**Mantel:** What do you have to say? You heard the comments and the Rebuelo's point of view.
**Lorenzo:** No one knows what to do with these kids, how to handle them. Everyone thinks of them as problem children, but what they are is lonely. That's where PLA comes in. We take in these kids, we give them snacks, we listen to them, we love them.... We even prepare them to leave home if they have to!
**Chief:** That's just great! You throw them out on the streets and then leave the city with the headache! Mr. Bacalao, I know you mean well, but do us all a favor and don't be so radical. Leave the handling of these kids to us. Don't waste your time. They don't deserve respect! That Rolando is a troublemaker! He's always hanging around the gangs, always talking back to authorities, a car thief...
**Mantel:** So what are you gonna do about it?
**Chief:** We put him on probation for stealing a car, being his first offense, but he violated his probation.... We issued a warrant for his arrest and we'll send him to juvenile hall for three months and six more months of probation.
**Mantel:** We have some more questions.
**Audience Member 4**: Chief, don't you think these kids are crying for respect?
**Chief:** We "respected" him...oh, yes! We sent him back to school, and a few months later we found him with a 38-special and a pound of coke. And now he's threatening to burn down the governor's mansion? All we recommend is to keep him locked up until he shows "improvement." What a relief it will be to be able to enjoy my morning donuts without having to worry about what Rolando might be up to today!

**ROLANDO:** Maybe I should burn down yours, instead! Babosa!
**CHIEF:** Keep it up, Cholo! You won't have immunity forever! I'm gonna catch you someday. In fact, I'm gonna catch you right now.
(*ROLANDO and CHIEF begin fighting*.)
**MANTEL:** (*trying to pull them apart*) Call security!
**CHIEF:** I'm the security around here, Baboso.
**MANTEL:** Where is the doctor? Call the doctor! Doctor, Doctor.... Back in "five" with our next guest, Dr. Wilma Wasteoftime, on the "Mantel Wimpey Show."
(*Guests clear stage for commercial. Two actors enter to do the commercial*.)
We have been studying a lot of young people and we have discovered that in California eight out of 10 people smoke marijuana. Five out of eight go to other drugs. Like we have said before, this is your *brain*. (*Shows a picture of an egg*.) This is your brain on drugs. (*Shows a picture of an egg being fried in a skillet*.) Any questions?
(*Return to MANTEL WIMPEY SHOW*)
(*On the show, MANTEL is seated next to DR. WASTEOFTIME, who studies him seriously and analytically. The cameras are not rolling yet*.)
**MANTEL:** Dr. Wasteoftime, it's a pleasure to have you with us today.
(*Pause as all the guests adjust themselves in preparation. All arguments come to a halt and all stare ahead expectantly. MAKE-UP LADY scurries around WIMPEY with last-minute touchups. Cameras start rolling*.)
**MANTEL:** We have with us today Dr. Wasteoftime, a top child scientist and psychiatrist. Tell us, Dr. Wasteoftime, what in your opinion caused these massive disorders...or are these disorders?
**DR. WASTEOFTIME:** Yes, indeed, Mr. Wimpey. We have here a classic case of delusional children in what they sadly view as a hostile environment. One child thinks that he's a psychic and the other thinks that he's a gangster. In their attempt to escape from themselves, they've even chosen new names. It's very romantic, of course, but dangerously unrealistic. They've resorted to burning houses and using weapons. I'm here to help them work through their negative obsessions and to focus on healthy, unthreatening social behavior.
**MANTEL:** And how do you intend to do this, Doctor?
**DR. WASTEOFTIME**: I've been experimenting with brain cells. I believe that the cells of the right brain are contaminated with those ideas. I came out with a "stanacane pill" to remove negative ideas from the brain. We've done experiments on monkeys, but never on humans. (*Looks at ROLANDO, and smiles excitedly*.) I have been wanting to test this medication on a human child for a long time; it's just been a matter of finding the right subject. Clearly, this little boy displays all signs of becoming a classic socio-psychopath in need of immediate behavior modification.
(*DR. WASTEOFTIME calmly opens bag and starts taking out operating equipment*.)
**MOTHER:** Dios mío!
**WALTER:** Wait just a minute! That's my brother you're talking about!
**LORENZO:** This is insane! All children have rights!

**Chief:** Says who?
**Dr. Wasteoftime:** Don't worry. One pill is enough to prevent them from doing crazy things. It makes them calm and open to positive suggestion...sort of like a holistic lobotomy!
**Mother:** Do you really think it would help?
**Dr. Wasteoftime:** Believe me, madam, I am quite serious. If we don't take these steps right away, it's only a matter of time before his abusive behavior will begin to surface.
**Audience Member 5**: Chief Escoba, I think Mr. Bacalao has some wonderful ideas and you should hire him to clean up your act. Mr. Bacalao, keep it up! And you, Doctor, you should go back to your lab and chase rats and stop messing with our kids' brains. You should be ashamed of yourself, comparing the future of America with monkeys.
**Lorenzo:** (*sarcastically*) Yeah, Doctor, why don't you just put pins on his head and give him shock treatment?!
**Dr. Wasteoftime:** Mr. Bacalao, you read my mind! Actually, I had that in mind for the other one, to stimulate his senses back to the present instead of the future.
**Walter:** No one is going to make a pinhead out of me! And my brother's no psycho! You are! Grandma Georgie, come!
**Father:** No! No!
**Dr. Wasteoftime:** I'm in the right place for my experiment.
**Father:** (*to Mother*) They're your children!
**Mother:** If you had spent more time with your family, instead of with las viejas esas, this wouldn't be happening!
**Walter:** (*louder*) Grandma Georgie! Come on, Rolando, help me out, man!
(*Dr. Wasteoftime suddenly starts to feel weird, almost sick. Walter becomes quiet, peaceful.*)
**Rolando:** Grandma Georgie! Grandma Georgie! Grandma Georgie!!
**Both**: *Grandma Georgie*! Grandma Georgie! Grandma Georgie! Grandma Georgie!
(*Dr. Wasteoftime opens mouth to talk, but no sound comes out. Walter gets up and stands behind Dr. Wasteoftime, speaking for her.*)
**Grandma Georgie**: (*Grandma Georgie starts shaking and making loud sounds.*) I'm here, my darlings.
**Mantel:** Oh, my God, Stage Manager! Stage Manager! Call the paramedics, call 911! Somebody is having contortions.
(*Father gives a terrible cry of pain and defeat.*)
**Grandma:** Cállate, vieja! Let me get comfortable in this strange lady's body.
(*Walter makes some transitionary sounds, then Grandma Georgie coughs and begins to speak.*)
**Mantel:** This is a first time ever, ladies and gentlemen! (*to Stage Manager in the wings*) Call the press!
(*Make-Up Lady comes out within view of audience, eating cookies and staring in

*disbelief*)
**GRANDMA:** I apologize, dear grandson, for taking so long and not coming forth earlier, but this lady's system was too full of valium. Oh! It's so nice to have a voice again!
**WALTER:** Grandma Georgie! Cool!
**GRANDMA:** Yes, dear. (*stretching experimentally, getting used to physical body*) (*MAKE-UP LADY, who has moved to join the CAMERA PERSON to get a better view*.)
**WALTER:** God, Grandma Georgie, it's good to talk to you!
**GRANDMA:** (*hugging him*) Walter, I'm so proud of you!
**WALTER:** Rosendo to you, Grandma!
**GRANDMA:** I'm honored.
**ROLANDO:** Hi, Grandma! I'm Rolando.
**GRANDMA:** (*hugging him*) Rolandito!
**CHIEF:** This woman is unreal!
**GRANDMA:** Oh, but I'm very real, Esther Escoba! Reality is not only what you can see with the naked eye, but what you feel in your heart, what you know to be true.... Exposing the real sickness in society and the environment, like my grandson Walter is trying to do, and like that Señor Bacalao. And as for dealing with the Rolandos of the world, you people have certainly bungled that!
**CHIEF:** I can't take this any more! (*frightened, but trying to cover*)
**GRANDMA:** But you must. Rolandito is not a bad boy; he's simply searching for a direction. He's crying for a vision; he's crying for his culture, isn't that true, m'ijito? He doesn't burn things because he wants to destroy. He burns because he's burning inside. He hurts people because he's hurting inside.
**CHIEF:** So what do they really want?
**GRANDMA:** What he really wants in his own way is to create. What Rolandito needs is love and support, for people to put their faith in him to do good. I was so encouraged, for example, when he spoke of his home-brother being wrong in stealing the camera and of feeling somewhat responsible. That's a start!
**ROLANDO:** My homie, Grandma!
**GRANDMA:** Yes, dear. (*continuing with CHIEF*) You know, I couldn't understand at first *why* you seemed so threatened by Mr. Bacalao....
**CHIEF:** (*insulted*) "Threatened"?
**GRANDMA:** ...until I realized that you are a member of the Board of the Slick and Smooth Paint Company.
**LORENZO:** (*to himself*) That's it! The missing link!
**CHIEF:** And I've been doing everything I can to keep them on track.
**GRANDMA:** Yes. One might even call it the betting track, mightn't one? It was you who arranged for certain well-chosen companies to sell pollution credits to Slick and Smooth so that they would get tax write-offs.
**WALTER:** What?!
**GRANDMA:** For which you were paid quite well. In fact, you were paid so well that you found ways time and time again to trick environmental control agencies and Green

Peace, so that they never found out about the Slick and Smooth employee death rates and brain retardation caused by massive lead poisoning in and around the plant.
**Walter:** Grandma Georgie! Was that *lead* I saw coming up through the asphalt near the backyard of the Garcia family?
**Grandma:** It certainly was, Rosendo.
(*Phones suddenly start ringing off the hook. Stage Manager starts motioning madly to Mantel from offstage*.)
**Mantel:** There go the phones, ladies and gentlemen! They're ringing off the wall! Unbelievable what has come out today. It will certainly make the top story on tonight's evening news and tomorrow's headlines for all the major newspapers! Mr. Bacalao, can I have your reaction here?
**Lorenzo:** This is environmental racism, RAZA! We see so many examples throughout this country like the Slick and Smooth Paint Company, which built ghettos for their workers on company land...land which they have filled with chemicals, oils, lead waste, and other pollutants.
**Rolando:** You're right, Señor Bacalao, we need to clean up the ghettos.
**Lorenzo:** These neighborhoods have become today's cities, and it's these companies that still control our lives and our health. They buy legal tax write-offs, which help them pollute more, and we're the ones who suffer! What are we going to do about it?
**Rolando:** I'm with you, man! Viva la Raza! The Human Raza. I invent things, man, me and my friends. We'll work with you if you work with us. I don't usually admit this to nobody, man, but I get A's in science! I can't help it! But now I'm glad, 'cause I can study about this lead shit and make a difference for my neighborhood, man. I feel *good*!
**Walter:** That's my brother. We're gonna clean this up together and bring down the people responsible for Grandmom's cancer.
**Mother:** Here he goes with his astrology again.
**Mantel:** Here you have it, señoras y señores: a "homie" who is willing to turn himself around in a fight for life! Hey there, Georgie girl! Let's give her a hand. Georgie, it is a privilege to have you as our unexpected guest. Do you have any final words to leave us with?
**Georgie**: Thank you, Mantel, for providing the right vibrations for me to materialize today. I bless this poor, misguided doctor whose body I have inhabited. When she "comes to," she will remember everything that happened and her understanding will be expanded as a result.
(*A merengue starts playing, gradually getting louder*.)
**Georgie**: Never mind that now! Dance with me and be happy!
**Mantel:** Come on, señoras y señores! Everybody dance! (*Lorenzo bows to Mother, and joins the dance*.) Let's show the world how it's done on the "Mantel Wimpey Show," where we lay it all out on the table.

# Invisible Youth Reappear! A Review of Two Youth Produced Videos

Dana Saunders

## Introduction

RARELY VISIBLE IN MAINSTREAM MEDIA, THE PERCEPTIONS AND WORLDVIEW OF children are vividly expressed in the hundreds of "youth-produced" videos that are created in classrooms and community-based workshops every year. *Kolaps* and *Youth on Racism* are just two examples of competent and compelling videos produced by children participating in youth media programs.

Youth-produced videos are, most often, a collaboration between the children and "media educators" or "media artists." The latter tend to be teachers with traditional academic backgrounds who have learned video production skills, or professional videographers committed to sharing their knowledge with children or youth with several years of experience in media production programs. Media educators teach the fundamental skills necessary for self-expression using the medium of video. Ideally, they act as mentors who facilitate the production process as unobtrusively as possible, allowing the children to express their own authentic voices.

Although the structure and details of each program are unique, they share similarities. Among them are access to experienced mentors, a safe, focused, and creative working environment, an opportunity to learn technical skills, and access to cameras and editing equipment.

Video production workshops enable children to express their unique perspectives while they acquire the skills and self-esteem necessary to make their voices heard in the public sphere. Schools, public health projects, leadership training, and arts programs have used video production to engage children in identifying and representing problems that affect them, and working toward viable solutions.

Pervasive exposure to mass media has created a generation of children and youth with a sophisticated understanding of the media's power and influence. When provided with the skills and equipment necessary to create *their own* media, children respond enthusiastically, producing insightful investigations of topics important to them, such as racism, politics, ecological concerns, sexuality, and homelessness.

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Once completed, youth-produced videos are showcased in community settings, schools, and video festivals. A few are picked up by distributors and become available to the educational video market. Youth-produced videos are sometimes broadcast on community access television and occasionally on public television stations.

## In a Refugee Camp

In the youth-produced video entitled *Kolaps*, teens living in a Croatian refugee camp tell their stories, share their observations about the world, and express their hopes for the future. This video exemplifies how collaboration between young people creating media for the first time and educator/media artists with years of production experience can result in an artistic and technically competent representation of the subjective experience of the youth.

*Kolaps* was facilitated by Global Action Project (GAP), an exchange program that trains young people around the world to produce "videoletters" on issues that concern them. GAP, a New York-based program of Global Kids, aspires to encourage young people to become "positive role models and contribute to community development and international understanding." Although such "adult" ideals might drive the organizations sponsoring youth media projects, videos such as *Kolaps* ultimately express the concerns and interests of the youth who create them. Once completed, the "videoletters" are used for peer education and community action and are distributed to schools, universities, museums, film festivals, conferences, and television broadcasters.

*Kolaps* exemplifies how *the process* inherent in youth-produced media programs is as important as the final creation. In such programs and in their resultant videos, media educators use conflict resolution and team-building techniques to create an environment where self-expression is valued and where the children feel safe enough to share their thoughts and begin the dialogue to be realized in their video. *Kolaps* is a model of how such productions can be facilitated so that the kids can tell stories in their own way. As the opening narration explains:

> I've been living in this camp for nine months together with the others who share my fate.... We are here because of the war.... On behalf of the teenagers, I will tell you our story...we will tell you of our experiences....

We see the world through the eyes of the young videographers. They select the images and the music. These kids are survivors; they are unafraid to ask tough questions of themselves and of those they interview. They ask people on the street what they think of the war, as well as those who have lost their homes because of it. They often exhibit a depth of concern and understanding that adults are too preoccupied, or afraid, to explore.

The teens share intimate glimpses of their lives in the camp: they express how it feels to be confined by gates, to be displaced, homeless, and cut off from the

mainstream of society. They also share their delight and pride when the new teen center they have built is complete and ready to be christened with its first rowdy party. Despite the hardships they have experienced, they appear resilient, remarkably good natured, and optimistic. Their self-depiction strongly suggests that they feel a strong appreciation for family, friends, music, romance, dancing, and playing pranks or acting silly, just for the fun of it.

Production occurred over an eight-week period: two weeks of preproduction, three weeks of principle photography, and two and one-half weeks of editing (by the youth and a professional editor). During this demanding schedule, lighting, camera, ease in front of the camera, interviewing, and other skills were taught simultaneously. The teens decided what stories they wanted to tell, what to shoot, and how to shoot it. They determined the basic structure of the final product and also selected the music. Artfully crafted sequences were created by teens and professionals alike.

### Production of Mass Media Stereotypes

The voices of children and youth, and positive images — especially of teens — are lacking in the mainstream media and in the public/political discourse so closely associated with it. Youth often express concern that the mainstream (i.e., corporate) media portray them either as negative stereotypes or, worse yet, render them invisible. As an article in the *Los Angeles Times* reports, "most children who watch television news or read newspapers believe the media portray a negative image of young people...."

Media programs such as Community TV Network (CTVN) in Chicago offer teens an opportunity to counteract negative or nonexistent media images by producing and disseminating their own media in the form of the public access television series, "Hard Cover." The program is produced, written, and directed solely by the teens, who are mostly low-income, minority, drop-outs or kids who don't do well in a traditional academic setting. Over the past 20 years, 1,700 of these once "invisible" teens have participated in the program.

CTVN has a social agenda as well. On a personal level, the program attempts to use video as a tool to build the critical thinking skills and self-esteem of teens. On a social level, video is seen as a solution-oriented tool for change. The youth are encouraged to pinpoint a problem and then take the all-important step of finding solutions.

*Youth on Racism* is one of hundreds of shows produced from the perspective of the teen producers of "Hard Cover." The program is an exploration by four teens from diverse social, economic, and ethnic groups of how racism affects their communities. Part 1, *What's It Like Where You Live*?, takes us on a tour through each neighborhood from an insider's perspective. In Part 2, *I Dare You to Cross This Line*, the kids visit each other's neighborhoods and openly discuss the differences. Tamika Crout, 20, one of "Hard Cover's" youth producers, comments:

> Through working with "Hard Cover" I have learned so much that cannot be taught in school. The show gives me a chance to voice my opinions and get my views across. It also gives me the chance to dispel many of the stereotypes created by mainstream media.... Since I started video I've learned how to understand the media and its power....

The highly commercial nature of mainstream television limits the viewing of youth-produced videos like *Youth on Racism* to cable access television, film festivals, schools, and community gatherings. There is, however, an intrinsic value to the videos, whether they are widely seen by the general public or not: they have great meaning to the youth who made them, and to their families, friends, and communities.

Hands-on experience in creating film and video encourages the demystification and deconstruction of commercial mass media. Youth who understand the language and techniques of media are potentially formidable agents for social change and democracy. The insights and creativity expressed in *Kolaps* and *Youth on Racism* indicate that children have much to say, say it well, and are well worth listening to.

## RESOURCES

*For* Kolaps *and other "videonewsletters":*

Global Action Project
561 Broadway, 6th floor
New York, NY 10012
phone: (212) 226–0130

*For* Youth on Racism *and other episodes of "Hard Cover":*

Community TV Network
2035 W. Wabansia
Chicago, IL 60647
phone: (773) 278–8500

*For The National Media Education Directory:*

The National Alliance for Media Arts and Culture
The Ninth Street Media Complex
356 Ninth Street
San Francisco, CA 94103
phone: (415) 431–1391

*For media festivals that highlight youth-produced media:*

Wired Youth
Visions of the Future Video/Film Festival
L.A. Freewaves
National Educational Video Network

# 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,

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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.

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# Z and Me

**Don Reneau**

**I.**

> I suspect that children play as important a part in adult "growth and development" as we adults do in theirs.
>
> — R.D. Laing (1997: 7)

MIDWAY THROUGH THE CHILDREN AND THE ENVIRONMENT PLANNING PROJECT, my three-year-old became interested in sizes. He knew that our address began with 2600, so for a while all kinds of things became 2600 big, or not 2600 big. I learned to ask questions like whether seven-twenty-six-hundred was bigger or smaller than twenty-six-one-hundred-ten. Z always knew the answer. Scotty Pippen, the basketball player, became the standard for very tall. A tape measure Z liked to play with helped him get a fix on long and short. One day he asked me to "put the measure tape high up as big as Scotty Pippen." I guessed six foot seven or so. "No," he said, "taller. Taller than the ceiling." Then his eye fell on the workbench. "Here," he commanded. "There. You hold this there." He pulled the tape to the other end of the bench, studied for a moment the still indecipherable numbers, and then pronounced with satisfaction, "Yup, that's how long it is." Then he dropped the tape and toddled off in pursuit of another endeavor.

Our work in the planning project at that time concerned how to evaluate the activities we had organized with inner-city teens. Four groups of approximately a dozen young people had each been charged with identifying problems in their environments, learning about what caused them, and proposing solutions conceived from their own point of view. The precise difficulty we faced as the organizers of the work was how to prevent our evaluation of their efforts, in this case daily monitoring reports on how the young people conducted their activities, from taking over the activities themselves. We didn't want our measuring instrument either to deform or blunt the young people's own initiative, nor to predetermine our understanding of what they were up to. We didn't want to organize tests that would, in the evaluators' eyes, transform the participants from a group of creative, unpredictable individuals working together into a collection of good or bad test-takers.

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Little Z, working with his measure tape and his fledgling grasp of language, commented more tellingly on formal measuring methods than we adults were managing in our sophisticated discussions. Things that you measure, he seemed to know without knowing he knew it, always turn out to be precisely as big — or as small, or as valuable — as your measuring stick tells you they are. Listening to him exercise his still untutored intelligence helped me see how the answers we seek to questions are often inscribed, not necessarily visibly, in the conventions we deploy at the outset of a questioning process. To the extent that we seek innovative answers to seemingly intractable problems, it is necessary to call those conventions themselves into question. The parallel activities of working with young people in the planning project and fathering Z underscored for me the way that meetings across boundaries of age, class, race, and personal experience can operate to focus critical attention on unconscious, often unhelpful, conventions. Boundary crossing, if accomplished in mutual good faith, deconstructs authority; it qualifies narcissism, bringing unwarranted habitual assumptions to light and exposing prejudice; it opens a space for creative movement into a future that cannot be conceived abstractly or one-sidedly in advance of the movement itself.

I find myself, in the aftermath of the planning project, repeatedly discovering that what I wish to say to Z — how I want to answer his questions, to pose questions of my own — forces me to examine what I'm willing to embrace myself, and ultimately to question what self of my own I'm willing to accept. The idea that a child's comprehension is limited, while true, is also a dodge. How many things he hears in his daily doings that he doesn't comprehend, in this sense of his passing limitations, and yet how hard he listens and how hard he works, not yet in fact to know, but to go on discovering a way to be in relation to all of what he hears. It is not always easy to respond in like spirit to the challenge he poses. When I stumble over a response to his blank ponderings on death, I feel my fear of mortality being stirred. If a certain uneasiness flavors a frank discussion of human cruelty and injustice — by which I mean grappling with the reality of it, rather than rehearsing a standard adult explanation — it comes from not knowing how to justify my privilege, and his. To the extent that I find myself unable to model a hopeful politics for him, I'm left either with a bankrupt, purely abstract ideological self-righteousness, a tired sentimentalism, or a feeling of impotence that is not comfortable for a father to bear. Z causes me, if I'm honest with him, to be honest with myself.

Like Laing, with his children as with his clients in psychotherapy,[1] we took participation to be one of our three or four founding principles in this planning project. We sought the active involvement of other adults, drawn from various locations in the broader community of those concerned with issues of public health and youth, and we sought ways to meaningfully engage young people in our thinking. Participation of this sort turns out to be both easy and difficult to occasion. On the one hand, all you have to do is open a space for expression and

listen. To say that I was consistently astounded at the depths of awareness, intelligence, imagination, energy, and eloquence the young people were able to contribute to our work together is to confess a prior ignorance of what should be obvious to us all. On the other hand, under the pressure to "get things done," it is frightfully easy to turn what is heard into something other than what it was, to rationalize it in alien terms.

Effective participation is not tokenism. It is not simply a marshaling of other voices in support of preconceived ideas and values. There is a world of difference between really engaging children — maneuvering with them into a space of mutual and equal communication — and instructing them in correctness or, for that matter, collecting and parading their ideas and opinions as cute or arresting or oddly wise beyond their years. I find myself feeling secure in my awareness of that difference, when what Z says or does causes me to think or act differently than I otherwise would have. Engaging him means being with him, not supervising him, and I emerge from good encounters as changed as I often think he is. His participation, in short, is best measured by the change I experience in myself.

It is perhaps the broadest claim of our project, and others like it, that youth participation in community affairs, evaluated in this way by the impact it has on adult perspectives, leads to both radical and salutary social change.

## II.

> Laziness and cowardice are the reasons why so great a portion of mankind, after nature has long since discharged them from external direction (*naturaliter maiorennes*), nevertheless remains under lifelong tutelage, and why it is so easy for others to set themselves up as their guardians.
>
> — Immanuel Kant (1963: 3)

"Out of the blue" is a phrase I find recurring in the journal I keep of my exchanges with Z. The words mark the way he surprises me with a thought or concern I had not anticipated. "Clouds are the lowest planets in the world," he says one day, turning from the window simply to offer the information, "because they cover up the suns." My surprise at such moments is misplaced, because it implies that I have noted something about him, when what it inevitably refers to is my failure to maintain a fitting sense of the wholeness of his mind and spirit or to escape adult narcissism sufficiently to appreciate him as a carrier of his own seamless reality.

I remember gazing at the sky myself as a child about his age, made uncomfortable by a feeling of not being able to fathom personal identity against the depths of space. "I," I would say silently to myself, and "me," repeating the words, intensifying my bewilderment for as long as I could endure it, listening to the words fail to capture a meaning commensurate with the feeling they evoked. This

memory, prompted by Z's questionings and pronouncements, helps me realize that he is moving through a time of spiritual imprinting, when guidance — more precisely, the kind of guidance offered him — probably has lifelong consequences. He is undertaking his last good-byes to infant symbiosis; he will emerge with a sense of himself in the universe that I suspect will persist.

Dogmatic instruction is conceivably the most common and least appropriate form of adult "stewardship" in these circumstances. If the dogma takes, then I imagine what it seeds is either personal limitation, when the repression of unresolvable wonder is more or less complete, or that endless, often destructive skirmish with doubt that is so characteristic of Western philosophical being. Z teaches me that the difficult alternative to adult dogmatism — of which there is a complex liberal variant as well — requires me to surpass my own imprinted uncertainties and doubts, not in the direction of more certainty, but rather toward mutual, open-ended exploration. For me to share in his cobbling together of meaning from experience — to "shepherd it," to use another oddly obsolete religious term — I have to learn to let little Z's speculations and momentary convictions become as valid as my own. I have to allow mine to become as relative as his.

What seems to be at stake here is the difference between mobilizing drama and language as a way to grow and to heal, which intact children do very ably, and seizing on "meaning," attempting to impose it on youth, as an adult's abstract antidote to unmastered pain and fear. Our culture is abuzz with anxiety about teaching our children the rights and wrongs of the world, whether of mathematics and physics or morality and religion. The Dan Quayles and William Bennetts of the contemporary cultural scene would turn back the clock to allegedly simpler days by sheer dint of propaganda. "Virtue" in this sense, as Bennett himself conceded in a radio interview some years ago, falls awkwardly on sophisticated adult ears; the moralistic little nostrums compiled in his popular *Book of Virtues* (Bennett, 1993) have, as he put it, a frankly "corny" ring to them. Yet, so runs his argument, were children not exposed to any alternative, were they to be engulfed in a nostalgic adult's discourse of abstract virtue, they simply wouldn't know any alternative to the "virtuous" life he prescribes. The national anti-drug campaign, in addition to having staged a shooting war in the inner-city, relies on the same rhetorical strategy: if adults stay relentlessly "on message," the children will follow without having discovered any paths of their own.

This is Kant's dictum posed imperialistically from the perspective of the guardian. It betrays the functioning of dogma, not as education for the young, but as a form of illusory reassurance to the old. Adult authority wielded in this way functionalizes youth narcissistically. It reminds me of the evil queen in "Snow White," who wants to see in her mirror only a flattering reflection of herself. She is confronted instead with an ineradicable vision of fresh youth, which is not herself but an image of her obsolescence, telling her that she has already faded and is destined to die. The lesson of "Snow White," as I allow it to be informed by my

experience with a child, is that adult talk very readily becomes a narrow discourse of a doomed authority. Moralists like Quayle and Bennett would drive what is native to youth underground, where, I would suggest, it either seethes and slowly cripples its frustrated carrier or erupts later in the genuinely ugly display of real life anger and violence. At work here is a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy: the image of dangerous youth that must be contained is actually only an externalization of the ugliness we shy from perceiving in ourselves. A recent *USA Today* article called blithely for the construction of yet more prison capacity on the basis of the brute demographic fact that more children than ever are entering their teens.

It is easy, from an unreconstructed adultist view of childhood development, to read dismal future outcomes into behavior that makes an entirely different kind of sense to a child.

"That green thing comes off, too," says Z one day at the playground, struggling to dismantle a brand new toy.

"It does?" I say, casting a wary eye at his strong little hands tugging at what I'm not sure will withstand the force.

"Yeah, but I can't get it off right now."

"A really hard one, huh?" I'm sure he hears the subtle note of relief in my voice.

"No. I just have to drop it from a really far distance. Then it'll come off."

I often find myself warning Z that he's about to break something. I spontaneously want him to value objects as I do, not as a stimulus to his curiosity, an occasion for testing his strength and ingenuity, but as a thing that is precious instead ultimately for the money it cost. It is quite possible in this way for us to suppose that we are discouraging "consumerism" in our children, while at the very same time we relentlessly enchant bought objects by bathing them in an aura of exaggerated and, to a child, mystical monetary value.

Another day Z invents the Super HXX Killing Machine, a construction of duplo blocks that he deploys against the collection of meanies I'm charged with playing in our game. I'm supposed to knock the top parts off his machine, an assortment of farm animals and a couple of propellers, by bombarding it with a variety of toys and smashing it with a dragon. Z chortles with his victories and quickly, calmly rebuilds, recovering from momentary defeats. My job is to keep up an energetic attack until he tires of the carnage, until he has had gotten enough of whatever it is that he knows he's getting from it.

Z plays with undivided concentration and intensity, while I'm left fighting my battle on two fronts. First, I have to contend with the spectacularly tough and resilient Super HXX Killing Machine itself. But the more difficult task is to quiet the voices inside me that are telling me to censor his delight. I suppose I was punished as a child, as many children are, for breaking things, because the first line of attack on the internal front is always to worry that these objects, these mass-produced, readily replaceable or easily forgotten consumption items I otherwise disdain, will be injured.

Should I cop to this inconsistency, my mind immediately mobilizes a specter of the strained family budget; I question whether Z is learning to value things appropriately. Past these worries, I hear murmurings of testosterone poisoning and start wondering from that angle whether I'm cloning a monster. The thought runs through my mind that if he plays like this at school or at a friend's house, my parenting will be called into question. Z excavates, in other words, an archaeology of discipline that is buried in myself. He confronts me with the choice of mindlessly passing it on, permanently installing it in the nether regions of his consciousness, or following his lead, discovering, possibly, in my own terms and for my own purposes the difference between navigating by judgment and reacting by reflex.

There are, of course, compelling reasons for adults to instruct the young in the effective application of consensual knowledge, to pass on the fruits of accumulated findings, including examples of successful virtue. Inherent in each moment of intergenerational transmission, however, is also the power — the temptation — to cultivate in the young the encompassing feeling of what they do not know rather than what they do, of how they are not adequate rather than how they are, of what they do wrong rather than right. If there is any validity to the suspicion that expression left undeformed by relations of unequally distributed authority finds its way easily to relevant truth, then there emerges reason to suspect further that the effect of authoritative discourse, which may be well-meaning, is in fact authoritarianism. Working with young people in the planning project, alongside being with my child, left me with an acute sense of how slippery is the slope between authority, an irreducible aspect of intergenerational relations, and authoritarianism. The condition of walking securely at the top of that slope is the active cultivation of a countervailing power, a force pushing up, from those who, for the moment of their youth, walk along the bottom.

The alternative to adult dogma, to the imperialism of nostalgic virtue, is surrender to the labor of ongoing, often uncomfortable adult development. It is to take advantage of encounters across the boundaries of generational difference to pursue, unlazily, what Kant calls maturity. It is to surpass archaeological reflex in the direction of freedom.

## III.

> Growing up at that time in America, it wasn't any different than any other small towns and cities, if you had the right influences, and the right people telling you you were doing a good job, you were probably going to be a pretty good young man or woman. Whether you come from a small town or city or suburban area, I think it's just who you know, people have impressed you as you were growing up, your parents and your family, maybe the first place you have a job. And it's about telling the truth. I remember in our household when you didn't tell the truth, my mother,

> well, she would find a bar of soap if you used a four letter word or didn't tell the truth. You had a long memory of the, uh, in your mouth, filled with soap. I mean, my mother made all my sister's clothing and passed up ours. I always got the good stuff, I was the older brother. But, uh, we were poor, by standards, poor in some respects, economic, but we had, uh.... My parents didn't finish high school, but they were good people.
>
> — Robert Dole[2]

"Had, uh, what, Bob?" I want to ask. What lies behind the rhetorical stutters, preserved in the otherwise self-consciously crafted biographical video made for the 1996 Republican convention? What precisely is the good in Dole's nostalgic image of impoverished rural authoritarianism that ought to be resurrected and passed on? Dole's words accompany images of ranging cornfields and deserted streets, a boy on an antique bicycle delivering morning papers. There are old black-and-white portrait stills, arresting because of the way the children seem to be scowling into the camera.

Dole's Kansas, meanwhile, is lost as irretrievably as his presidential campaign. But if it's not Kansas anymore, the question is, what is it?

One night on the local news there is a report on how to safely execute an ATM withdrawal from your car. A female reporter goes through the motions. Then she appears on screen with a male expert. "What did I do wrong?" she asks. He says: "You parked too far away from the ATM. Someone could have gotten between it and your window and threatened you. You put the car in park. Don't ever do that. Keep it in drive with your foot on the brake, so you can get away when you need to. And you didn't look once in your rearview mirrors. Always keep a lookout for suspicious behavior." The reporter runs obediently through the maneuver again, acting more like an agent making a pickup in a Cold War spy film than a mom on her way to the grocery store. Now, of course, I find myself rehearsing the maneuver whenever I stop off to pick up some cash, noting at least abstractly the frightened thoughts that go with it. Snared in a ritual repetition, my thoughts turn to children learning to perform the stations of the cross in catechism school or mastering the bodily postures of Islamic prayer.

We are surrounded by fearful images. There was a letter in *Vanity Fair* a few years back from an irate reader. An article had, in her eyes, made light in some way of the crime problem in the United States. How dare a magazine not take crime seriously, she wrote, "in an age of rising murder rates, rampant drug wars, rape, burglaries, and drive-by shootings..."? She signed the letter from Sheridan, Wyoming, a town of modest population and a crime rate to match. A convenience store billboard in Berkeley sports a gigantic blow-up of an adducted girl: "Because we care if something precious is missing from your neighborhood." A familiar hysteria rises here to an obscene crescendo in the implicit comparison between a missing child and a midnight package of cigarettes or an early morning carton of

milk, marking the point at which cultivated fear passes over into unwitting second nature. Peter Jennings on the national news reports the latest findings on Sudden Infant Death Syndrome: infants, he says, have a just measurably better chance of not up and dying on you if you put them to sleep on their sides or their backs, but "never, never, like this on their stomachs." There's an image of an uninformed mother recklessly risking minuscule odds by putting little Johnny to sleep the wrong way — instead of finding encouragement in her peacefully sleeping child to gain what comes of an honest confrontation with the feelings of mortality, irrevocability, and ever-impending loss that new life awakens in all of us. It is difficult not to note an element of compulsive repetition in all this fear mongering, in the ceaseless construction of a threat inside what purports to be a remedy.

Instead of Bob Dole's Kansas, we live, even in Sheridan, Wyoming, inside an equally deluded, now endless stream of alarming messages: this is right, this is wrong, and almost everything is dangerous. Culture in this sense becomes an externalized superego, an enormous, fearful construction with which we treat ourselves, in the same way that we treat children whom we fear to be constantly on the verge of deadly misbehavior.

The point is not to register yet another variant of some universal decline, which would merely represent another variation on the same culture of fear. The point is rather to focus on what might be the difference that remains between the organization of a child's fresh perception and how we adults, often in reference to children, go about organizing our own. Parents inevitably become aware of their children's fears, recognizing most of them as groundless even while, one hopes, treating them with respect. It is more difficult to view our own fears in that same way, distinguishing what is real from what has simply become an anchor for our free-floating anxieties.

Halloweening with Z last autumn, along with a small group of parents and their children, we caught sight of a television screen through an open door. The pictures flashed by so quickly that it was impossible, without the sound, to decipher what the program could possibly be about. One parent noted ruefully that children's programming requires edit cuts every two or three seconds; he had a friend whose video piece, in which there was an average of five seconds between cuts, was rejected by a broadcaster for that reason. I mentioned the popular reaction to early travel by train. Fledgling rail passengers were made intensely uncomfortable by the way the landscape shot by the windows, as if a dangerous acceleration had been forcibly injected into nature itself. People got nauseous and found themselves unable to sleep the night following a journey. Writers moralized grandly about the baleful effects of speed on human beings. "Trains were too fast," offered one mom, and we laughed. I wanted to say more, to press the point, thinking about succeeding panics: that postcards would ruin our ability to correspond by subjecting written sentiment to an artificially limited space; that phonograph recordings would put an end to worthwhile musical experience; that television stunts children's neuro-

logical development or spells a disastrous end to 500 years of popular literacy. Listening to us talk, finding myself unable to imagine the harm involved in humanity going through another round of visual skill development, it was impossible not to think that what I was hearing were the stodgy or, more to the point, fearful prejudices of an aging generation.

A few days later, I happened upon a radio interview (Martin, 1993) with the French author of a new book on Prohibition. His view is that the movement against alcohol was at bottom an attack on otherness, on the more indulgent lifestyles brought by primarily southern European and Irish immigrants to the new world. The argument struck me as persuasive to the point of obvious, leading me to suspect that a similar sort of classism and racism informs the otherwise well-intentioned hoopla about sex and violence in the media. "Today's media portrayals of teens," in the words of a report published in a recent issue of the magazine *Extra!*, "employ the same stereotypes once openly applied to unpopular racial and ethnic groups: violent, reckless, hyper-sexed, welfare-draining, ignorant" (Males, 1994). It is not upper-middle-class white kids in their private schools whom we tend to think of when we hear that too much TV watching is wreaking ruinous effects on the young.

I am not unaware of the startling statistics and well-intentioned reasoning put forward by media critics: American children spend a stupefying number of hours glued to the tube; the fare they are presented with there contains a staggering rate of violent incidents per hour; our media industry is vastly more concerned with exploiting sensation to sell advertising time than it is with what can reasonably be understood as the education of viewers, young or old; that same industry is relentlessly and probably irrevocably driven by an international marketing strategy that reduces drama to motion because mindless action is easier to export across language barriers; and so on. The fact of the matter, however, is that alarmed media critics, in study after study, fail to produce good empirical evidence to support their claims of a compelling connection between virtual consumerism and real-world behavior (Goodman, 1994; Males, 1996).

Meanwhile, the likely causes of common childhood misadventures are abundantly evident in the real-world experiences of children. It becomes necessary to question why all the attention is directed at the media, as opposed to disastrous life conditions: defunded schools, devastated neighborhoods, jobless parents, hopeless prospects. If there is little reason to believe that violence or sexuality in the media are the proximate cause of unwanted behavior, then there is just as little reason to believe that our children or the future are being served by attempts to sanitize the airwaves. It all starts indeed to look like yet another old-fashioned temperance movement, which may be the peculiarly American form of authoritarianism.

Observing Z in his relatively ideal conditions, I believe that the process of his exploration, learning, growing, suffering hurt, and healing himself is a delicate

one, and subject to myriad adult subversions. My feeling is that all kids are as relentless as he about their development, but that self-healing in particular is very easily driven underground, where, frustrated, it runs the risk of deformation. Television may be one deforming force, but what can be its effect compared to homelessness or woefully substandard daycare? Alongside victorious reports that some media watchdog group has gotten industry executives to agree to consider attempting to reduce violent incidents in their programming by, say, a whopping 10%, we all read more or less daily about the impossibility or inappropriateness of action elsewhere. Generous parental leave is pronounced too expensive for American industry. Public budgets would be overwhelmed by a merely adequate funding of daycare or public education. The business judgment that creates joblessness in the inner cities is represented like a force of nature, not to be tampered with. Meanwhile, the ongoing expansion of prison capacity is represented as an obvious response to an increase in the population of children.

Fear is a commodity in contemporary America as surely as were chewing gum and baseball mitts in bygone Kansas. Compulsive repetition, cycling endlessly from constructed fear to false reassurance, is in these circumstances an understandable but unhelpful response. When we are not being afraid for our children, we are being afraid of them. In neither of those conditions are we being with them, passing on to them what we know, learning from them what they have not yet forgotten. On the one side we have the macabre population of milk-carton kids, on the other the specter of violent youth out of control. On the one side are the made-for-adults nightmare movies of the news media, on the other the soothing meaninglessness of made-to-order Hollywood dreams.

## IV.

"Do you know what mama means when she says nightmare movies?"

"Uhh, no. Do you?"

"Yes. She means movies that when you watch them at night instead of in the daytime they make you have bad dreams."

"Oh. Do you think that's right, that movies make you have bad dreams?"

"No."

We're arriving home from school. Z thinks things over as I park the car.

"What if," he continues, "there were movies where only the bad guys won and at the end there weren't any good guys left because all of them were dead?"

His eyes are lit up with the dangerousness of the mere thought and his voice is pitched a touch higher.

"Would that be a nightmare movie?"

Now his voice crackles with a nervous laugh. "Yes, of course that would be one!"

Z's movie watching career began with *The Lion King*. He was barely three and watched it the first time with his eyes glued to the television screen. He rejoiced so hard he jiggled when little Simba sang about being the future king and doing

just what he liked. He chortled when Simba made fun of the evil Uncle Scar. And tears poured silently down his face when Scar flung Mufasa, Simba's father, from the rocks and killed him. When Simba, now grown, announced his resolve to return to the pride lands and challenge Scar, Z rose in one smooth motion from his pillow and shut off the VCR.

"That's enough," he said.

The next morning, he told me the story again, ending it before Simba takes up the challenge of his adulthood, by returning Simba not to the pride lands to reconquer his rightful legacy, but to the games of his infancy with his playmate Nala. In Z's first version, the story cycled endlessly from tragic loss to the contented oblivion of prematurity. Eventually, he watched the movie through and then many times over, thrilling to Simba's victory as once he wept at Mufasa's death. In a short stretch of time, I watched Z climb the movie like a ladder to a sturdier and more understanding self. I've seen him do it a number of times since, with all the movies that really capture his attention, watching them over and over until he wears them out, transforming fright into security. I ask him occasionally if he wants to have another look at *The Lion King*. "No," he always says, simply and without elaboration. He's through with it, on to other things. It's over definitively for now, perhaps to return someday decades hence in a burst of middle-age nostalgia. Meanwhile, he has moved from a primal fear in the face of unthinkable tragedy to a playful imaginative experimentation with wickedness and evil.

"Who do you want to be?" Z asks me one day in the kitchen, while I'm preparing dinner. I'm aware from an earlier play session that he wants to inhabit one of the characters from what we call the mouse movie, and he's looking for a playmate to reenact the drama.

"Joanna," I say. Joanna is a lizard, errand girl, guard, and all-around agent for the meanie poacher McLeach. "Who do you want to be?"

His eyes get a little too bright and he adopts a conspiratorial whisper. "McLeach."

Bruno Bettelheim (1991) has made us aware of the importance of fairy tales for children, focusing on the way they foster development in precisely this way, by stimulating artificial fear in a secure setting, helping young listeners learn to master their real fears in the real world. It may be that there are important differences to be noted between being read to by an adult and watching movies, certainly between the former and zoning out in isolation in front of the baby-sitter tube. Z, however, has no interest in watching movies alone. He delights in discussing them as they go along. And he maintains a lively interest in being read to. Often we watch a movie and then read the book, or vice versa. Then we talk about the differences between the two.

"What did you like better, Z? The *James and the Giant Peach* movie or the book?"

"The book."

"How come?"

"Because in the book Aunt Sponge and Spiker get smashed flat as pancakes by the peach."

In the movie version, the evil Sponge and Spiker don't die. "You know what's really silly in the movie?" Z continues. "Aunt Sponge and Spiker just drive across the water in their car."

"That's how they get away?"

"No, they end up where James' giant peach is."

"On that spike on the big building?"

"Yeah. And then they come at him whacking with an axe."

"With an axe?!"

"Yeah."

"Then what happens?"

"Uhh, they miss. James is on this red thing and he just moves his head."

"And that's the end?"

"Yeah. No. In the movie they don't die."

Z wants Sponge and Spiker to die because they are meanies. In the exaggerated terms of his evolving moral machinery, dread villainy is answered satisfyingly only by the direst comeuppance imaginable.

Adult movies, as a rule, operate the same way in terms of their essential dramatic structure. Meanies are installed into the story early on, often disappearing for a time toward the end so they can reemerge precisely at the moment of the good guy's apparent triumph. Sponge and Spiker survive in the movie so they will be available to reinvigorate the threat to good, lending James' ultimate victory an added oomph. So it is with *Ransom*, the popular Mel Gibson film of late last year. It tells the story of a wealthy couple, mother and father to a beautiful child. In the merest moment of inattention on the part of Mel, the loving father, the child is abducted by a diabolically clever band of kidnappers. A string of rescue misadventures follows, until finally Mel loses his patience and calls the kidnappers' bluff. Rather than paying the ransom, he decides to devote the entirety of his overproportioned resources to hunt down the evildoers and destroy them.

It is typical Hollywood fare. We are kept on the edge of our seats, riveted by fear even while we have not a moment's doubt that good will prevail. Mel finally scores what seems to be the final victory, returning the child safely home, but just as quickly the illusion of safety is exposed: the kidnapper is back, inside Mel's home this time, unrecognized, perfectly situated to recapture the child; vengeance figures into his own intentions now, which could not be more obvious or more ominous. Then the little boy suddenly appears. He recognizes the kidnapper's voice — and pees in his pants. The thin stream of urine trickles out onto the floor. Mel immediately registers the boy's fear, which allows him to identify the threat at the last possible moment and heroically turn the tables. He lures the kidnapper

back into the public world of male action, out of the home, and in a gruelingly extended flash of hand-to-hand combat, the bad guy ends up dead.

The little boy doesn't speak; he pees. His father reads him, not as a whole human being, but as a malfunctioning organism, an object for which he is responsible. This has been the boy's role throughout the film — precious, helpless, endangered; he has all the native subjectivity of a cash register.

The difference between *Ransom* and *The Lion King*, or between adults consuming the one and Z absorbing the other, is that adult movies of this sort, rather than fostering mastery, rather than encouraging development toward a stronger or more discerning self, return viewers to exactly where they were at the start. There is no narrative mechanism to insert distance between the adult viewer and the hero, just as nothing operates to make the child real outside the terms of his parents' fear. *Ransom* operationalizes "Snow White" for adults, leaving the evil queen's narcissistic mirror intact. Youth exists entirely for adult purposes; the carefully wrought mechanics of viewer identification see to it that no confusion can arise on the boundary between the two generations. We leave the theater feeling more than a little like larger-than-life Mel. Then we return to our fear-ridden doldrums, waiting for the next hit to come along to give us a temporary boost. Compared to the development I see in Z, adult movie watching can look very much like compulsive repetition. The cycle goes round and round, like little Z the first time with *The Lion King*. The movie generates fear like a dynamo, cancels it like magic, going nowhere, except to the bank.

It happens that I saw *Ransom* with a Syrian filmmaker who was visiting the United States for the first time, in New York for a festival. He was as gripped as I was; he tensed in all the right places and laughed at the spots scripted for relief. "It is horrible," he said afterwards, "that filmmakers would use a child in that way."

We are all using children in that way, to the extent that we assume it is possible to guide them into the future without understanding quite comprehensively, in great detail and in their own terms, who they are in the present. To achieve that understanding, it is necessary first of all to ask them. After that, and more difficult, comes allowing what they say in response, not merely to inform our judgment, but to transform it.

## NOTES

1. For a radical statement of the virtues of participation across boundaries of presumptive authority, see Laing (1967: 90).
2. Republican National Committee, "An American Hero," video biography of Robert Dole, Republican National Convention (August 15, 1996).

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# Safe Spaces: California Children Enter a Policy Debate

**Sandra Meucci and Jim Redmon**

### Introduction

> This stupid experiment of organizing work and failing to organize play has, of course, brought about a fine revenge. The love of pleasure will not be denied, and when it has turned into all sorts of malignant and vicious appetites, then we, the middle aged, grow quite distracted and resort to all sorts of restrictive measures.
>
> — Jane Addams (1910)

> In real life, only from the ordinary adults of the city sidewalks do children learn — if they learn it at all — the first fundamental of successful city life: People must take a modicum of public responsibility for each other even if they have no ties to each other.
>
> — Jane Jacobs (1961)

THE ISSUE OF SAFETY IS OFTEN CAST SOLELY AS A PROBLEM OF VIOLENCE AND CRIME. The focus of campaigns is riveted on urban violence, and youth violence in particular. Yet nationally only five percent of all juveniles were arrested in 1992, and of those five percent approximately nine percent were arrested for a violent crime. Despite the fears, fewer than one percent of juveniles are arrested for violent crimes (Shorter, Schaffner, and Schick, 1996). Though juvenile offenders currently account for a smaller percentage of violent offenders than their numbers in the U.S. population would predict (Lubow, 1995), the dramatic increase in homicide rates of young black men has been well publicized, even if not well understood. The response is a variety of "get tough" policies; for example, the intensification of policing crime and imposition of youth curfews are intended

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to address community safety issues. States have been revamping youth crime laws over the past two years, allowing more youths to be tried as adults and scrapping longtime protections like the confidentially of juvenile court proceedings. The thrust of these new laws is to get more juveniles into the adult criminal justice system, where they will presumably serve longer sentences under more punitive conditions (Butterfield, 1996).

Campaigns to address youth and "gang" violence typically aim to limit access to guns, restrict television viewing of violent shows, amplify community policing, and impose curfews to get children off the street. Yet regulating their access to weapons of destruction and to each other is merely a palliative measure; it isn't a solution to a social problem that has much deeper dimensions. Much of what is written about crime and violence avoids addressing economic and political systemic factors that contribute to it, such as spacial isolation of poor people in urban areas, which culminates in violence.

Instead of focusing on the systemic and structural opportunities within urban environments that are associated with violence, youth are demonized as more punitive responses to juvenile offenses prevail. Yet the negative images of urban youth are so widespread that the majority of funds and efforts go to building more youth prisons and stripping away the legal protections for all youth that were instituted in 1899 when the first juvenile court was established.

The need for a policy designed to address children's safety is clear, but it ought to be informed by an understanding of how children experience its lack. Many children, especially those in low-income urban environments, have come to see violence as an unavoidable part of their social reality (Noguera, 1995).[1] Rather than recognize poor urban children's lack of control over the exigencies of their lives and come to understand their bid to protect themselves, city councils and national policy initiatives characterize them as needing restraint. By doing so, they entirely overlook the children's experience of vulnerability in their own terms. Not being able to protect themselves from "bullies" combines with the loss of public facilities, open public spaces for play and recreation, safe swimming, fishing, and tree-climbing "green" places to produce an environment devoid of anything positive for children. They literally have "nowhere to go" and "nothing to do." Children taking part in the pilot projects reported on here repeatedly described their experience of not having safe spaces and how this lack of safe havens makes children more vulnerable to youth crime, both as perpetrators and victims. By working directly with young people on these problems within their environments, we can forge an alternative analysis of the problem of youth violence and youth safety.

## Safety and Safe Spaces

As early as 1910, Jane Addams laments the loss of a world where children have open spaces that invite their exploration and play, and spark their imagination. The

modern city, she says, turns over to commercialism practically all the provisions for public recreation. At first blush Addams seems merely to be articulating a romantic ideal and nostalgia of the classical city replete with theater and stadium, squares, piazzas, pageants, street processions, and amphitheaters. Her concern, though, is larger than that; it is with the way in which industrial development, for over a century, has dwarfed the possibilities for children to flourish and direct their desires toward civic life.

Addams is not alone in noticing the historical trend in the loss of safe, common, public space for recreation and public life. Other historians mark 1910 as the beginning of the changes in children's access to U.S. cities, marking the loss of public spaces for children's use. In that decade the deaths of children from playing in the streets were becoming a scandal (Gaster, 1992). There was no governmental commitment or action to urban and rural development "as if children mattered," but private and religious organizations stepped forward. Organizations such as the Children's Aid Society and Play Schools Association directed their energies toward the "moral development" and Americanization of the immigrant poor. Their efforts began to influence public and political discourse over the streets not being safe for children's play, and this resulted in improvements. By the 1920s, a children's play movement was in full swing. Public education authorities were concerned to develop public school playgrounds; churches and other private organizations offered social programs for poor children; the Boy Scouts of America, Girl Scouts of America, and YMCA, all of which started in the 1920s, were clubs for middle– and upper-class children. In New York City, there were at least designated hours during every day in which up to 60 city streets were closed off for children to play.[2] These improvements occurred despite the general tendencies within urban planning during the prewar years to serve the bustling central business districts and not to concern itself with the need of children for safe play and streets.

During the 1930s New Deal, the Federal Works Progress Administration (WPA) produced 12,300 public works: thousands of athletic fields, ball courts, ski trails, tennis courts, swimming pools, and outdoor parks. Though the WPA was the halcyon era for producing the infrastructure for public life, other attempts at "green" and public spaces in city planning were made in the 1930s, though less successfully. For example, urban geographer Mike Davis chronicles how lone city planners and landscape designers in Los Angeles tried to redistribute park and open-space resources to the advantage of neglected working-class districts, but the general pattern of speculative development began overtaking the investment of public money in open public space. Hence the area lost its greenbelts and commons-centered, pedestrian-scaled land became the "exploding metropolis," replete with the urban sprawl that today marks it as a national scandal.[3]

Unfortunately, Davis' Los Angeles scenario has become a common one. This general trend of privatization of public space and diminution of available public

facilities intensifies and compounds the foreclosure of opportunities for children. Children's development and freedom are restricted as public spaces increasingly become unavailable or unsafe to use (Noschis, 1992; Hillman and Adams, 1992). Their encounters with violence are heightened as a result. Yet the prevailing concern over children's safety is expressed as one over crime and violence, not over the lack or loss of safe public space.

The research from our own case study is part of a new and growing body of work (Lynch, 1977; Moore, 1994; Hart, 1997; Stephens, 1994) that is interested in children's understandings and experiences of local and global environments.[4] There are alternatives to existing punitive and restrictive directions of policy for "safety," and the process of involving children in the definition of the problem is a first step toward building constituencies, social consensus, and proactive policies for safe spaces.

## Case Study

This study is based on the work of California children and teenagers,[5] from nine to 18 years of age. They came together for eight weeks in summer 1995 with adults who guided and assisted them, as needed, to define and explore their most pressing concerns within their environments and to launch a campaign within their community to address the issue. Four community agencies were funded to lead this work, based on ethnic and geographic variation: East Los Angeles (Latino), Richmond (one Southeast Asian and one Latino), and Oakland (multiracial). All four urban-based agencies focused mostly on low-income neighborhoods. Three were existing organizations and one was formed specifically for this pilot study.

The commonality in what the young people uncovered was striking. Each articulated threats in various ways to the existence of "safe spaces" in their lives. Their systematic environmental action research alerted us to how significant and necessary the availability of nontoxic, open *public* space and facilities for youth is for them to feel safe. Moreover, they launched campaigns and programs to create safe spaces and offered solutions that do not depend upon policing, curfews, restrictions, or regulations on them in any way. Rather, their efforts were noteworthy for their proactive, and not reactive, nature to preserve and reclaim safe common environments.

### *Environmental Safety of the Projects Selected*

*Richmond*: *The Asian Pacific Environmental Network* in Richmond, which began as part of the environmental justice movement, selected Southeast Asian young teens for leadership development. The girls' families all have taken refuge in the United States, unfortunately in an area that has some of the worst socioeconomic statistics in the country. This area of western Contra Costa County contains over 350 industrial facilities, including waste incinerators, oil refineries,

and pesticide, fertilizer, and other chemical manufacturers (Belliveau et al., 1989). In addition to living in the heart of Richmond's toxic sites, their families also face workplace exposures and contaminants in the soil where they grow much of their food. Among the most vulnerable populations in this area are the newcomers from Laos, who are concentrated in the heart of these toxic sites. This refugee community, which emerged only in the past 10 to 15 years, is extremely poor. The girls' parents are mostly monolingual in one of seven different languages spoken; the girls said they had difficulty even in telling their parents about toxins in their native languages, which lack a word for "chemicals."

*Sangre Latina*, a theatrical group also in Richmond, has a mission to help young people, many of them former gang members, to use the medium of theater arts to improve their lives. Staff of this project selected eight young Latinos and Latinas, ranging in age from 10 to 17, to develop their awareness and profile, from their own perspective, the physical and mental health "risks" in their environment. These children had all witnessed people being shot, drugs being sold, and "drug houses" being burned to cover evidence. In preparation for a play that they wrote and performed in a prominent Bay Area cultural arts center, they discussed these features of their environment and drew out implications about the way teens and youth were cast as threats to community safety and as perpetrators of the social and environmental problems in Richmond.

*Oakland*: The *Youth of Oakland United* community action research project was conducted under the auspices of a well-established national community organizer training institute, the Center for Third World Organizing, which is seven years old and has over 500 member families across the city. Problems in the community around this multiracial, multiethnic, and predominantly low-income group include limited access to quality health care and education, and neighborhood safety. Oakland is a city divided geographically along racial lines. While east and west Oakland are predominately African American, the hill neighborhoods like Piedmont are predominately white.[6] The health status of the residents is staggeringly different. Simply put, people die at a younger age in Oakland's low-income neighborhoods than they do in the hills (Haan et al., 1987). East and west Oakland experience higher violent crime rates and infant mortality rates that are twice as high as they are in the higher-income areas. Public facilities, such as playgrounds, are located closer to industrial sites and major freeways. A recent survey found high levels of lead contamination in some playgrounds in East Oakland.[7] The Youth of Oakland United approach was to lead a broad coalition in developing a local city ballot initiative to increase the number of youth development programs in Oakland, which they see as necessary to reverse the escalation of youth crime.[8]

*East Los Angeles*: *East L.A.* is made up predominantly of Mexican-Americans and Mexican immigrants. It is a neighborhood that is also home to many industrial factories and businesses that bring toxic waste and air pollution. In a study of

young people who died violently in Los Angeles, 80% showed lung abnormalities (Sherwin, 1990). Air pollution is blown from other more affluent neighborhoods in Los Angeles, bringing with it high rates of asthma and other respiratory illnesses.[9] In addition, as in Oakland, youth in East Los Angeles are more likely to die violent deaths at an early age. In this community, where members are addressing problems of unemployment and violence, the pilot project was organized by two community health educators working with the Multi-cultural Area Health Education Center and other local organizations. Fifteen young people took part; again, they selected issues relating to safe spaces for their research: the closure of libraries and the widespread use of alcohol in their community.

*Tours and Mapping: The Social Landscape of Fear*

Adults in each of the programs structured tours of the neighborhood and city environments. They guided children in mapping their environments using methods pioneered by Robin Moore (1989) and others for environmental education, in which realms of value are identified: places that children frequent in their everyday lives and places that are important for other reasons, such as their favorite places or sources of "environmental fear."

Within Richmond, there was great variety in the tours between the two projects. The theater group visited various residential neighborhoods, San Quentin prison, and the Hilltop Shopping Mall. The girls in the environmental network were guided by environmental groups on "toxic tours," which ranged from Richmond Harbor and other sites within their own neighborhoods, to North Richmond's refineries and incinerators, and to Laotian Gardens, where health threats are posed by the high levels of lead and cadmium in the soil, parks, schools, and the city dump. In Oakland, the teens toured the public schools, parks, and recreation centers in the entire city, which they noticed are profoundly demarcated along class and spatial boundaries. In the hills, the facilities are abundant, safe, and usable because that is where wealth is concentrated; in the flatlands, where poverty is concentrated, public facilities, where they exist at all, are dilapidated. In East Los Angeles, the young people mapped the environment sequentially, from their homes to what they witnessed on walking tours from their homes, and to public housing and other public facilities within East Los Angeles.

The tours and mapping provided the children within each group with a common understanding of what they meant when they talked about their community or neighborhood, and their definitions included the social, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of their experience of the environment, as well as physical and economic spatialization. Their first reactions to the question of how to represent their environment were very emotional. For example, one youngster in East Los Angeles early on noted "killing of young people in my neighborhood affects us emotionally"[10] as he made a bid for considering crime as an environmental issue to address. Noticing that "even in East Los Angeles there are differences

in what people see and encounter," they agreed and expressed sadness that "there aren't a lot of good role models in ELA...a lot of dropouts and people lacking in motivation."

The Oakland youth agreed to focus on aspects of their environment that were "deeply felt by all of us," that "affect us physically, mentally, and emotionally," that "unite rather than divides us," and they drew images depicting the rundown conditions of their schools and the violence, thugs, drugs, and diverse people on their neighborhood streets. At home, they described the environment by saying that their parents were "all worked out."

The Southeast Asian girls said their maps and discussions about identity gave them "a chance to learn about the common parts of our culture," despite being isolation from each other based on language barriers. Though all were Southeast Asian, the differences between their native languages kept them from feeling that they were in a community. They were Mien, Thaidam, Lao, Khmmu, and Hmong. They spoke of their common experience as first-generation bilingual immigrant children, who at a very early age interpreted for and shared power with their parents. Domestic violence surfaced as an environmental issue for them, as it did for the teens in Oakland.

The first thing the children in the Richmond theater group discussed was their vulnerability to being robbed or assaulted; "The people from here doesn't make it bad, they come from other communities." One boy offered at first, "The Blacks are doing it," and "they break into your house hell of easy." Another said, "I feel scared to take the bus because I'm afraid of being jumped." One of the girls pointed out, "It doesn't matter what race you are, today everybody is killing everybody else; Black with Black and Mexican with Mexican." Reflecting on why their peers are killing each other, they offered the following ideas: "I think that it is money that is the problem"; and "This neighborhood is taken by Chevron. They want the land for business. The bourgeoisie have trashed this community." They then began to describe what they saw in their community:

> The neighborhood had changed.... What went wrong...guns, drugs, violence... It used to be beautiful and there used to be parks.... It used to be my home, but not anymore.... They want this land for waste...things die and are born all the time.[11]

They described being scared: "...it feels like being under an avalanche, being cold and shaking: it feels like being in a shower with spiders all over."

Perhaps unsurprisingly, conflict leading to the formation of gangs was racialized and threatened the safety of the children across all of these communities. As they tried to get beyond immediate racial stereotypes as reasons for the violence, they focused on issues such as the concentrations of wealth and poverty and the unequal allocation of public recreation and education opportunities, the power of large petrochemical companies to lay waste to their land, unresponsive government, and

parents who worked too hard and engaged in violence and alcoholism themselves within the home. To confirm and correct their impressions of the problems within their environments, and before choosing a course of remedial action to these problems, they were encouraged to construct surveys and canvass their peers, parents, neighbors, and community officials.

*Participatory Action "Survey" Research*

In each project, the youth conducted extensive research through personal interviews, mutually constructed surveys that were completed face to face with the person being surveyed.

The Southeast Asian girls interviewed their peers to gain their impressions of the safe and unsafe places in their neighborhoods. After learning about the water flows throughout the Bay Area, where they toured the estuaries and levies and learned about oil spills, they became concerned about the way toxic waste moves up the food chain and is magnified in the process. The waterways that were polluted, they discovered, were the places where their parents and relatives fished. They were alerted to the Chevron incinerator that burned hazardous waste for the pesticide factory and to the smoke stacks that billowed over the North Richmond residential area. A tour of the "Laotian Gardens," named after the Laotian family who was forced to move from there due to high levels of lead and cadmium in the soil, caused concern over the chemical content of the areas where their families grew their vegetables. So they added questions about fishing and gardening habits to their surveys. Their survey of 100 youth between the ages of 12 and 23 disclosed that 53% went outside their house to play or hang out, while 33% did not go out at all; that 37% hung out in unsafe places and 17% were in a gang. When asked where they did not feel safe because of gang activity, 18% said everywhere, 17% said school, 16% said North Richmond, four percent said their own neighborhoods, and three percent said the streets. The researchers then mapped the clean and safe places in Richmond and San Pablo.

The children in East Los Angeles randomly interviewed students at the high schools and their families and friends about what they considered to be the biggest problem in East L.A. In constructing the survey questions, they grappled with the meaning of the terms and the interconnectedness of the issues, striving for a definition of crime, for instance, that avoided facile answers. Since "poverty, pollution, and discrimination had effects as devastating as drug usage,"[12] the children determined them to be crimes. Initial surveys suggested that people were concerned about the closure of public facilities, especially libraries. Their findings premised that "lack of knowledge and information is at the root of the problems listed.... The library is a place where we can go and it is safe.... We like doing homework there."[13] Thus, they next gathered information about the county's plan for closure of district hospitals and libraries and discovered that one county hospital and 15 libraries were slated to close in the L.A. area. Reviewing their data,

they began to link issues such as how increasing the hours of libraries might lead to a decrease in teen pregnancy and youth crime. Their governing hypothesis concerning library closures was that the budget deficit of $1.2 million in East L.A. was responsible. To confirm this, they decided to conduct more research on the location of libraries to be closed, the year of accumulated deficit, and how much money is given to libraries. They also surveyed who uses the libraries. After analyzing the trend data in the city budgets over a 20-year period, they determined that library closures were not directly linked to lack of revenue. Rather, it was that libraries in East Los Angeles were not a priority for spending.

The Oakland youth conducted intensive field research on the need for safe and fun public places for Oakland youth. Teams conducted 300 surveys among youth, citywide.[14] They also interviewed officials at recreation centers and held focus groups. Throughout this extensive field research they came to feel that youth in their neighborhoods are not important in the priority-setting processes of city officials. "They see us as nothing but troublemakers, gangsters" and "they make us look bad." Their impressions were reinforced by their analysis of the difference between the Piedmont and Oakland city budgets. A $250,000 difference between cities, favoring Piedmont where many fewer children lived, was found. In contrast to the Piedmont budget, none of the Oakland money was allotted to youth-specific programs. So, the young Oakland researchers met with Councilman Spees about the city budget. One of them explained their work in gathering information on youth recreation centers and surveying other youth around Oakland about their surroundings and recreation activities. They posed questions about the budget and the Councilman's views on recreation activities. Meetings with Councilman Chang and Councilman Russo followed. Back at the office, with the survey information, brochures of existing youth centers, notes from various interviews, and statistics from the police department spread about the table, they began to organize their findings for their community presentation.

The theater group, Sangre Latina, interdigitated between their neighborhood tours, interviews, and script writing. For example, they interviewed a neonatologist about why babies were born prematurely. Incorporating what they learned into a script performed at St. Mary's Cathedral in San Francisco, one girl portrayed a teen mother who fell in love with a boy who bit her repeatedly, and she had nowhere or no one to go to for help. The next performance was at a youth theater festival in San Francisco, where they became more acquainted with the work of young theater troupes. Their script for the pilot project took shape as the story of a "dysfunctional family" on a television talk show and discussed what in their environment they want to change.[15]

Every group organized a crowning community event to present their action research findings. Sangre presented their play; the East Los Angeles youth presented a program that included delivering 1,000 signatures on a petition to a City Council member to keep the public libraries open. The Oakland youth showed

the video they made to a packed room of community members and presented a policy statement to the City Council.[16] The Richmond girls presented their survey results to a meeting of their families and friends.

## Analysis

The study was designed to engage teenagers in identifying and exploring features of the local social and physical environment that might promote or inhibit their health. Therefore, we asked them to focus on places and people, to look at "place" holistically and remain alert to the cumulative or interactive impact of an individual's local environment. This was in keeping with recent public health research that establishes the relationship between area and health in ways that go beyond identifying one single feature of the physical environment and disease at a time (Macintyre et al., 1993).

The overwhelming policy finding of our case study is that young people feel a lack of, and wish to create within their environment, "safe spaces" where they can enjoy access to the land and water, greater freedom of movement, and freedom from violence. They want a safe environment in which to play, recreate, and work. The study points to three domains within which safer spaces need to be created: public facilities, public space, and within the home. For the older youth of East Los Angeles, the priority was a facility — public libraries, where they felt safe and could do homework. Among the younger youth there, it was making their homes safer by working with parents on drug and alcohol education. Differences in public recreation areas and schools in their neighborhoods and other more affluent neighborhoods captured the attention of Oakland youth. In Richmond, the Southeast Asian girls' lives are compromised by toxic pollution and a lack of "clean" open space. The Sangre group brought together their concerns about their inner lives and the violence they face every day, both environmentally and socially.

Regarding public facilities, these young people alerted us to the erosion of what Rodrick Wallace (1996) calls "community ecology," that is, a program of planned shrinkage of public resources that has severe consequences for public health.[17] The loss of libraries in East Los Angeles and the absence of recreation possibilities for the Oakland youth were linked in their minds with feelings of being more vulnerable to pernicious elements of street life, such as gangs, guns, drugs, and drug dealers. The dilapidated condition of the schools, of concern to the Oakland youth, is a visual marker of other important things missing in the schools as a result of lack of funding, such as sports and recreation possibilities.

Regarding open spaces, the children from the East Los Angeles and Richmond APEN projects said they were afraid to go out of doors and play. This is a dreadful situation, which clearly has consequences for their development. Children need play and interaction with their environment to develop creativity and especially need common spaces with access to ponds, trees to climb, wild animals, and

interaction with many other people (Moore, 1990; 1989). The whole neighborhood, not just the playgrounds, should be in the domain of children to play. They should be included in the world of adults, not isolated. Streets, alleys, all the places where adults go should be part of the child's world. Playgrounds should not be islands, but rather part of the neighborhood.

Unfortunately, urban space is usually planned by adults, with very little concern for, or input by, children. The result is an environment that is very often detrimental to the development of children, not only because of automobiles, homes with obvious safety problems, lead, and other environmental concerns, but also because of the alienation and isolation that the city engenders. We see our project as a step toward analyzing cities for their relationships and capabilities and for children and their promotion of health and wellness, as opposed to illness and disease.

Current policies regarding youth and safety are constructed with too little positive and too much negative attention paid to the space children occupy. Public policy reflects increased restrictions on teen activities (Eubanks, 1994). In particular, curfew laws have been reinstated in many communities, and skateboard laws have been added. Young people are being subjected to increasing regulation on the street, via publicity campaigns and through the role that youth services have been required to play (White, 1990). Also, school and other services are cut to pay for prisons, which young people say only makes youth crime *more* likely!

## Conclusion

In every pilot project, it was the notion of safety that the children cared most about. They experienced a lack of places in their lives where they felt safe. The current policy dialogue on the issue of safety is much different; directed at inner-city and minority youth, its focus is on reducing violence and increasing incarceration through tough love and discipline. The youth in our case study did not mention increasing the juvenile justice budget or adding police as solutions to their problems with safety. Their policy solutions focused instead on increasing the number of safe common places where they could congregate and share, having more safe and toxic-free open space, and making home life a more peaceful place. These solutions are proscriptive and prevention oriented, and they represent an innovation in the concept of children's or community safety, 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., to people's felt sense of safety. In one sense, the children are calling for a renewal of a type of public life and community that have been overshadowed by the privatization of social space. Their policy is based on well-being rather than "protection," and on notions of an environment structured to facilitate interaction rather than to prohibit contact by people who fear one another.

## NOTES

1. The work of Pedro Noguera (1995) on youth perceptions toward violence is instructive and helps us understand the context in which young people assess their options.

2. *New York Times,* "Play Streets Set Apart" (July 22, 1920).

3. Mike Davis, "How Eden Lost Its Garden: Los Angeles and the Politics of Space." Annual Colloquium Series: The City (Center for Social Theory and Comparative History).

4. See also the work featured in a special issue of *Childhood* 2 (1994: 1–21), edited by Sharon Stephens, and in particular her article (Stephens, 1994) and that of Katz (1994).

5. See Michael Schwab's "Sharing Power: Participatory Public Health Research with California Teens" in this volume.

6. Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Reports* (1990).

7. *Oakland Tribune* (October 17, 1995).

8. This initiative resulted in the Oakland Children's Fund, approved by voters in the November 1996 election, which sets aside 2.5% of the city's general fund for programs benefiting children and youth for the next 12 years.

9. "Asthma Death Rate," *Los Angeles Times* (July 27, 1990: 21) and University of Southern California "Air Pollution Study" (p. 3).

10. "Monitors' Reports and Youth Assessments," East Los Angeles, *Children and the Environment Research Archive* (Summer 1995).

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*

13. *Ibid.*

14. They went to the Omega Boy's Club, Centro de Juventud, EBAYC, Sanborn, Project YES, and the West Oakland Health Center.

15. See "Mantel on the Table" in this volume.

16. See "How Oakland Turns Its Back on Teens: A Youth Perspective" in this volume.

17. These consequences include higher rates of violence, low birth weight, and AIDS.

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# Children of Incarcerated Parents

## Diane F. Reed and Edward L. Reed

### Introduction

Most of the over one million persons incarcerated in U.S. jails and prisons on any given day and the millions more on probation or parole are parents. Although a considerable body of information has been collected about individuals who have been or are under some form of criminal justice system control, very little is known about their children, particularly those under the age of 18. There are approximately 10 million children in the U.S. who have had one or both parents incarcerated. These children and youth have little or no voice about who, in the absence of the parent who is the primary caregiver, will take care of them, or if they will be allowed to visit or communicate with the incarcerated parent. The children of parents involved in the criminal justice system have no voice because they are invisible to the larger society.

The national trend to use incarceration to punish even minor offenses guarantees that children will continue to be adversely affected by policies enacted with no consideration of the harm done to family systems. There are many complex and interrelated contributing factors: the intensification of politically motivated "get tough on crime" rhetoric and the "War on Drugs," public discourse about crime designed to instilled fear, the enactment of increasingly harsh sentencing laws such as "Three Strikes," and the ratings-driven media preoccupation with policing and arrests, leading to public support for a prison-building frenzy. The virtual disappearance of work, along with stores, transportation, and other components of a viable infrastructure, from many inner-city communities has resulted in a concentration of poverty that has devastated neighborhoods and marginalized residents, making them easy first to criminalize and then to dehumanize.

The original intent of this article was to examine what is presently known about the children of incarcerated parents. Its scope has been expanded to include the more realistic continuum of parental crime, arrest, incarceration, release, and

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recidivism that children experience and must contend with as their lives are disrupted, and sometimes shattered. We begin by placing present events into a larger historical and political context. Available information about the children of incarcerated parents is provided, followed by a discussion of caregivers, custody, and visitation issues. The next sections describe what is known about the impact on children of parental involvement in the criminal justice system, as well as observable intergenerational trends, and then look at how law enforcement and social service agencies regard and respond to children of arrested and incarcerated parents. We conclude with interventions that address and alleviate the problems resulting from parental involvement in the criminal justice system.

## Background

In 1990, the United States had the highest incarceration rate in the world, five times higher than France and Germany and over four times greater than Britain's rate (Foote, 1993). California has the dubious distinction of having the largest prison system in the country and the second largest in the world following China (*Ibid.*). One out of every eight U.S. prisoners is incarcerated in the Golden State. In less than 20 years, California's prison population has exploded by 631%, from 19,000 in 1977 to 139,000 in 1996; over 97,000 persons are presently on parole.[1] An additional 71,000 Californians were local jail inmates as of April 1996[2] and 400,000 former California jail inmates were on probation in 1995 (Criminal Justice Institute, 1994).

Changes in mandatory sentencing guidelines enacted during the mid-1970s have led to a significant shift in public policy favoring punishment over rehabilitation. Passage of the "Three Strikes"[3] legislation in the early 1990s has taken a decisive step in making the concept of rehabilitation historically obsolete.[4] To accommodate growing numbers of felons sentenced under the 1,000 new state laws specifying new offenses and increased sentences passed by the legislature (Foote, 1993), California has added 20 new prisons to its original 12 since the early 1980s (CDC, 1994). This represents the largest prison construction program in the U.S. To house the expected onslaught of new long-term prisoners sentenced under "Three Strikes," the proposed 1996–1997 California state budget calls for completing three new prisons, while other bills introduced in the 1996 Legislature authorize construction for up to nine new prisons.[5]

While the construction and filling up of new prisons give the impression that public safety is being enhanced, the truth is that increasing numbers of the prison population are nonviolent offenders. Driven in large part by the "War on Drugs," the percentage of violent offenders newly incarcerated in California prisons actually *decreased* from 39% in 1985 to 26% in 1990, while the percentage of drug offenders *doubled* from 17.6% to 35% in the same period (CDC, 1991). The most recent national survey of state prison inmates found that over 60% of inmates in 1991 had been previously incarcerated (USDJ, 1993).

Incarcerated Californians tend to be disproportionately young, low income, people of color, raised in single-parent families, with limited education, poor employment skills, and histories of substance abuse. In 1992, African Americans made up the largest segment of California prison inmates (33.5%), followed by Latinos (33.1%), whites (28.9%), and 5.5% from other racial and ethnic groups (CDC, 1995a).[6] According to a new study by the Center for Juvenile and Criminal Justice, nearly two out of every five (39%) young African American men in their twenties (in contrast to five percent of young white men) are presently under some form of criminal justice control in California, representing an increase from 33% in 1990 (Schiraldi et al., 1996).[7]

Women are among the fastest growing group of prisoners, their numbers having tripled nationally since 1980 (Bloom et al., 1994). The number of women incarcerated in California prisons increased nearly eightfold from 1,100 in 1980 to 8,500 in 1995 (CDC, 1995b). Nationally, incarcerated women are more likely than men to be serving time for a drug offense and less likely to have been sentenced for a violent crime. About 60% of incarcerated women grew up in a single-parent household, and over 40% reported prior physical or sexual abuse (USDJ, 1994). Over half the women in California prisons are African American (35%) and Latina (17%) (Bloom et al., 1994). *Seven out of 10 women incarcerated in California are serving time for nonviolent drug and property crimes*; in 1993, one-third were reimprisoned due to parole violations (Bloom, 1995).

The choice to use incarceration as the first line of defense against crime over other alternatives comes at no small price to Californians. During the prison building frenzy of the 1980s, the California Department of Corrections (CDC) expanded its $400 million 1983 budget to a multibillion dollar operation in 1995 to 1996 with 37,000 employees. This growth has come at the expense of other state programs, most notably health, education, and social services. The diversion of resources from health and human services to this most severe form of corrections will continue as "Three Strikes" is implemented.

For the children of parents under some form of correctional supervision — whether arrest, incarceration, parole, or probation — the social, psychological, and economic consequences of present policies will exact profound harm for years and generations to come.

## Children of Parents Involved in the Criminal Justice System

The minor children of parents under some form of criminal justice system control are among the most at-risk, yet least visible, populations of children. Though rising incarceration rates suggest an increasing number of children who have lost one or both parents to incarceration, very little is known about this highly vulnerable population. A 1992 study by the California State Assembly Office of Research (Lawhorn, 1992) reported:

> No precise count exists of the number of children in California who have incarcerated parents. Data on the number, ages, gender, location, or needs of children of incarcerated parents are not collected by the Department of Corrections, the Department of Social Services, or the Department of Education. *These children are not recognized as a group by any state agency or department in California* (emphasis added).

A study by the Virginia Commission on Youth (1992) yielded similar results. The Commission found no information about the number and conditions of children whose parents were incarcerated, or any statewide systems or service models in place to address the needs of children who are affected.

Most of the information known about children of people in the criminal justice system is obtained from surveys of incarcerated populations, the majority of whom — 78% of women and 64% of men — are parents (USDJ, 1994).

- A 1991 study of state prison inmates found that 67% of the women and 56% of the men surveyed were parents of over 826,000 children under 18 years of age (USDJ, 1993).
- A 1989 survey of 5,675 women incarcerated in 424 local jails showed that 68% had a child or children under 18 (USDJ, 1992).
- Six to nine percent of incarcerated women are pregnant when they enter prison (USDJ, 1994; Bloom and Steinhart, 1993), and about 15% have had a baby within the previous year (McCall et al., 1985).
- A 1991 National Council on Crime and Delinquency survey of mothers in jails and prisons in eight states and the District of Columbia found that 439 respondents had an average of 2.6 children each (Bloom and Steinhart, 1993).

Denise Johnston, M.D., with the Center for Children of Incarcerated Parents in Pasadena, California, estimates that nationally about five million children under the age of 18 have one or both parents under some form of criminal justice system supervision (arrest, incarceration, parole, or probation), out of which about 1.5 million have at least one parent who is incarcerated. An additional five million children have parents who are not now under such supervision, but have been in the past. All told, *about 10 million children in the U.S. are affected by current or past parental involvement with the criminal justice system.*[8] Peter Breen, executive director of Centerforce, a nonprofit agency dedicated to serving families of prison inmates, estimates that 350,000 children living in California have lost one or both parents to incarceration.[9]

### Caregivers of Children of Incarcerated Parents

Children's lives are seriously disrupted when a parent is arrested and/or incarcerated. Families of incarcerated fathers are more likely to remain intact than

those of incarcerated mothers. Of the approximately 1.5 million children of U.S. prisoners, about 1.2 million, or 87%, of children of male inmates are in the care of their biological mothers (USDJ, 1993), while only about 20%, or 29,000 children, of incarcerated mothers are in the care of their biological fathers (USDJ, 1993; American Correctional Association, 1990). This leaves over a quarter of a million children of incarcerated parents in the care of grandparents, other relatives, friends, or foster care.

The majority of incarcerated mothers of minor children were the primary caregivers for their children prior to confinement. Studies of prison and jail inmates have found that about 70% of female inmates with children under age 18 had lived with their children prior to incarceration, compared to about 50% of males (USDJ, 1993; 1992).

- A 1991 survey of mothers in jails and prisons in eight states and the District of Columbia found that 17% of children whose mothers were incarcerated were living with their fathers, nearly half (47%) with their grandparents, 22% with relatives or friends, and about 7% had been placed in foster care (Bloom and Steinhart, 1993).
- The 1989 national "Women in Jail" study reported that half the minor children of incarcerated women were living with their grandparents, 23.5% were in their father's care, and 27% were living with other relatives or friends. About eight percent were in foster or other institutional care (USDJ, 1992).

## Custody Issues

In 1991, 10% of women and two percent of men incarcerated in state prisons reported that their children were in a foster home, children's agency, or institution (USDJ, 1993). Unlike most children who enter the child protective services system due to parental neglect or abuse, children of arrested or incarcerated parents become dependents of the juvenile court and are subsequently placed in foster care if no relative is available to provide care for them.[10]

The 1980 federal Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Reform Act (P.L. 96–272) mandates that children who are placed in foster care must either be returned to their parents or placed with long-term guardians within 12 to 18 months. If neither has occurred, parental rights can be terminated by the state. Although this legislation was meant to avoid multiple short-term placements that worsen the disruption for children, parents with sentences that exceed the allowable time may be unable to comply with reunification requirements before or after their release (Barry, 1995). Recognizing this circumstance, many states have held that positive actions on the part of incarcerated parents, such as maintaining contact with children and following reunification plans, can avert termination of parental rights.

However, incarcerated mothers whose children are in foster care must overcome numerous obstacles to maintain their parental rights (*Ibid.*). Children often go through multiple placements, making it difficult for mothers to keep up with their current whereabouts (Kampfner, 1995), a situation that is exacerbated when the social services caseworker does not maintain timely communication with the mother. Distance, lack of transportation, and limited economic resources on the part of the caregiver can become insurmountable barriers for regular or any visitation by children, and are further exacerbated when siblings are separated from each other. Inadequate family reunification services during incarceration, and inability to meet contact requirements and statutory schedules for reunification, put many incarcerated mothers at considerable risk of losing custody of their children (Johnston and Gabel, 1995).[11]

Incarcerated parents whose children are in foster care must rely on the caseworker appointed by social services to help them in the process of reunifying with their children. The caseworker needs to involve the parent in developing a reunification plan and help the parent meet the requirements of the plan. The caseworker also has a vital role in allowing visits by the children and notifying the incarcerated parent about child custody hearings. In practice, however, despite their mandated responsibility to provide assistance, in practice caseworkers may be opposed to the reunification of a parent and child (most often due to the mother's prior child welfare history and/or previous drug history) and thus not communicate with the parent or allow jail or prison visits for the children (Bloom, 1995).

In addition, the courts may be unwilling to permit parents to use incarceration as a reason for failure to provide necessary emotional and material support to their children. Several state appellate court cases have regarded a parent's incarceration to be an aspect of abandonment, and therefore, a reason to terminate parental rights (Muhar, 1991). At least 25 states, including California, have termination-of-parental-rights or adoption laws that specifically pertain to incarcerated parents (Bloom, 1995). Although no studies have systematically examined the extent of this issue, the Center for Children of Incarcerated Parents has found that involuntary termination of parental rights occurs disproportionately among women. About 25% of women offenders whose children participate in the Center's therapeutic programs lost their parental rights (Johnston, 1992). The National Black Child Development Institute (1989) found that from 12 to 18% of terminations of parental rights in African American families occur among incarcerated parents.

Smith (1995) identified several key factors that lead to termination of parental rights:

- Parental incarceration in facilities at very long distances from where the children live, lack of transportation, and limited financial resources of caregivers;

- Overall lack of prison programs and services to assist parents in developing and following a reunification plan;
- Lack of communication and coordination between foster care workers and corrections staff;
- Lack of joint counseling for parents and children to deal with problems and reactions related to the separation;
- Lack of adequate screening, training, and support for caregivers to support the parent-child bond and eventual reunification;
- Lack of legal counseling for incarcerated parents; and
- Systematically excluding incarcerated parents in decisions concerning placement of children, planning for reunification, and case reviews.

## Visitation

Maintaining close family ties during incarceration has been shown to result in decreased recidivism rates, improved mental health of inmates and other family members, increased likelihood of family reunification following release, and greater potential for parole success (Hairston, 1991; Schaefer, 1991). Nevertheless, many incarcerated parents have infrequent or no contact with their children.

The most recent survey of state prison inmates revealed that while most parents of minor children had some form of contact, 28% of mothers and 40% of fathers reported never having called or received a telephone call from their children,[12] 21% of mothers and 32% of fathers never sent or received any mail from their children, and fully 52% of mothers and 55% of fathers were never once visited by their children (USDJ, 1994).

Bloom and Steinhart (1993) found similarly disturbing trends in the frequency of visits from children during the mother's incarceration. Over half (54%) of the 439 mothers in that study reported that their children had *never* visited them in jail or prison. Seventeen percent were visited by their children once a month, 12% every four to six months, and seven percent once a year or less. Only 10% saw their children once or more a week. The distance from the child's residence to the correctional facility accounted for 43% of the reasons cited by mothers for having infrequent or no visits from their children. Fully *61.5% of the children lived over 100 miles from the mother's place of incarceration*. Thirty percent lived 21 to 100 miles away and only nine percent lived within 20 miles of the correctional facility.

Hairston (1989) reported that nearly one-third of the incarcerated fathers she surveyed had not seen their children since entering prison and more than half had not seen their children in the six months prior to the survey. The main reasons given by inmates for the lack of visits were transportation, escort problems, and opposition by the child's mother — this last factor due to the large percentage of incarcerated fathers who report not having an active or ongoing relationship with

the mothers of their children. One study of federal prisoners found that 87% of unvisited fathers chose to relinquish visits from their children out of shame, embarrassment, and feelings of overall powerlessness (Koban, 1983).

This trend is likely to continue, as has been seen in California, as new prisons are built in remote, rural areas, at long distances from the cities where children of incarcerated parents are most likely to live.

## Impact on Children

The cycle of parental crime, arrest, incarceration, release, and recidivism is particularly devastating for children, but no study has as yet directly observed a large sample of these children. Instead, most of what is known is obtained from information provided by the children's incarcerated parents or caregivers. The few studies that have directly examined the children of offenders yield troubling results. Johnston (1995a) found that of the 56 children identified by their teachers as having the most severe behavioral and disciplinary problems at school, 80 to 90% had experienced parental crime, arrest, and incarceration, and 25% had a parent who was incarcerated at the time of the study.

Researchers have documented a variety of behavioral, psychological, and educational problems in children traumatized by the arrest, separation, incarceration, and absence of a parent. The process of forcibly separating children from their primary caregiver generally ignores the emotional needs of children, who feel vulnerable and frightened about losing their parent (Kampfner, 1995), and is further exacerbated for siblings who may have been separated from each other. Caregivers may not allow children to talk about their feelings or tell others about their parent's incarceration. Sometimes, children are not told the truth about where their parent really is (Bloom and Steinhart, 1993). Most children receive little or no emotional support to process their feelings of grief, loss, anger, anxiety, and fear.

Children respond in various ways, including sadness, withdrawal, low self-esteem, excessive crying, depression, diminished school performance, truancy, disciplinary problems, alcohol and other drug use, running away, and aggressive behavior (Sack et al., 1976; Fritsch and Burkhead, 1981; Johnston, 1995b). Many children, including very young ones, blame themselves for the parent's absence (Kiser, 1991). Seventy percent of the children of imprisoned mothers studied by Baunach (1985) were reported to have psychological or emotional problems. The depression, feelings of anger and fear, flashbacks, and "survivor" guilt reported in one study by children of women prisoners have been associated with post-traumatic stress disorder (Kampfner, 1995).

Johnston (1992) identified three characteristics found in most of the children of offenders with whom she has worked: (1) multiple parent-child separations (lack of family support), (2) inadequate quality of care (associated with poverty, multiple placements, etc.), and (3) the stress associated with enduring childhood

trauma (experiencing *repeated,* in contrast to single or occasional, traumatic events).

The cycle of parental crime, arrest, incarceration, release, and recidivism seems to have a cumulative effect that increases as children grow older. According to Johnston (1995a):

- Parental incarceration in the first year of a child's life may prevent the development of parent-child bonding.
- The development of autonomy and initiative in children aged two to six may be compromised by the trauma of witnessing parental arrest and the loss of a parent due to incarceration. "The long-term effects of these experiences may be worse at this stage of childhood...because young children have the ability to perceive and remember traumatic events, but they cannot process or adjust to trauma without assistance..." (p. 74).
- Children ages seven to 10 may have a hard time achieving in school and getting along with others, precipitating aggressive behavior in reaction to experienced trauma.
- While some young adolescents aged 11 to 14 may overcome their parent's absence, poverty, stigma, and multiple placements, many children act out.
- The cumulative effects of parental involvement in the criminal justice system appear in 15 to 18 year olds. "Their experiences have left many with negative attitudes toward law enforcement and the criminal justice system. The parents of many have served multiple jail and/or prison sentences and will not reunify with them. A large but unknown proportion will engage in criminal activity..." (p. 82).

## Intergenerational Trends

As each successive generation of children becomes absorbed into a social process that involves the criminalization of a growing underclass, involvement in the criminal justice system is increasingly becoming part of the family system for many low-income families, particularly in communities of color.

- A U.S. Department of Justice jail study (1992) found that 44% of women and 34.5% of males reported having a close family member who served time in jail or prison.
- Bloom et al. (1994) found that nearly 75% of women incarcerated in California prisons had family members who had been arrested and 63% reported having close relatives who had been incarcerated.
- The American Correctional Association (1990) reported that up to 50% of incarcerated juveniles have a parent who has been incarcerated.

According to the model for intergenerational crime and incarceration developed by the Center for Children of Incarcerated Parents, children exposed to enduring trauma (such as parent-child separation, sexual or physical abuse, or witness to violence) produce emotional responses (sadness, grief, anger) that lead, absent intervention, to reactive behavior (withdrawal, physical aggression, hypervigilance) and become fixed in patterns that help children to cope (fighting with peers, substance abuse, gang activity, promiscuity), ultimately leading to crime and incarceration (Johnston, 1995a).

The growing prison culture observed in many low-income, inner-city neighborhoods plays a big part in assimilating children into what is becoming an intergenerational norm. Anecdotal information provided by veteran prison guards[13] who recalled prisoners whose children and grandchildren have been — sometimes even simultaneously — incarcerated attests to the unraveling of already marginalized families. According to Schiraldi et al. (1996), "as one travels through many inner-city neighborhoods, the contemporary expressions and subculture are increasingly being borrowed from the prison yard, a tangible sign of the 'prisonization' of many communities of color." In other words, children whose parents or other close relatives have experienced criminal justice system involvement are environmentally socialized to follow in their footsteps, just as surely as their more affluent counterparts are prepared for higher education and professional careers.

**Institutional Response to Children of Arrested/Incarcerated Parents**

The complex problems resulting from increasing numbers of arrested and incarcerated parents who are the sole caregivers of young children suggest the need for coordinated, systemwide approaches. Yet, most law enforcement and child welfare agencies lack both awareness of the issues and the means to respond to children following the arrest and/or incarceration of their parents. This conclusion was reached by the American Bar Association (ABA) Center on Children and the Law (1994) from its national study examining how law enforcement and child welfare agencies address the needs of this group of children.

The ABA Children and the Law study found that overall, the agencies responsible for the emergency and long-term placement of children of arrestees lack specific policies, procedures, and interagency coordination:

• *Law enforcement*. The majority of jurisdictions interviewed have no specific policy that police officers follow for emergency child placement following parental arrest, and 43% rarely even ask an arrestee if they have minor children. Nearly half (49%) do not notify any other agency upon the arrest of a mother who is a sole caregiver and 54% are not required to coordinate efforts with notified agencies. Seventy-eight percent said the police are mandated to report the placement only if they suspect the child was abused or neglected.

• *Child protective services*. Only 20% of child protective services agencies interviewed had a specific policy on the placement of children of arrestees. Two-

thirds reported having no formal team approach with local law enforcement with respect to children of arrestees, and 34% believed that the placement needs of children whose mothers were arrested are not being adequately met. Most child welfare agencies, already overwhelmed by increasing numbers of child abuse and neglect cases, lack the resources to meet the needs of children who are not in immediate danger of being abused. Many social worker respondents tended to regard the children of arrested parents as being less at risk than are children who are physically or sexually abused or neglected.

• *Foster care*. A stunning 97% of foster care system respondents reported not having a specific policy on foster care placement of children of arrestees.

Correctional facilities also lack critical information about inmates. According to the most recent Department of Justice inmate study, "*official records are often incomplete, are not easily compared across jurisdictions, and lack crucial personal data*" (USDJ, 1993: 11). This is clear from survey data collected from Departments of Corrections throughout the country, which reveal an enormous lack of information about the needs of female inmates. Out of 43 responding states, 15 had no records on the number of women who were mothers and/or who had dependent children, and 32 had no knowledge about how many children would be living with their mothers upon release (Clement, 1993).

## Interventions

The multiple or recurrent traumatic events that affect children of parents involved in the criminal justice system are rarely addressed. These children typically live in poverty before, during, and after their parents' incarceration, reside in low-quality housing, and lack the means to visit their parents. Johnston (1995c) describes some models designed to address and alleviate the problems that result from parental involvement in the criminal justice system:

• *Crisis nurseries* for very young children, 0 to 6 years of age, are temporary residential care settings, designed to prevent children's exposure to acute trauma such as parental arrest, sudden homelessness, or domestic violence. One such program, the Bay Area Crisis Nursery in Concord, California, provides services for 400 children annually.

• *Crisis intervention counseling* for children following the arrest of a parent can reduce the immediate and long-term negative effects of that experience, as well as provide reliable information about the process in which the parent is involved and referral to sources of ongoing support for family members. No program of this kind currently exists in the U.S.

• *Therapeutic interventions* to help traumatized children master the effects of current and previous traumas and overcome future trauma by improving individual coping skills. The Center for Children of Incarcerated Parents provides community-based therapeutic services for young children of prisoners through its Early Therapeutic Intervention Project.

• *Therapeutic visitation* designed to help reduce the incidence of post-release domestic violence among families of formerly incarcerated parents, and thus reduce exposure of children of those families to that particular source of trauma. Project ImPACT (Importance of Parents and Children Together) has offered these services for the families of men imprisoned at New Mexico's Las Lunas Correctional Facility.

• *Community-based mother-infant correctional programs* to foster maternal bonding, provide a stable placement during infancy and early childhood, and increase the rate of family preservation. The model California Mother-Infant Care (MIC) Program is conducted by private agencies. MIC has seven sites throughout the state that allow pregnant and parenting women sentenced to relatively short terms of incarceration to live with their infants and/or young children up to six years old in community settings.

• *Parent-child visitation programs* held in child-oriented environments in the correctional facility to make visits with incarcerated parents a more positive experience for children. The Prison MATCH Program, started at the Federal Correctional Facility at Pleasanton in 1978 and later moved to the San Francisco County Jail, provides a child-friendly, enriched recreational setting for children to visit with their incarcerated parent for four hours once a week.

• *Children's support groups* that provide social support in a structured setting that is safe for children to express their concerns and to help dispel the sense of shame connected with parental incarceration. The Parents and Children Together (PACT) Program offers age-appropriate Support for Kids of Incarcerated Parents (SKIP) groups in the residential communities that surround Fort Worth Correctional Facility.

## Public Policy

Although reported crime rates have remained fairly stable over the past few decades, public misperception that crime is on the rise has contributed to the development of new mandatory minimum sentencing laws that have led to the increase in incarceration. The sentences now given to nonviolent offenders convicted of property and drug-related offenses are at times harsher than those given to individuals convicted of violent crimes.

In addition, the prevailing focus on the isolated offender systematically disregards the needs and issues of families, making the profound impact children experience even more intense (Bloom, 1995). One result of these interrelated trends is the destruction of often fragile but viable family systems. Some researchers view these trends as an urgent wake-up call:

> ...if compulsive behaviors and criminal activity represent relatively resilient responses to life in poor, violent, chaotic families and neighborhoods, then our society is condemned to incarcerating an ever-increasing number of the people who live in these circumstances, unless we can help

them to reduce the poverty, violence, and chaos in their lives (Johnston, 1995d: 314).

As the trend increases to address crime by building new prisons and jails at the expense of preventing crime through the funding of education, vocational training programs, drug treatment, health care, and other services, the need grows to explore ways of developing public policy that will prevent the destruction of vulnerable family systems (Smith, 1995; Bloom, 1995; ABA, 1994) by:

- Using alternative or creative sentencing instead of imprisonment for primary caregiver parents who were convicted of nonviolent offenses. Options could include restitution, community service, substance abuse treatment, counseling, vocational or educational training, and community-based residential sentencing programs in which parents and children stay together.
- Appropriating funds for parent-child visits whenever an incarcerated parent lived with a child prior to incarceration.
- Screening foster parents for their willingness and ability to be supportive of the parent-child relationship. Training and support services should be available to teach foster parents and the birth parent how to cooperatively co-parent the child. Counseling and support groups should be available for the foster parent(s), child, and birth parent(s).
- Providing high-quality services in prisons, including classes on parenting, family and juvenile law, counseling for survivors of childhood sexual abuse and domestic violence, and vocational and educational programs.
- Making available legal services and representation for incarcerated parents.
- Passing open adoption statutes that allow parents and children to have ongoing contact in the event adoption is used to obtain permanency placement for children whose parents have very long sentences.
- Developing law enforcement and child welfare policies and procedures to meet the needs of children of arrestees.
- Coordinating efforts between law enforcement and child welfare agencies to develop a collaborative, coordinated systemwide approach to meeting the needs of children of arrestees and incarcerated parents.
- Developing correctional practices that allow increased communication or contact between incarcerated parents and their children, including specialized services offered through partnerships between correctional facilities and community agencies, such as mother-infant and mother-child community corrections programs and extended contact visitation programs.

## Conclusion

U.S. policymakers, legislators, and children's advocates know virtually nothing about the approximately 10 million children under the age of 18 whose parents are or have been under some type of criminal justice system control. Although this growing population of children has not yet been formally recognized, many are well known to their teachers as disciplinary problems, to social service caseworkers as foster care placements, to counselors as behavioral problems, and to law enforcement authorities. The increasingly serious behaviors of many of these children tend to be regarded out of context. They are seen as withdrawn or acting out or violent rather than as children reacting to the aggravated stress of multiple separations due to parental arrest, incarceration, and recidivism.

The often cyclical nature of parental involvement in the criminal justice system results in serious and sometimes permanent destabilization of family systems and subjects children to ongoing trauma. Many of these children will themselves follow in their parent's footsteps and repeat the process with their own children. Meanwhile, legislation mandating ever harsher sentencing requirements continues to be passed in a heavily polarized political environment that rhetorically labels those who support creative alternatives for nonviolent offenders as being "soft" on crime. Unchecked, present trends suggest that the increasing criminalization of today's underclass holds an extremely daunting portent for the future of American society.

Like the canaries that served as an early warning about poisoned air, the children of incarcerated parents alert us to the grave consequences resulting from a polluted political environment that sustains these larger trends. It is possible to check the course of present policy development and its intergenerational consequences, but for this we need to learn the lessons these children's lives can teach us. As a first step, the millions of children affected by incarceration need to be identified and acknowledged. Much more direct work with these children and their parents is needed to fully understand their circumstances and to develop meaningful responses. The public must be educated about the families and children who are caught in the "tough on crime" net along with the individual offender, and policymakers must be supported to seek less punitive, more pro-family, community-based alternatives for victimless and nonviolent crimes. Law enforcement, correctional facilities, child welfare service systems, schools, and other community-based agencies need to collaborate in developing coordinated responses to affected children and their families.

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## NOTES

1. Per April 17, 1996, telephone conversation with Data Analysis Unit, Offender Information Services Branch, California Department of Corrections.
2. Per April 17, 1996, telephone conversation with Neil Zin, California Board of Corrections.
3. California's "Three Strikes and You're Out" legislation was enacted in 1994. This law sends a person with two violent or serious prior offenses to prison for 25 years to life when they are convicted of any third felony offense. It is estimated that in 1996 to 1997, one out of every eight offenders sent to prison by the courts will be committed under the Three Strikes law.
4. Two bills introduced in the 1996 California Legislature underscore the extremely punitive aspects of this shift. AB 2044 (Granlund) would require selected prison inmates to perform labor wearing leg irons in chain gang work groups, and SB 1616 (Leonard) would require state prison inmates to perform hard labor wearing leg irons, manually breaking rocks for no compensation.
5. For example, AB 3461 (Brulte) authorizes construction of nine prisons; AB 3116 (Brulte) authorizes construction of four medium/maximum security prisons; AB 3326 (Tucker) and AB 2437 (Poochigian) authorize the construction of one medium/maximum security prison each.
6. According to the 1990 Census, African Americans make up only 7% of California's population, Latinos 25.8%, and whites 57.2%.
7. Vast disparities are found in the arrest, conviction, and sentencing of people of color. The arrest rate for African Americans is four times higher than for whites (California Department of Justice,

1993). African Americans are charged under "Three Strikes" at 17 times the white rate in Los Angeles and 13 times the white rate in San Francisco (Schiraldi et al., 1996). One study showed that one-third of white first offenders had their charges reduced compared to one-quarter of Latinos and African Americans; white first offenders received rehabilitative placements in the community at twice the rate of Latinos and African Americans; Latinos were sentenced to prison for drug offenses at twice the rate for whites; and African Americans received prison sentences one-third more frequently than whites (Schmitt, 1991).

8. Per April 16, 1996, telephone conversation with Denise Johnston, M.D., Center for Children of Incarcerated Parents, Pacific Oaks College, Pasadena, California. Johnston (1995b) has also developed a formula to estimate the number of prisoners' children based on data collected from past studies, wherein 67% of incarcerated women have an average of 2.4 minor children each, and 56% of incarcerated men have an average of two children each.

9. Per telephone conversation with Peter Breen, Executive Director, Centerforce, headquartered at San Quentin, California (December 1995).

10. In California, about nine percent of reports investigated by county Child Protective Services involve "caretaker absence or incapacity," the category used for parents who are absent due to arrest, incarceration, hospitalization, or death (California Department of Social Services, 1994).

11. Pregnant women are also at risk for termination of parental rights when they give birth while incarcerated. Most correctional systems separate incarcerated mothers from their newborns within 24 to 48 hours after birth (Barry, 1995).

12. Communication with an incarcerated parent is limited by the ability of the child's caregiver to afford to pay for collect telephone calls from the parent.

13. Informal interviews conducted by Edward L. Reed with correctional officers at San Quentin State Prison since 1992.

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# How Oakland Turns Its Back on Teens: A Youth Perspective

**Jermaine Ashley, Dawn Samaniego, and Lian Cheun**

*In the course of their summer work as one of the Children and the Environment pilot projects, Youth of Oakland United surveyed 200 youth in Oakland about their concerns and used the results to draft proposals to improve their environment. Their primary proposal was for more teen centers, which they regard as a preventive measure against crime and a positive alternative to incarceration. This article was written by three teenagers at the end of the summer. They then presented it to the Oakland City Council and to high school groups in Oakland. Thus began their organizing within the Oakland youth community for policy changes within the city. With help from local organizers and lawyers, they drafted a ballot initiative known as "Kids First," or Measure K, calling for 2.5% of the city budget, or $6 million over the next 12 years, to be directed toward after-school programs, music, art, tutoring and other services for Oakland youth. They then collected the requisite 50,000 signatures to put the measure on the ballot. The electorate approved Measure K in the November 1996 elections.*

**Seein' It Through My Eyes (by Jermaine Ashley, Age 16)**

Here's a place where right is wrong and wrong is right. Dope runs the streets and those who are supposed to serve and protect are common enemies. Every thing is backwards; then they wonder why there's a loss of respect because it was never given. You have to grow up fast just to keep up with our peers. Stepping out of your house is like stepping into another world. No love, not knowing who you can trust, and at any point in time anything can happen and will happen. But you can't be scared to walk out of your house, can you? *No*! Why? Because I'm a hard young *man*. Why? Because I have to be. It's either be the beast or be eaten by the beast. Elders look at me and think I'm a menace to society, but they do not know I'm doing the best I know how. I tried to get a job. I put in an application. I even got an interview, but no one taught me how to present myself, so that job is down the drain.

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**Jermaine Ashley**, **Dawn Samaniego**, and **Lian Cheun** are members of Youth of Oakland United, which has 100 members and has been involved with multiracial youth organizing throughout Oakland since 1990. It is a project of People United for a Better Oakland (PUEBLO, 132 East 12th Street, Oakland, CA 94606).

A teenager is really new to this world and not prepared for the challenges life will offer, like HIV, herpes, teen pregnancy, peer pressure such as fighting, drugs, sex, and many, many more. Life is not quite real to a youngster yet. I feel a person is as good as his or her company in some ways. If a boy is growing up without a positive influence, he will be negative, not by choice but by nature. In other ways, the environment shapes the young man. Statistics show that the average life expectancy of a young man growing up in Oakland is shorter than the life expectancy of a young man in Piedmont. Some say that Oakland is just full of dumb, crazy people and others say that there's more than meets the eye.

We, in Youth of Oakland United (YOU), have seen a big difference among the schools, neighborhoods, and recreation centers within Oakland. A city that has all nice neighborhoods and other public facilities helps its residents have a better life, while in a city where schools, neighborhoods, and public facilities are bad, residents have more problems. If you take away a person's learning and cage him in neighborhoods with a lack of positive influence, his chance of making it in the real world will be reduced.

We feel that that's where teen centers come in as a start. A lot of our elders like to point fingers and talk down to us as young people today. Now, if that point of a finger were a helping hand and kind words, the situation we have could be better. Not that we're claiming to solve every problem, but we feel if the city helps one, he'll help another, and she'll help another, and *that* will make a difference. Do you understand that kids of today are the rulers of tomorrow? Only investing in us today will make sure tomorrow is a better day.

## Introduction

The boy that was raised by wolves was told he was a wolf
and he thought he was a wolf.
The boy that was raised in the city was told he was a loser
and he thought he was a loser....

## Ignoring the Youth of Today

The City of Oakland has ignored the cries of the youth for a very long time. This is shown through the attempt to implement a curfew that would legally criminalize the youth. The meetings we held with city residents indicated that there were more recreational activities in the 1970s. With the cutbacks on recreational activities sponsored by the city, many of the young turned to activities that are deemed inappropriate or even illegal.

Youth of Oakland (YOU) is a multiracial youth organization that is helping Oakland youth voice their concerns on issues that directly affect them. YOU members between the ages of 14 to 19 have organized around issues like the

nutrition programs in schools and, more recently, the proposed Oakland teen curfew. This summer we have come together to demand the improvement of recreation centers and programs for teens.

Preventive measures such as recreational programs that accommodate the needs of youth have proved successful in cities such as Phoenix, Arizona, Fort Myers, Florida, and Newark, New Jersey. The Trust for Public Land reported that in Phoenix juvenile crime decreased by 55% when recreational facilities stayed open until 2:00 A.M. in the summer. In St. Petersburg, Florida, juvenile arrests declined by almost one-third after the city began a youth academics and recreational program. In Newark, a once abandoned recreation center is now being used by 5,000 youth a month; crime has decreased since the city renovated it. These programs benefit the youth by offering positive role models, raising self-esteem, decreasing crime in an uplifting way, and providing alternatives to incarceration. *Allocating money for positive alternatives to incarceration must be a top priority of the City of Oakland.*

## Our Research

### *Crisis in Teen Programs*

Oakland may seem like a place with different sights and activities for everyone. However, when it comes to youth programs, the city seems to hide the fact that youth are ignored. This summer, YOU surveyed almost 300 youth between the ages of 14 and 19 at summer schools, on the streets, in parks, and at recreational centers. We found that the majority of youth feel that there are too few activities for them, especially for teenagers. Because of age restrictions, youth are not allowed to do many things, such as go to clubs, dances, and other evening events, and are limited to only a few kinds of activities.

In fact, most of the youth interviewed expressed feelings like, “Whenever I go somewhere, it is always in another city because the stuff in Oakland is always hecka messed up.” They feel that they have to go outside Oakland to have real fun, because there’s nothing to do here. For example, they go to Berkeley, Richmond, or San Francisco to hang out with friends at arcades, shopping malls, or public places where adults hang out, too. The shopping malls in Oakland are run-down and most of the stores are closed, or there is nothing to buy. Many who like movies said that there were not enough movie theaters in Oakland, especially after the theater at Eastmont Mall closed down. There is no place in Oakland that stays open late enough for teens to hang out together. There are not enough fairs and festivals to keep young people busy. As a result of all these things, we’ve seen many of our friends always doing something bad instead of positive things. The results of the surveys overwhelmingly showed that there’s a great need for organized youth programs in Oakland.

*Problems with Existing Centers*

Oakland does have several teen centers, but they serve less than 200 teens each day, less than one percent of the city's 36,000 teenagers. According to the youth, there are many good reasons that they do not attend these centers. First, many feel that the centers are no longer safe for them to attend. Many centers do not have a safe, well-maintained, well-lit environment, and an inviting ambiance. Safety and the maintenance of the facilities are reasons why youth do not attend these centers. For example, some recreational centers are always so dark and scary looking that the youth don't want to attend. At some centers there are people hanging around that young people are afraid of.

Second, youth said that the "good" recreation centers, like Brookfield and Arroyo Viejo, are too far away from their homes. Likewise, teen centers are not always located where teens are. They are spread out and young people don't want to take public transportation. They feel that taking the bus takes too much time and costs too much money. For example, we visited Acorn recreational center and the youth there said that they don't want to go to the teen center at deFermery. They feel that they should not have to travel the distance when they have a center that could be improved nearby. If the center is not near my house, why should I bother going through all of that way to get there?

Third, many teens feel the programs the centers currently offer do not interest or excite: they do not meet their needs. Most of the programs are for children under the age of 12. When the recreation centers do have trips, the youth have to pay and many people don't have money.

Fourth, some centers are in such bad condition that they remain empty. For example, Mosswood does not have the right equipment to attract more youth and the equipment they do have is of poor quality. Sanborn recreation center does not even have a basketball court, so those interested in playing basketball must make their own out of a pole and use a round piece of steel for a hoop. This is kept up in a garbage can.

Fifth, publicity about existing programs does not bring in that many youth. Many of the youth said that they don't even know what the teen centers are about or what programs they offer. Youth never hear about the few good programs that do exist at the teen centers.

*Lots of Talk, But No Money*

Many of these problems stem from the lack of money. Our research showed that when the City Council told Parks and Recreation to open teen centers, they didn't give them adequate funds to run the centers. The Council told them to make the centers out of what they already had.

The city doesn't give successful centers, like East Bay Asian Youth Center (EBAYC) and Centro del Juventud, any money. In fact, the City of Berkeley gives

EBAYC $500,000 to run their program in that city, while Oakland gives them nothing to operate the same program here. Oakland gives no money to youth organizations.

When we interviewed center directors, they said money is needed for staffing in order to provide a safer environment with more programs for youth. Many teen centers are understaffed, as they have only a few full-time staff members. If they want to have any programs, they need to raise their own money. It's very difficult to attract teens to a program if that program doesn't have a budget or adequate facilities.

*Teens Lack Real Power*

In addition, though the teen programs do have an advisory council, the teens don't have direct voice in the major decisions affecting the center. They don't control any of the budget, the staffing, the hours of operation, or anything like that. As a result, all of the decision-making for the recreation centers is done by adults. Why should adults be telling recreational centers what the youth want? Youth should be able to take part in the decision-making process so we can have the programs we want.

## Recommendations

*Vision for Teen Centers*

Teens want flexible, not rigidly structured, programs, plus activities that meet their needs and with which they are comfortable. Because teens usually will not engage in new activities that make them look foolish, they need programs that they can, at their discretion, slowly engage in. YOU conducted several focus groups — in-depth discussions with small groups of youth on what programs would attract them to a teen center. The following is a description of the programs suggested by the focus groups.

Youth want organized tournament leagues with prizes to attract teens to the centers. Centers should have adequate staffing and equipment to provide midnight intramural sports games. Youth want quality equipment and facilities that include good courts, posters, paint, and a lounge area for inside.

Recreational centers should provide alternative activity trips to amusement parks, excursions, and camping programs that let youth explore nature and get out of the city. Pool tables, dominoes, cards, arcade games, board games, books, and magazine subscriptions are necessary to attract youth and give them fun activities to do. So, too, are dance parties with DJs, with food and drink funded through the admission price. Recreation centers can rent out gyms to provide shows, parties, and performances. The performances can include plays, singing, dancing, etc. The availability of a VCR and a television can provide entertainment and education.

Youth need college and GED preparation programs and tutoring to supplement school programs that are insufficient. Offering classes on how to receive grants,

scholarships, and financial aid for college will give youth more opportunities. Also helpful would be job training classes that include job interview preparation, vocational training, and paid internships. Providing culturally appropriate programs such as political science and history will create political and cultural awareness in youth. Centers could also have music classes that include playing instruments and singing, allowing youth to explore the arts, which is not possible in public schools.

*Counseling and Mentoring*

Community-based peer counseling and conflict resolution are needed to provide both alternatives to violence and comfortable relations between youth. Confidential counseling on health issues like teen pregnancy, sex, STDs, AIDS, drugs, and gang prevention should be provided by our peers, from our perspective. All of these are rare and not geared toward teens.

*A Role in Decision-Making*

The major citywide problem is that youth lack an active role in the decision-making process in programs that affect them. In particular, we recommend the following:

> *Citywide*, we advocate the creation of a Youth Development Department that will work with other city and county agencies and community organizations to meet the needs of youth, especially housing, drug rehabilitation, job training, teen centers, etc. An "open house" fair or festival should be held at each center on the same day to attract youth so that publicizing the available programs and activities at the centers is made easier and less expensive.
>
> *At individual teen centers*, we believe that all policies directed toward teens must incorporate the concerns and solutions of youth. Teens should be hired from the community to work on staff and coordinate teen events to create more job opportunities for the youth. Center staff should be enthusiastic about working with and relating to youth. Centers should be open late. Recruitment, outreach, and publicity should be aggressive and youth-designed; it should be broadcast over television and radio, and flyers should be posted. The facilities should have peer conflict mediators to maintain a safe environment by resolving conflicts without violence.

## Conclusions

Youth raised in the inner city are constantly bombarded with negative images, from the liquor stores on every block, to tobacco advertisements and "Just Say

No!" signs. All of these show us that society has no hope for us. The majority of the youth interviewed say that there are not enough activities in Oakland. The lack of funding for teen programs perpetuates the low self-esteem of youth, who then turn to activities that are illegal or seen as unsuitable. The programs mentioned in this proposal can potentially boost youth moral by redirecting their energy into creative and constructive avenues, rather than destructive ones. Centers, in general, should provide safe havens for youth.

The recreation centers in Oakland look bad by comparison with those in other cities like Piedmont or Berkeley. With so many teens, there are not enough activities to accommodate the youth. There are more than 36,000 teens in Oakland and there are not enough places for youth to go.

The City Council of Oakland simply is not in touch with youth ideas and needs for recreation, or their presence in general (except when it comes to crime and the police). If they were, they would fund more programs for teens. That is something we aim to change.

# Children's Rights and the Building Of Democracy: A Dialogue on the International Movement for Children's Participation

**Roger Hart and Michael Schwab**

**Michael**: You've been working on children's participation for many years now, and you've been all over the world meeting groups of kids who are working together to improve their own conditions. In your writing, you give considerable emphasis to the value of this work in democratizing children. Would you say that most of the people you've met think of their programs that way?

**Roger**: Many of the programs I've observed are in the "developing world" — I prefer to call it "the South" — and most of them make a link between the way they work and the way they feel their society should be developing — democratically. In the U.S., it's different. We have such an orthodox and narrow view of what it means to be democratic that many of the more progressive groups I know would not want to be associated with any commonly understood use of the term democracy! For example, as we speak, all over the country, kids are doing mock elections, pretending to be President Clinton and Vice President Gore or their challengers; what a wasted opportunity. They should be having elections about things that they know lots about, namely, their own lives and the lives of their schools, real democracy. That's what they do in the "New Schools" of Colombia, for example. This mock democracy, mock elections, it's a way of playing safe, to avoid getting into some of the tricky and morally challenging issues of local politics that one faces in genuine democratic process. I suppose much of the problem is that in the U.S., we have come to think of democracy as electoral representation. While the nation loudly proclaims itself as a democratic model for

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the world, it has in fact lost touch with its democratic origins — with the idea of each person having a voice.

**Michael**: "Real Democracy," that's an interesting theme. There are projects in quite a few countries that might qualify as really democratic. You mention the New Schools in Colombia, and I want to discuss those with you. But first, how would you characterize this broader democratic movement with children?

**Roger**: Well, most of what I've learned has been through visiting nongovernment organizations who are working with what UNICEF calls "children in especially difficult circumstances." That's a euphemism for a diversity of children: those who are separated from their families, who are living or working on streets, or exploited in child labor, in prostitution, or perhaps living in red light districts as children of prostitutes, and so on. The term also includes children in war-torn situations, though I have not visited any of these programs. Many of these children now work with adult facilitators and *animators* on their rights and learn to have a voice. As a result, there is probably a much higher percentage of those kinds of children learning about rights and democratic skills than of children living in stable and economically viable families.

In many countries, the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* has become a very important organizing tool for facilitators working with children who live in difficult circumstances. Unfortunately, most other children are not learning about it. In the U.S., of course, the Convention is not even being used with children in difficult circumstances, because it has not been ratified in the U.S. and most facilitators and teachers don't even know about it. As you know, the U.S. is the only major country that hasn't ratified the Convention. In contrast, in countries such as Colombia, Brazil, and the Philippines, it has been a major tool for improving children's lives, and the children seem to be a major focus of debates about democratization. Within the children's movements in those countries, the Convention is not only a powerful instrument for the advocates of children, but also for children themselves.

**Michael**: What did you find in Brazil?

**Roger**: Well, Brazil is I think the example *par excellence*. There is a very strong popular movement there for the education and empowerment of the poor, which developed under the years of dictatorship mostly among radical educators, many of whom were associated with the Church. One important educational theorist whom many North Americans are familiar with was Paulo Freire, though there were other writers who have not been translated. During the dictatorship, many democratic poor communities were quietly working on local direct democracy, so after Brazil declared itself a democracy in 1989, there were a lot of people who were ready. I wrote in the UNICEF essay, "Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship," about how street workers and groups of street working children came from all over Brazil to Brasilia to have their voices heard by congressmen as the new constitution was being debated.

**Article 12**

1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.

**Article 13**

1. The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing, or in print, in the form of art, or thorough any other media of the child's choice.
2. The exercise of this right may be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary:
   a. For respect of the rights or reputations of others; or
   b. For the protection of national security or of public order (*ordre public*), or of public health or morals.

**Article 14**

1. States Parties shall respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion.
2. States Parties shall respect the rights and duties of the parents and, when applicable, legal guardians, to provide direction to the child in the exercise of his or her right in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child.
3. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals, or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.

**Michael**: It sounds the way you've put it that the initiative was coming from adults in that particular case, although they found children ready and willing.
**Roger**: Well, yes, adult facilitators play an important role in animating children and presenting opportunities to them. But we must also remember that children who make their living on the streets often have a lot of ability to think and act independently. What they often need is more skill in how to cooperate with one another. Nevertheless, they have community and they've found ways of helping each other survive on the street. When you meet these kids, they often seem very strong and forthright. As important as it is to work with these children, it is saddening to learn that there are so many more children living in difficult

circumstances who are hidden from view and have no voice at all: children in various kinds of industrial slavery and girls in domestic slavery all over the world.

It is wonderful to walk alongside a good street worker and see how they allow children to come to them. It often begins with something like — "Do you want to come and join us? We do some fun things." From this, they slowly bring them into a culture where they share more. It is a fascinating process. The different ways street workers do it is an interesting story in itself. Some of the best street workers are a composite of cultural anthropologist, child psychologist, and brother or sister. From them, children discover how they can improve their own lives and work with others to improve their collective lives. After a while, they begin to see that there's even a chance for them to work for the lives of other kids like themselves. That's where, again, the pedagogy of people like Freire is so important. Freire is very clear about how and when children are pulling themselves out of their condition; they must always be reminded by the adult facilitators to look back at the ones they're leaving behind. Otherwise, the oppressed become the oppressors. That's the way Freire puts it, and that's the way most street workers I have met in Brazil think of it.

**Michael**: You make it sound like a national movement.

**Roger**: It is a national movement, part of a popular political movement, though I should admit that I have mainly visited the nongovernment organizations identified by UNICEF, so I have a biased view. No doubt it would look less like a national movement if I saw a cross-section of NGOs.

**Michael**: Is the situation similar in the Philippines?

**Roger**: There are some important similarities between the two countries. They've both got local street workers who are constantly trying to improve their own democratic practice with their groups, and one of the ways they both do this is through exchange between street workers. They meet and discuss process. They also actually switch roles; for two or three weeks they work in each other's organizations. That's an important role that the NGO coalitions offer. Communication can make a big difference. There has also been considerable correspondence and exchanges of experience between Brazil and the Philippines in their work with children in difficult circumstances. For example, Teresita Silva, who coordinates a network of NGOs in Manila, visited Brazil a number of times to learn from Brazil and brought the lessons back. She also fostered exchanges between the two countries.

There is more and more of that South-South exchange going on now with people learning from one another. As a result, the Philippines, like Brazil has local municipal-level meetings between elected child representatives of the different street children's groups who go on to island level and then national meetings of street and working children. Every year there is a National Congress of Street and Working Children in Manila that meets for a week and presents issues that have come from their peers at each of their small groups. They

ultimately decide upon two or three issues that the children bring to the Philippine Congress. That model is similar to the one in Brazil.
**Michael**: Can you give an example of issues either in Brazil or the Philippines that moved from the local level to the national level?
**Roger**: Yeah, a nice one I saw being developed through skits by the children was the problem of people taking the wrong drugs inside low-income communities. You know, a person gets up in the middle of the night and there is probably no electricity. They go to the cupboard and pull out medicine. It's in the wrong bottle because people get small amounts of medicine or they share medicines and put them in whatever bottle they've got. In this way, they take the wrong drugs and they're in trouble. There are people that are kind of swapping medicines with each other and making do. So these kids said, "This isn't fair. We need pharmacies in our communities." They made a presentation to the National Congress that resulted in new legislation for the distribution of pharmacies in low-income neighborhoods of the Philippines. Now, I haven't followed that through to see where it's gone, but this is happening at a high enough level that when these promises are made, the press of the Philippines is following it. That's a very important part of the movement. The press is working alongside the children's participation movement. That's true in Brazil, too, where children's rights issues are on the front page of the newspapers with stories of children doing things like this. It's a very exciting movement and the press is really crucial.
**Michael**: Do the children themselves learn how to use and work with the media?
**Roger**: Sometimes, but the media need awareness training on this issue — to stop them from being so damned patronizing with children. You know, they're constantly pretending, "Kids did this and kids did that," and writing it up as though kids did it all by themselves and we all know it's a lie and they do it just to make good, cute stories.
**Michael**: We need to educate the press about children's participation.
**Roger**: Yeah, it's very important for them to learn to be critical, so they understand when they see a process that is either exaggerating or not really recognizing children's genuine competencies. They don't need to exaggerate, and hence patronize, children's efforts, but rather to report it honestly and just as critically as they would adult projects.
**Michael**: Can you also give an example in Brazil of an issue that the kids have taken on?
**Roger**: Well, I've already described some of the process of children's involvement in writing the constitution of Brazil. They brought to Brasilia a critical evaluation of the *Convention on the Rights of Children* by children from all over Brazil who had been through the Convention and identified issues that were particularly important to them. One of these was the way children were forcibly removed from the streets and incarcerated. We hear so much about the right-wing killings in the North American press, but on the positive side, the police can no

longer sweep the streets clean of children. The battle is not finished, of course. It is one thing to have things in law and another to get all the judges throughout the country to follow it. There is a very strong movement in Brazil for the defense of children.

**Michael**: This is a movement of adults...

**Roger**: Yes, a movement of adults...

**Michael**: ...with children?

**Roger**: Well, yes, and that's what makes it different. It's a movement with the public. It is connected to a broader popular movement, which is a movement of the poor. It is led by advocates for children, many of whom are trained street workers and many of whom are lawyers. What they are most vigilant about is watching the judges. They watch the court cases to see how they play out, provide legal services to children, and communicate from state to state and city to city about the progress of children's rights as the Brazilian Constitution and the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* are turned into law at the local level.

**Michael**: So it's a children's participation movement rather a children's movement?

**Roger**: Well, it's both: a movement for, and with, children; it also involves the press and lawyers to a great degree. So there are some important actors beyond the facilitators of children's participation. We need the lawyers and the press, too.

**Michael**: From what I've seen in Europe and here in the U.S., there is potentially also a lot of support among parents. Most of the children's participation in these countries is with kids living at home, often in very difficult circumstances — poverty, violence, drugs, and so on — but with at least one parent, usually the mother, living with the kids. These mothers are often very supportive of their children's involvement in positive community activity.[1] Then there are projects involving more stable families, where parents are in a position to organize themselves quite easily around the children's issues. For example, I was recently in Germany and met an adult — not a street worker, but what you would call an *animator* — who was working with a group of children on an urban planning project. This was in a small town in the Ruhrgebiet, an area that used to be heavily mined, but where the mines are now closed, and there is a lot of development going on. They are putting grass on top of the slag heaps and redesigning communities. This animator had worked with the children, using clay and various other materials, to model the kind of town they would like to live in. As the kids' ideas formulated, and the model grew, parents and neighbors got involved. They liked what the kids were proposing. What the kids were saying is, "We want the cars on the outside of town." The parents and others came to their support and said, "That's right. Why don't we do that? Why must we always have cars in the middle of town." By the time they reached the planners, they had a community-wide movement of adult and children.

**Roger**: Yes, in many of the projects that I've seen in developing countries, kids are catalysts for community action. When the kids aren't in families — often they

are removed from their communities — they have to first work to safeguard their own lives. In the best projects, though, these kids will quickly come to work with the larger community, as with *El Programa Muchacho Trabajador* (The National Program of Working Children) in Ecuador.[2]

**Michael**: How would you say children who are living in families and going to school can become active proponents of the Convention?

**Roger**: A common idea is that kids be stimulated in school programs — you know this from the health world — and be told to carry health messages home. But you take that one step further and instead of carrying one-way messages, the kids carry home issues to discuss with their parents. I would love to see that happening generally with the Convention all over the world. You know, we all act as though the Convention is something everybody's agreed on, but in fact, it is a very controversial document and to many there are large parts of it that are really unacceptable. To educate kids about the Convention and not deal with the way their parents think of it is unacceptable. We do need processes for these children who live in families to bring their families into the discourse.

**Michael**: You have visited the Escuelas Nuevas in Colombia, where the children are given the time and space to research community issues, to interact with the adults who are actually managing their environment, and begin to participate in making decisions. Tell us about them.

**Roger**: The Escuelas Nuevas in Colombia started 19 years ago in Caldas, the richest coffee grinding region in the world, where every inch is used to grow coffee. For part of the year, kids would be working long hours in the fields, and the schools were empty. It just wasn't a relevant school system. So they started from scratch with the parents to work out what a new relevant school system would look like. With the help of UNICEF and UNESCO funding, they developed a school system that not only has some of the best qualities from systems in other countries, but is also democratic. The schools were organized with the participation of children, in a representative democratic way, at every age level, beginning when they entered school at six. Community service was a fundamental part of the curriculum. In the U.S., community service is voluntary and is so often perceived as what the goody-goody kids do, rather than something fundamental to education. In the Escuelas Nuevas, each child has to help plan and organize a community project. The kids don't have textbooks in the official sense of the word; they have the kind of documents that María Espinosa describes, which are books that require kids to do research. The teachers are resource people, who help the children carry out their research; but the children are in charge of their studies. Training is very important, because to put children in charge is a very threatening transformation of a teacher's role.

Teacher training is also difficult. In Colombia, they found the best way to do it is horizontally, with teachers supporting teachers. So you set up a new Escuela Nueva, with a number of other schools around it, and the teachers all meet at the

same school once a week. They share with each other the problems about feeling disempowered now that their children have been empowered! This is a big issue — to transform a teacher-centered classroom into a child-centered one. But there have been many evaluations to show how successful this transition often is, and now many South American and African countries are building upon the "Escuelas Nuevas" model. It is wonderful to see the southern hemisphere looking at itself and learning from itself, instead of adopting ideas from the North. Now, the northern nations need to become open to learning from the South!

Most of the Escuelas Nuevas in Colombia are in rural areas. There are now a few in the city of Bogotá, and it remains to be seen how successfully they will be. What is different in a rural area is that you have got local parent support — again, the parents — and a relatively homogeneous culture: these make it easier to transform a school in radical ways.

Not only are the classes democratically organized, but the farm committee, the worm committee, and the fish farm committee are also all managed by children. They are elected in a campaign that is run like a traditional election campaign. In some schools this happens every three months!

In the Hojas Anchas school, which I visited, I asked about democratic process and it was clear that the children understand the parallel between the system at school and the one in the town. They know they are not only preparing themselves for participating as adult citizens, they are also participating right now. If they've got issues that really relate to the town, they bring their questions to the local *junta* (like "selectmen") community. They will actually stand up and speak and say, "You know, we now need some more money for our fish committee, because we feel we need to dig a new pond and it requires this kind of expense."

They organize themselves with boys and girls equal in all things. For example, in another school I met some 13– and 14-year-old boys on the school farm committee, and the president of their committee was a girl, 10 years of age. In my experience, it's unusual for teenage boys to pick a girl as being president of their committee, but they explained to me. "The thing is that she is more experienced in this area, she's really involved in it," and they felt she could do the best job of bringing the boys together. It seems to me that in the schools I visited there was equal responsibility between girls and boys at all age levels in managing projects.

**Michael**: This kind of ecological education that doubles as participation in community life — it's far away from American mainstream education, or the national curriculum they now have in Britain.

**Roger**: It wasn't always like that. In the United Kingdom, throughout the 1960s and 1970s, we had a different kind of government that allowed this kind of initiative to develop. It was an important phase of development for us to learn from. Much of my understanding of it comes from discussions with Colin Ward, who was a prime mover in the movement. He was the education director of the Town and Country Planning Association, and from this stronghold he was able to

establish a movement for inspiring geography and social studies teachers to become "environmental studies" teachers. He encouraged them to get kids to evaluate their community, focusing on problems that the children themselves identified. Colin argued that to become responsible citizens in the environment, children needed to observe it, critique and evaluate it, and act to change it. He expanded what had been going on in Britain in "rural studies" and "nature studies" for years, and brought it to cities. He took the idea of field work and turned it into "street work," and took the idea of field study and turned it into "urban study." He also took the idea of rural study centers and nature study centers and turned them into "urban study centers."

Urban study centers became a model to involve children in investigating their environment. They were not physically based in schools, but were used by the schools. They are similar in some ways to the "alternative spaces" in Ecuador, except that children from a larger region were involved and they came as members of school groups. The environment they focused on included green spaces, but it was equally about housing, recreation, crime, and other issues of the human environment. The children had access to aerial photographs, surveying instruments, photographs, video equipment, maps — whatever they needed to document neighborhood problems that they thought needed to be investigated. Over many years, the urban study centers were able to redocument the environment, to show how the community was changing. So the urban study center model is a research effort that school teachers facilitate, but which includes the children's point of view.

**Michael**: How come all this happened in Britain?

**Roger**: I can think of at least four reasons why children's participation happened in community development in Britain in the 1970s. One was that British schools, at the elementary level at least, had become extremely child-centered. The elementary schools were self-consciously trying to make themselves follow the implications of developmental psychology, which said that children develop best when they are allowed to construct their own lives and learn best when they construct their own learning. It wasn't just the upper-class schools that were progressive in this way, like in the U.S.; it was common across the country in the 1970s.

So that's one major factor. Another one was that the government mandated public participation in planning, and one of the ways they achieved this was to allow education offices in each of the local government environmental planning departments to work directly with the schools. They could have done their school business in a traditional way, like policemen and firemen lecturing to the kids, and some of them apparently did this. But many of them did it in a more active way by involving teachers and children in research for local planning projects.

Third, it has long been a tradition in British schools to go outdoors to directly do "nature study," and beginning in the 1960s, more broadly, "environmental

studies." This was much less the case in the USA. The progressive schools, including those inspired by John Dewey, were about the active involvement of children and democracy *within* the school. They did not generally reach out into the larger community. They tried to do microcosms of democracy. It is interesting to note that John Dewey did not write about the environment in children's education, whereas Friedrich Froebel, who so influenced him and other European educational philosophers, did. So there is a long tradition of kids going out into the environment and bringing their learning into the classroom that was less a part of education in the U.S.

Finally, there was the influence of the tiny Education Unit within the British Town and Country Planning Association, headed by Colin Ward. He had already written quite a lot about public participation and about people taking greater control over their own environment. He was a student of the so-called grandfather of planning, Patrick Geddes. Geddes believed in public participation in planning, and Colin Ward found a new way of achieving this, through children. The education unit of the Town and Country Planning Association saw schools, and particularly geography teachers, as a major way of improving public involvement in planning. A major instrument for achieving this was the monthly magazine, the *Bulletin for Environmental Education* (now *Streetwise*),[3] which is packed with practical accounts of involving children in environmental research. Another highly effective strategy was for schools to work closely with planning officers from local government planning department, something made possible by the government mandate for public participation. Since the 1970s, many U.S. leaders have worked to involve their children in field research on the environment, but it has largely been on the "green" issues of the environmental movement; it rarely involves such important urban environmental issues as housing and recreation space planning.

**Michael**: And today?

**Roger**: The urban study center idea has been largely erased and I believe that the Conservative ideology that has reintroduced individual competition into the schools as the strategy for excellence and economic performance in the nation has eroded community research by children. We will need to wait a few years to hear again the cries of those asking how children are to become caring, cooperative, democratically skilled citizens of a civil society!

**Michael**: So if you take the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* seriously, it may be that children's organizations, outside the school setting, are more likely to help children play a really democratic role in their own lives.

**Roger**: Yes, certainly right now in the U.K. that's true. The people who are trying to bring the Convention forward in Britain are youth workers working with kids, mostly underprivileged kids. They are working from the same principle — which I think is the most effective way to make the Convention work — to allow children to be what the South Americans call the "protagonists of their own rights," that is,

to let them know their rights so they can speak about them and become active for them. There are many nongovernment organizations in the U.K. that are active in promoting children's rights. One of them is called "Article 12." They have named themselves after Article 12 of the Convention. This organization is made up of young adolescents who speak out about children's rights and try to carry that message to other children. They are very self-consciously trying to get a movement going for children's voices.

**Michael**: Again, I'm asking myself, is this a "children's movement"? Do the kids feel some ownership of it?

**Roger**: When we are talking about street children in Brazil and the Philippines, yes. I think many of them feel they are part of a movement and they feel a real ownership of the issues. But most other projects I've seen around the world begin with an assumption by adults that kids should do something in particular. Once you've said that to the kids, it's already too late, you've narrowed their view. One needs to gather them together to do whatever they want — for example, to understand the Convention and act from it. That would be a valid thing for any organization that claims to be a children's organization to do, from the Boy Scouts, to a youth club, to a group of delinquents living in care. I'm thrilled to hear, for example, that the Episcopalian Church in the U.S. is now promoting the Convention with children's groups in their churches.

**Michael**: It is disturbing that the U.S. hasn't yet ratified the Convention. It reminds me of the *International Code on the Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes* in the 1980s, which again the U.S. did not ratify — basically because the formula manufacturers didn't like it. One of the most vocal groups working to advance the Code in the U.S. has been the church. Perhaps the same could happen with the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*.

**Roger**: Well, very few people know about the Convention in this country to even push for it. Those who do haven't been trying very hard because they think it's a hopeless cause, because of the power of the right wing. As a result, we have so far heard more about "parent's rights" than children's rights. My own feeling is that the participation articles of the Convention are too visionary for most parents; the U.S. has already gone so far down the road of what it thinks is permissive child rearing that anything about children having a greater voice will be seen as moving in the wrong direction. The current dominant mood seems to be in the opposite direction. The tendency is rather to bemoan the unruliness of children and to blame it on lack of discipline, a lack of moral uprightness, that can only be corrected by an increase in "the rod," or at least an increase in adult authority. This has already happened to some extent in Europe. It is a misreading of the Convention, of course, because it doesn't prescribe any reduction of adult authority. Rather, it recognizes a deeper way of achieving that authority — through mutual respect and dialogue. We've got a big uphill battle, however, because all over the world families tend to be authoritarian. In the U.S., we've got the extra problem that most adults think

that children already have too much of a voice. Actually, what they probably have is too much freedom and not enough honesty and genuine open dialogue. The distinction between authoritative and authoritarian parenting, which developmental psychologists often use, is relevant here. Unfortunately, we have much more permissive and authoritarian parenting than authoritative parenting.

**Michael**: Maybe American parents would find the French model for children's participation more attractive — the children's councils, which are set up to mimic the adult democratic process. In France, there is a national network of Children's and Youth Councils.[4] The kids are often elected through the schools, but the councils function independently of the schools. They have some latitude in what issues they work on. Some have been quite successful in getting their ideas onto the agenda of the adult municipal councils in their towns. The oldest council I know of, in Schiltigheim, has been going for 20 years now, and I think there are currently something like 600 around the country, which is quite a staggering thought. They have a national association (Association National de Conseils d'Enfants et de Jeunesse), and the idea seems to be catching on in the European Community. There are councils in Germany now, and Italy, and Denmark. What is your impression of this trend?

**Roger**: I have only seen these councils active in Northern Italy, and I am very interested in this movement. I hope it will soon establish self-critical and comparative evaluation procedures so that we can learn what its strengths and weaknesses are. One criticism I've heard is that these councils tend to be made up of the articulate school achievers. If the prevailing school structure does not foster the open participation of all children, one cannot expect it to suddenly produce democratic representatives. Even if there are elections, they are going to be kind of fake elections if they only involve those few kids who have somehow already learned that they are the kids who are likely to be listened to; those who are already disenchanted will be excluded. Another criticism is that the councils only deal with a narrow spectrum of school issues. One of the things that so impressed me about the New Schools of Colombia is how wide a range of issues can be managed democratically with children. By making democratic involvement into a general school practice, they don't have to worry about involving only a select group of children. We need to go beyond the idea of children's councils as a special kind of activity, and hence, probably, a media event. We need to think of them as absolutely basic to the functioning of a democracy and to children's daily experience.

**Michael**: That is certainly something to work toward, but I'm inclined to see advantages to lesser forms of participation, too. There is a spectrum of degrees and kinds of participation. You've adapted Arnstein's ladder of participation, from tokenistic manipulation on the lowest rung of the ladder and shared decision-making with adults at the top (see Hart, 1992). Children's councils, community organizations that are led by kids, and other organizations that involve children in

some decisions, but not others, all seem to me to have their pros and cons. That is where evaluation would help us — to understand the pros and cons. Even these high profile media events, like the Children's Forums organized by the United Nations Environment Program, could be said to have their plus side. Some of the kids in our community action projects in California went to one of those international forums. They were deeply moved at meeting young people from all over the world, hearing them talk about their issues. The whole experience broadened their horizons, gave them hope and encouragement. Of course, these kids were also doing their own research in their communities — I don't know how many other participants in the conference were — so they also had the kind of everyday experience of designing and conducting community work that you're talking about.

**Roger**: Yes, large conferences can be vulnerable, but typically those single events — like a forum, conference, or town meeting — are based on little or no ongoing substantial participation in anything. I've observed that the child advocates and facilitators who take part in these events tend to focus on achieving democratic processes during the event, and much less so on the everyday institutional context and the processes leading up to the event. One must focus on regular functioning; then the special events will be a natural, authentic by-product rather than a token democratic aberration.

**Michael**: That is what you describe as happening in Brazil and the Philippines. But it is not the democracy that we have in this country, or just about any so-called democratic country that I know of.

**Roger**: If we had to think that what we have now is the model to follow, I wouldn't bother wasting my time! Presumably we are doing this kind of work because we believe that in the 21st century we will be developing something that looks more democratic than what we have today.

**Michael**: What we're talking about would mean profound changes in the way that adults behave in relation to children. It would mean acknowledging them as fully sentient beings, with their own valid experience. That's the implication of the Convention — that children, even babies, feel and see and know something about how life is, or how it ought to be, from the way we bring babies into the world, and the way parents and teachers *are* with children, to the way we design schools, cities, our whole society. We're talking about a new kind of respectful, attentive relationship.

**Roger**: Yes, this is a historical shift in thinking about children's development. And you know, some people think that organizations like the New Schools don't go far enough. I've talked about them glowingly, but some criticize the fact that they have an electoral process that mimics the adult one. The school has a president, a secretary, and a treasurer, and each children's committee has those three people. The elections are run and modeled after the Brazilian elections. Some people think, "We shouldn't build a representative democracy with these kids because we've all

seen how bad representative democracy is with adults. We need something better." The director of the National Program of Working Children in Ecuador, Dolores Padilla, does not like her staff to suggest any particular electoral process to the children in her local programs. Since she does not like the ones society now has, she would rather the children came up with processes themselves. I think this would be an interesting strategy to document and evaluate. I suspect that the ad hoc processes would be poorer reflections of our existing governmental ones. Perhaps the ideal would be to introduce the existing ideas to children, and over a long period allow them to experiment with them while also liberating them to try new ideas.
**Michael**: Again, it seems to me that you would probably also have to involve parents, at least for those children who are living with their parents. How could you expect the children to get comfortable with such a democratic process if the parents or other primary caregivers aren't involved? Of course, there is a whole generation of parents who have explored more democratic ways of being with their children, trying to maintain a middle path between guidance and freedom, structure and license.
**Roger**: Yes, there is a sizable literature on different parental ideologies in child rearing. I wish there were also research on children's organizations and their facilitators.
**Michael**: Our time is just about over. Any last thoughts?
**Roger**: One thing that's been most interesting to me about our discussion today is how often we have been concluding with, "Hmm, that would be an interesting experiment" or, "We should try that...." Those moments when we pause are euphoric...and I'm thinking that organizations need a little support to enable them to reflect more on what they are doing. I mentioned earlier the National Program of Working Children in Ecuador. They can get funded for their actions with children, but they cannot get funded for looking critically at their process.
**Michael**: The California Wellness Foundation's new initiative, which is based on our research, has about 10% of its funds allocated for evaluation and participatory evaluation, with facilitators and kids playing an active part in documenting and assessing their own projects.
**Roger**: It's very difficult to get that kind of funding and I think that we need it if we're going to develop this movement. Facilitators in children's organizations use different kinds of approaches; they should at least be given a chance to talk to each other about the processes they use. For example, I would jump at the chance to hear Latin American street workers come together to share their experiments in democratic process.
**Michael**: And the children?
**Roger**: With the children!

## NOTES

1. See "Sharing Power: Participatory Public Health Research with California Teens," by Michael Schwab, in this volume.
2. See "Working Children in Ecuador Mobilize for Change," by María F. Espinosa, in this volume.
3. *Streetwise* (formerly the *Bulletin of Environmental Education*). Lewis Cohen, Urban Studies Center, University of Brighton, Sussex, England.
4. Association National de Conseils d'Enfants et de Jeunesse (15 Rue Martel, 75010 Paris, France).

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# A Dragon in the Neighborhood: City Planning with Children in Milan, Italy

**Ilaria Salvadori**[1]

## Introduction

> Aidan was the commentator. He was brilliant at it. We had to tell him our names before the match. We were playing across the road. Our pitcher was gone. The gates on each side were the goals. There were eight of us, just right, four a side. Whoever had the ball when a car was coming got a throw-in when the car had gone. If you decided to risk it but the driver blasted the horn before you took your shot, the goal was disallowed, if it was a goal. You couldn't use the curb for shielding the ball. Anything higher than the top of the pillar was over the bar.
>
> — Roddy Doyle (1993)

PLAY SPACES IN THE OLD CITY WERE VARIOUS, MYSTERIOUS, AND MULTIFARIOUS; THE children in it were active and independent. Playing was something not very different from going outside and simply living in your neighborhood. On every corner there was a surprise; the objects there — inhabitants, gardens, secret places — were playmates. Today the city no longer seems to support children's play; on the contrary, it seems to prohibit it. Spaces for play are increasingly narrow and enclosured. They seem to be small, artificial compromises that adults have given as a gift, but without any opportunity for children to express themselves. They can no longer go around by themselves or, if they do, they walk among street signs proclaiming "It Is Prohibited...," "It Is Forbidden...," "Warning," or "Danger!" The space no longer has "dense" meanings. External logic decides everything. Many children are driven by car between meaningful spaces — afternoon classes, friends' homes, enclosed playgrounds, to the soccer field, to the cinema, to buy an ice cream. They don't make decisions; somebody else is doing it. They hardly explore or discover anything: everything has already been planned. This is what I found when working with children on "The Needs of the Urban Child" project. The world described by Roddy Doyle (1993) represents a reality that we have been struggling to re-create.

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The project began in Milan in October 1994, as part of a UNICEF project in five countries — India, the Philippines, Brazil, Kenya, and Italy. It was based on the idea of children not as static objects to take care of, but as active subjects in improving their environments. The first phase of the project — two years of analysis of data on children's life conditions — ended in 1992 with an international meeting of city mayors, urban planners, and policymakers in Florence, Italy (Blue et al., 1994). Here participatory strategies were set for the second phase. The five Italian city mayors agreed to create a central structure within their city governments to coordinate existing services for children and encourage the participation of children in addressing key issues affecting them.

As a result, the Milan City Council approved the formation of a Children Wellness Council (Consiglio per il Benessere dei Minori) to promote action at the local level and coordinate strategies at the central level. Two pilot zones were selected: Zone 3, a central, densely residential area characterized by diversity of architectural styles and people (upper-middle-class, art noveau buildings mixed with decaying buildings where non-European immigrants live), and Zone 20, located in the city's northern outskirts, where several large public projects were built in the 1960s and 1970s after several waves of blue-collar immigration from southern Italy. The planning project reported in this study was on the edge of Quarto Oggiaro, the main neighborhood in Zone 20. It suffers in that the buildings are in bad condition and it is geographically distant from the rest of the city, though it is connected to Milan by three bridges and one railway. Unlike Zone 3, which is a very lively area where the main problems are lack of green areas and intense car traffic, Quarto Oggiaro has few places where children can gather on their own terms.

## The Planning Project

This project was based in an elementary school, near a bridge where traffic flows heavily in and out of Milan. As such, there is air and acoustic pollution, and hardly any green areas. This severely affects children's autonomy of movement.

My work was with 19 fifth-grade children. Together with an urban planner, I met with them weekly, for two hours per week, as part of a process that took place during seven months between 1995 and 1996. Three other facilitators were carrying on similar tasks in other areas of Zone 3 and Zone 20. There were monthly meetings with the central coordinators and public administration's representatives and experts.

This process was inspired by a set of planning strategies for children's participation in urban design that was introduced in Italy several years ago (Lepore and Lorenzo, 1984). It includes guiding children to reflect on their own environments at a neighborhood level and to draw up an urban plan using maps, sketches, and tridimensional models.

*Analysis of the Neighborhood*

In our first exercise, "Thinking About the Future of the Neighborhood," each child was asked to describe and explain how they saw the future of their neighborhood, using drawings where the present and the future of the neighborhood were represented. The children's optimism was evident as 18 of the 19 children depicted the future of their neighborhood as improving. Only one child believed the neighborhood's conditions to be worsening. This optimism is typical of children still attending elementary school (first through fifth grade).

The children were then assisted in individually depicting what the neighborhood represents to them. These "mental maps" tell us how the life of the children is in that neighborhood, what streets are important to them, which places they love, etc. After interpreting the individual maps, we tried to draw a common map of the neighborhood on which everyone's home was located. Our interpretations were drawn from categories that Kevin Lynch (1960: 46) proposes in his study of people's perception of the urban environment. For example, we described the morphology of the neighborhood in terms of "paths" (linear channels that are used to move through the city), "edges" (boundaries between two sectors of the city), "districts" (areas with specific connotations, such as a specific architectonic style or social structure), "nodes" (focal points and meeting places), and "landmarks" (important, representative places or objects in the city). Our first finding surprised us: few common elements were perceived by the children. "Neighborhood" meant a different place to each of them. Common symbols of landmarks or objects in the city were rare. The mental maps revealed that the streets around the children's houses, with shops and buildings drawn very accurately, contained large blank spaces in between, indicating the children's unfamiliarity with other parts of the neighborhood (see Figure 1).

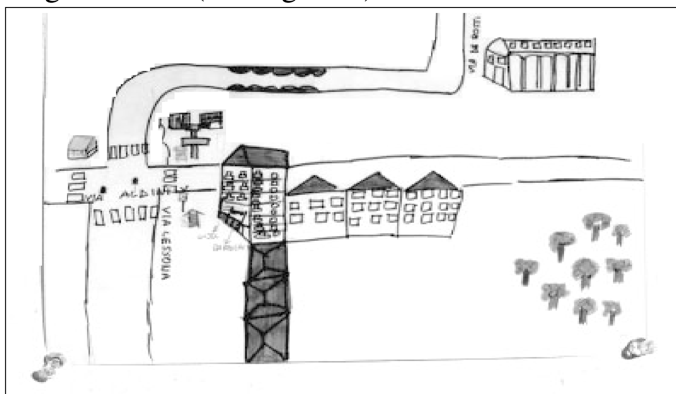


Figure 1:
A Mental Map showing how space is fragmented.

Nicoletta drew her house (the tall building at the center of the map) and its immediate surroundings in an accurate way. The barber and "Gisel's" shops are marked at the street level, like the bus stop, and — across the street (on the left of the map) — the *giornalaio*, the newspaper kiosk. Yet this small, lively area fades into an empty, blank space. The neighborhood becomes dense again with the school building, drawn in a very realistic way, on the top right corner. A bunch of trees in the lower right corner indicates a park, totally unlinked to the rest of the space. Nothing is said about the connection between the house, the school, and the park — the three principal aspects of Nicoletta's daily life.

The fragmented nature of their experienced world was a symptom of their lack of opportunities to even walk around and discover their neighborhood, relate autonomously to older persons, and to truly inhabit the spaces immediately around their own homes and the school. To confirm these initial interpretations, we asked the children how they spent their after-school time. Most said they are driven to school by their parents and none of them walk home after school. Few of them spend time in the streets after school because there is no space to meet friends or to play. They were not able to depict the other parts of the city through images and symbols, because they didn't inhabit them. To them "space" meant the "time" that it takes to reach some "distant" place by car.

We decided to take the group out into their own neighborhood to explore it. They were divided into five groups, each with different things to observe. To obtain a rich and complex final image of the neighborhood, we created a five-category model of observation.

As Table 1 (see page 201) reveals, this exploration took account of different aspects of the neighborhood that children could only grasp if they used all of their senses. The "Architects" had to visually observe and depict the natural and built environment; this helped make the children conscious of the different materials used in the built environment and their relation to the natural environment. The "Extraterrestrials" had to use feelings, trying to understand the place through the emotions evoked by it; they re-created the neighborhood with new street names to describe their experience of the place. The "Journalists" were to observe social factors of the neighborhood, using interviews and participant observations. The last group, the "Highway Patrolmen," dealt directly with the traffic problems, observing car drivers' behavior and comparing it to pedestrians' behavior, and giving tickets to cars parked on the sidewalks.

Walking in the streets and talking to people proved to be an easy yet rich mode of inquiry. The children initially depicted a very sad and gray environment, a neighborhood in which they felt alienated. It was a place with no spaces to play, streets filled with cars and trucks, many of them parked on the sidewalks and were therefore obstacles to the pedestrians; there were dark, gray factory walls everywhere. Few people were evident in these initial depictions of the neighborhood. Invited to give the streets new names, they offered names like "Street of Sadness," "Trash Avenue," and so on. As Jane Jacobs (1961) would have defined it, this was a neighborhood where no "Informal Public Sphere" existed, i.e., a network of relations between local inhabitants, between the "Public Sphere" (where institutions and authority reside) and the "Private Sphere" where private relations are located. The Informal Public Sphere is typical of the great metropolitan cities and can be experienced only at a specific, local neighborhood scale.[2] Without it, inhabitants are strangers to each other; informal public relations do not occur. Our neighborhood had, over time, become a body with no life blood in its veins.

*Making the New Traffic Plan*

The area we explored was under major reconstruction, with the school at the center. The Palizzi Bridge, the main connection between Quarto Oggiaro and the rest of the city, was being enlarged and this work, directed by the Milan Metro System, was based on a plan that included revision of the traffic system and construction of a new tramway line in Via De Rossi, near the school. The site the children chose for their research was approved by the city, but it was facing Via Console Marcello, a street with heavy traffic that was scheduled to be enlarged to let even more traffic stream through it.

For our project to be linked with the actual process of city planning, we engaged the children in understanding the planning choices that had already been made. The enlargement of the Palizzi Bridge would drive the major traffic flow into two streets and diminish it in the two streets around the school. The city plan mainly focused on traffic; our task was to work within the city plan, but focus on the relations between the street and its inhabitants as they play or gather together, trying to overcome the effects of the cars.

The children were asked to think about the future of their neighborhood by making collages superimposed on copies of photographs of the site. In these collages, a network of streets was turned into a huge playground, or a new paved street with separated pedestrian and bike lanes, a green field full of animals, or a new square with plants and flowers whose central decaying monument was replaced by a new monument designed by children. These collages suggested a strong need for color and lively forms in a gray and empty neighborhood.

We tried to stimulate new possible visions of the future setting of the neighborhood through an activity named the “Future Wheel.” Because the children had defined the main problem of the neighborhood as car traffic — with all its consequences (air and acoustic pollution, less safety, danger for pedestrians, etc.) — “fewer cars” was put at the center of the wheel. “Fewer cars” meant “more safety in the streets,” “more places for inhabitants to gather” and an increased environmental concern and civic sense, starting with the children. In this way, the children came to define the physical characteristics and atmosphere of a sustainable pedestrian-oriented street.

To imagine how their prototypical street might be experienced in their neighborhood, we now introduced a new activity: “Voices from the neighborhood.” The children were split into groups representing categories of inhabitants of the neighborhood — parents, seniors, people with disabilities, children, shop owners and business people — and they described the points of view from these different perspectives. A neighborhood is a place where many different interests and people live together; using creative negotiations (Fisher and Ury, 1981), we tried to account for this diversity by negotiating conflicts that could possibly arise. Each group role-played the various interests within the neighborhood and listed a

set of goals. These revealed in particular the street's lack of recreational areas, where people can feel safe and comfortable.

*A New Concept of the Street*

> Sidewalk width is invariably sacrificed for vehicular width, partly because city sidewalks are conventionally considered to be purely space for pedestrian travel and access to buildings, and go unrecognized and unrespected as the uniquely vital and irreplaceable organs of city safety, public life, and child rearing that they are (Jacobs, 1981: 87).

Our site contained three streets, each with different characteristics. We analyzed the public administration's maps and the children thought that the car lanes should not be so wide, because pedestrians didn't have enough space to walk or exchange a few chats on a sunny day on the sidewalks. The children resented always being taken "somewhere else" by their worried parents after school, instead of having time outside the school building to wait for their friends and walk home together, to hide from school fellows with whom they had fought during the day, or simply to play one last game before going home. Because the sidewalks were filled with cars, even crossing the street was risky.

We explored how the situation could be improved in the street that is most familiar to children, Via Varesina, which connects the Palizzi Bridge with the city. Along its sidewalks are many shops, factory walls, and residential buildings. Initially, we reduced the car lane and made it one-way only. Then we planned special lanes for bikes and pedestrians, separated from the car lanes by a row of trees, which also gave shade to pedestrians and bikers and reduced sound pollution. In our plan, cars were parked in a parking lot instead of on the sidewalks. Our system of streets with multiple lanes, as well as sidewalks and pedestrian areas crossing the whole street, became a sort of physical "model" that could be used not only around our school, but also along the entire length of Via Varesina.

Then we moved on to Via Raimondi, which presented the greatest problems. The only buildings on this street are factories, and the street is used mostly by trucks to load and unload goods. The traffic flow does not annoy pedestrians because nobody walks here. The children used Via Raimondi as an extension of the school's courtyard to create a joyful and completely different space; they turned it into a stretched-oval square where they could play and no cars were allowed. It became a place to gather, play, and recover from the stresses of urban life. We planned pedestrian areas, a bike lane, and a skateboard area, all oriented to recreation and play, with a mural on one long factory wall facing the street. In front of the mural, we placed dragon-shaped benches, which functioned simultaneously as benches and as bike holders (Figures 5 and 6). The children felt that, given a place to park their bicycles, they would be more likely to bike from their homes to school rather than being driven by their parents. The large pedestrian area

contained tables and chairs to play chess and other games. We designed trash cans in different shapes, to be distributed throughout the area, along with a few pet toilets to make the animals feel part of the community. We wanted to educate everybody about keeping the street clean. A charming, green area surrounded by trees and bushes was set aside for lovers, who could sit on special red, heart-shaped benches, where nobody would disturb them. A thick barrier created by a double row of trees separated this "long square" from a truck lane, to be used during working hours to load and unload goods on one side of the street. We spent considerable time building a tridimensional model of the area, complete with all these details.

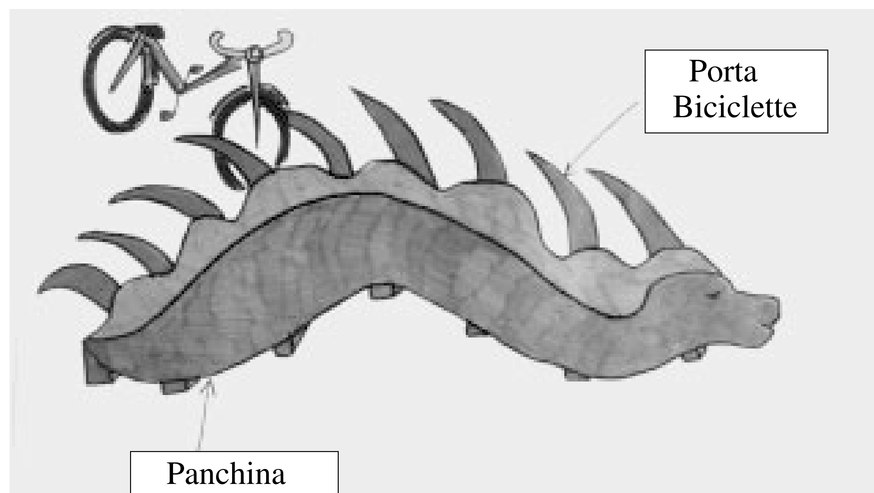


Figure 5: Dragon-Shaped Bench: Children's Design.

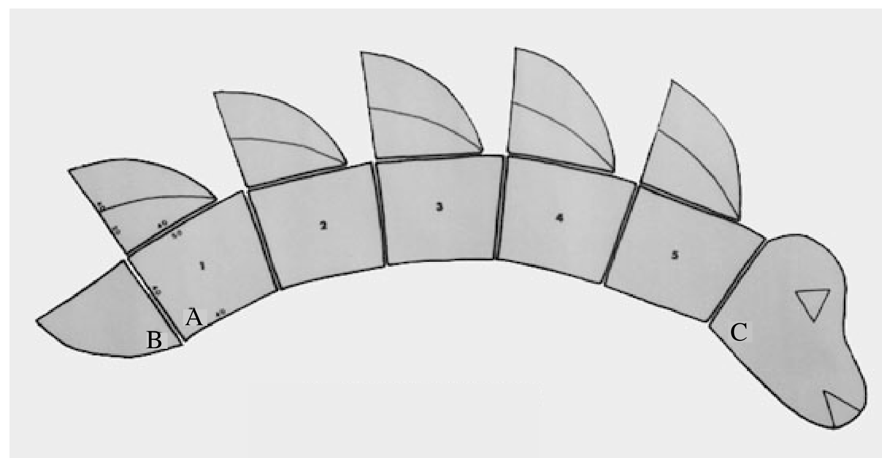


Figure 6: Dragon-Shaped Bench: Drawing by the Public Administration. The bench's shape is simpler, composed of three elements: a trapezoidal element (A), a triangular element (B), and the dragon's muzzle (C). It was to be made of recycled plastic, green for the body, red for the comb.

*The Dragon in the Community*

Gradually, the dragon became the symbol of our project and a centerpiece of an exhibition at the school, which was visited by parents, schoolmates, and teachers. In exhibiting their work, the children gained confidence in their power to transform the physical space around them. We asked community members to make suggestions to improve the project, and the feedback was generally positive, except that some shop owners feared that enlargement of the pedestrian areas and the introduction of one-way traffic routing would decrease their business. For them, life in the street meant many cars driving through; one of them said that the street would be "dead" after the enlargement of the pedestrian areas.

Then came two months of working with the City Council, modeling the results, and preparing a public campaign to promote the children's ideas. The children designed cards to send to community leaders and fliers to put on shop windows and to hand out to people. In May, during a special week dedicated to the "Urban Child," a conference was held in Milan. Citizens, City Council members, and participation specialists were invited and an official presentation was made. Children from the different schools presented their projects. This marked the beginning of a new dialogue with the public administration. The mayor of Milan attended and promised that the children's recommendations would be seriously considered.

Negotiation between the public administration and the facilitators continue, though there are many problems to be overcome in the realization of the children's plan. Via Varesina will, however, be reconstructed, and hopefully the children's design will be considered for the area facing the school's entrance. Via Raimondi is a privately owned street and will probably need City Council approval before being renovated.

The findings from Via Raimondi were carried over to Via De Rossi, where some of the children's ideas have now been included in the master plan. The ground is now broken and the street is closed, but for several months no work has been done. However, the idea of a mural has been approved by the water company and we are trying to raise funds for it from private sponsors. The plan is that our 19 kids, together with other children from the school, will paint it during after-school hours, and once the work is finished the school will take care of it. One City Council member, who is also an artist, has offered his help.

The trash cans and some of the benches designed by the children were approved by the City Council's Urban Design Department and Ecology and Environment Department, and are now being made. A major private sponsor has been involved in this process.

The dragon-shaped bench has been discussed at several meetings with the City Council's Urban Design staff and a private sponsor; the design has been simplified and the sponsor has agreed to produce one or two benches from recycled plastic,

to be put in Via De Rossi right in front of the school. The children are very pleased about this. The dragons will become more than simple benches; they will be sculptures, rich in meaning and metaphor.

## Conclusions

Children doing participatory research and planning are treated in many different ways. They are considered by some as the real actors of the process, by others as the objects of public politics, as students taught by teachers about environmental issues, or as nice and funny artists with unusual and interesting ideas about the city. The truth is that it is not easy to involve children in a truly participatory process and to guarantee that they remain the real agents and promoters of this process. The politics of city planning is a particular obstacle that threatens to diminish the work group's enthusiasm and energy and negatively influences the full implementation of the children's plans. If the children are to see themselves as active agents of their environment's change and improvement, it is important that at least some parts of their plan be realized.

This raises the question of negotiation. During the Urban Child Project, the facilitators at different sites were involved in a debate about how to deal with the children's individual choices in relation to their real chances of implementation. The facilitators followed two different approaches. Some schools decided to give children the freedom to express themselves beyond the possibility of realization; others, including my school, decided to foster a compromise between children's choices and bureaucratic restrictions, thereby making children the real actors facing conflicts and negotiating resolutions in their attempts to create change.

A participatory process involves many actors on the city's stage. We also learned the importance of involving public administration experts in the work team and of building mutual trust and cooperation with them to make implementation of the children's design plans more likely. We also discovered the need for training public administration planning staff in participatory and cooperative approaches to the managing of the city. They seemed open to this approach. If it were done with the children, this would likely lead to much better informed neighborhood planning.

## Acknowledgments

Special thanks to Elisabetta Ferrari, friend and colleague, who did the whole process of participation with me and provided the updated material for this article. Thanks to Monica Vercesi and Davide Fortim for their advice, and to Annarosa Gurgioni, the children's teacher, for her enthusiastic work. Thanks also to Lina Di Pierdomenico (Progetto Città Sano, Milan City Council), Annalisa Rosi Cairo, and Raymond Lorenzo (Istituto degli Innocenti, Consultants).

**Table 1:**
**Model of Observation of the Neighborhood**

| Role | Category of Observation | Action on the Field | Result |
|---|---|---|---|
| Explorers | Physical Perceptions (smell, sound, touch) | Smell, hearing, and touch were used to observe the space around. | Neighborhood as a land to be discovered described in terms of impressions. |
| Extra-terrestrials | Perceptions and feelings (emotions evoked by the place) | Children were not able to read the names of streets on the map. Places and streets were renamed according to the impressions the place evoked in them. | Neighborhood as an unknown place. New toponomastic and geography of the place. |
| Architects | Anthropic and natural forms and materials in the space. | Sight and touch were used to observe shapes, colors, and materials of the built and natural environment around. | Neighborhood as an architectural object. Description of shapes and materials that have been used in the different sites. |
| Journalists | Behavior and moods of the people in the place. | Age, mood, actions, facial expressions, and attitudes of people in the streets were observed. | Neighborhood as a social place. Description of the relation between people's behavior and the environment. |
| Highway Patrolmen | Movements in the space (such as driving, biking, walking, and skating). | Street traffic's flow and movement. Cars and pedestrians' behavior, cars frequency and quantity were observed. | Neighborhood as a flow of movements and energy. Description of traffic rules and behavior of the citizens related to them. |

## NOTES

1. This article was adapted from the original by the Editors and subsequently reviewed by the author.
2. Jane Jacobs (1961: 56) writes:

> The trust of a city street is formed over time from many, many little public sidewalk contacts. It grows out of people stopping by at the bar for a beer, getting advice from the grocer and giving advice to the newsstand man, comparing opinions with other customers at the bakery and nodding hello to the two boys drinking pop on the stoop, eyeing the girls while waiting to be called for dinner, admonishing the children, hearing about a job from the hardware man and borrowing a dollar from the druggist, admiring the new babies, and sympathizing over the way a coat faded.... The sum of such casual, public contact at a local

level — most of it fortuitous, most of it associated with errands, all of it metered by the person concerned and not thrust upon him by anyone — is a feeling for the public identity of people, a web of public respect and trust, and resource in time of personal or neighborhood need. The absence of this trust is a disaster to a city street. Its cultivation cannot be institutionalized. And above all, it implies no private commitments.

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# The Need for Nature: A Childhood Right

**Robin C. Moore**

### Shrinking Childhood Outdoors

A growing number of professionals are beginning to express concern that children are spending less time outdoors. Louv (1990) and Nabhan and Trimble (1994), for example, are often quoted as sources of anecdotal evidence, to which Hillman and Adams (1992) give empirical weight. To these statements of apprehension, add the concerned voices of children-environment researchers raised at professional meetings and the observations of writers in the popular press. All comment on both the negative impact on children of physical changes happening in the outdoor environment and the more tightly structured culture of childhood that is tending to keep children indoors for more time. Japanese photographer Keiki Haginoya (1994) for almost two decades made wonderful photographs of children's play in Japanese cities. In the last few years, children have disappeared so rapidly from his viewfinder that he has had to bring this chapter of his work to an end. Either indoor spaces have become more attractive, or outdoor spaces have become less attractive — or both.

Historically, making space for children has never been the top priority for city planning. However, former vacant land and open areas of the city — like waterfronts, abandoned railroads, and old industrial areas — have often been used by children informally, with or without the knowledge and consent of the owners. In more recent years, these once vacant areas have been redeveloped or fenced for security as urban land use has become much more tightly planned or *re*planned. The net loss to children has been substantial, since these erstwhile play areas have not been replaced by officially sanctioned spaces.

The findings of Hillman and Adams (1992) confirm my own research with eight-to-12 year olds in England in the mid-1970s (Moore, 1986a) that children are losing access to outdoor space. In the earlier study, examples of unhealthy (or

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"developmentally inappropriate") restrictions on children's use of the outdoors were rare. Fifteen years later, Hillman and Adams present them as commonplace.

### Factors Restricting Access to Outdoors

The list of barriers and restrictions on the changing world of childhood has increased substantially in the last few decades:

*Traffic Dangers*: When the results of the British study referred to above (Moore, 1986a) are combined with the results of a similar study of the urbanizing San Francisco Bay region (Moore, 1980), and combined with an international review of the empirical research from the same period (Moore and Young, 1978), there is one inescapable conclusion. The increase in traffic density on residential and arterial streets was the one universal factor above all others that restricted the development of children's spatial range, thereby limiting children's knowledge of the community environment — including its natural characteristics and components.

Traffic danger has been with us ever since horses rode into town. The invention of the horseless carriage increased the level of danger, greatly reinforced by the lack of attention to the needs of pedestrians in the design of residential streets. Early reactions to these unhealthy conditions in the form of "play streets" (closing streets to traffic during times when children were most likely to be outdoors) were instigated in New York, London, and other European cities beginning in the 1950s. As levels of traffic increased, some cities began to physically reconfigure residential street layouts to accommodate pedestrian activity more safely. At the same time, the British New Towns (Stevenage, for example) went several steps further by providing complete "grade-separation" between pedestrians and motorized traffic. The most recent innovation in the design and redesign of urban neighborhoods in favor of pedestrians was the introduction in the 1970s of the *Woonerven* in the Netherlands and Germany.

Even though several proven solutions now exist to redress the street environment in favor of pedestrians, the great majority of the world's municipalities have yet to adopt them on a scale that would make a measurable difference to children's quality of life. Gaster (1991), investigating changes in children's access to a neighborhood environment in New York City over three generations, noted that the earliest and most continuous parental restrictions related to traffic. Research in Australia and the U.K. (Hillman and Adams, 1992; Tranter, 1993) has shown that the ever-increasing dominance of traffic continues to bar children from their natural social habitat of the street — where playmates and natural resources can be found and where the public life of the community happens.

*The Bogeyman Syndrome*: The Bogeyman Syndrome was coined by Louv (1990) and indicates parental fear of children being abducted, kidnapped, or physically harmed when playing outdoors. Sensationalization by the media has greatly reinforced paranoia and overreaction regarding this issue (Finkelhor,

Hootaling, and Sedlak, 1992). A highly distorted sense of reality has resulted, where a bogeyman is seen around every corner, again restricting children's outdoor activity. In some countries (Australia, the U.S., and U.K., for example) the child's right to play is being substantially curtailed by adult perceptions of threats to child safety in the outdoor spaces of residential areas (Hillman and Adams, 1992; Louv, 1990; Tranter, 1993). Even parents who understand the importance of outdoor play find themselves caught in the middle, between allowing freedom and *irrationally* fearing the consequences.

Reliable empirical study would help greatly to clarify this issue. Prospective sources include police records and field investigations. The systematic studies of children's use of the urban landscape — conducted in the 1970s by Hart (1979), Moore (1980, 1986a), and others (Moore and Young, 1978) — indicated that the bogeyman issue was present, but with only a minor influence over children's use of the outdoors. Unreasonable restrictions, especially by parents over children's use of the outdoors, were few and far between, with the exception of two reoccurring issues documented by the above studies: on average, girls spent less time outdoors than boys did, and the spatial range of their activities was less than for boys. This gender gap has surely grown since, but we do not know by how much. To assess changes in outdoor use by children, follow-up studies are needed using the same participatory methods as in the earlier investigations.

*Lack of Play Space*: The sheer lack of space designed for children's use in residential areas continues to limit opportunities for experiencing the outdoor environment (Gaster, 1991). The rising cost of urban land, building upon vacant sites, the shift of public resources away from parks and recreation as a public service, and the lack of legally mandated norms for space allocation in most countries continue to reinforce this trend. In 1979, only nine countries had some form of standard for play spaces in residential areas (Esbensen, 1979). An unpublished follow-up survey conducted by this author in 1989, using Esbensen's methodology, indicated little change. Most countries do not even have a general guideline for play space allocation. To this issue, Evans (1995) adds the fact that free play outdoors is being substituted by organized sport in Australia. This may mirror a broader international trend toward investing public funds in sports areas rather than in multi-choice space for free play.

*Curtailment of Children's Playtime*: Children's playtime has been curtailed by more tightly structured schedules and the reduction or elimination of school recess periods. The tightly defined out-of-school schedules of many middle-class children have left them with hardly any free time, including time for free play outdoors. Moreover, there is an alarming trend, especially in the United States, toward the reduction of recess during the school day (Guddemi and Jambor, 1992). This directly contravenes the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC), Article 31, which addresses the right to rest and relaxation (United Nations, 1989).

*Changing Family Relations*: Changes in family structure and lifestyle (growth in both single-parent families and families where both parents work) have left a void in children's lives. Many neighborhoods where children enjoyed outdoor play with multi-mothered supervision now lack daytime adults. Over 50% of mothers of under-tens are now working away from home. New types of social infrastructure are required to replace full-time mothers for healthy child development to flourish. This is particularly so in the U.S., where television companies and their advertisers have irresponsibly filled the void with inappropriate programming.

*Electronic Media*: For Garbarino (1995), television is a significant part of what he terms the "socially toxic environment," where too many children grow up today. He cites powerful evidence linking television to the growth of violence in children and society. To make matters worse, the violent messages are now transmitted in settings where there is less chance of adults being around (p. 34). The deeply ingrained, unhealthy TV habit (along with electronic games and computers) is keeping children indoors for longer periods of time (Guddemi and Jambor, 1992), especially where the outdoors is insufficiently diverse and attractive to "pull" them out to play and explore.

*Air Conditioning*: The rapid growth of residential air conditioning in the United States during this century has surely encouraged children to spend more summertime indoors, now combined with the attraction of electronic media. In 1910, just 12% of housing units had air conditioning. By 1950, the level had risen to 49% and by 1970 it was 72% — an almost straight line relationship (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1960–1995).

*Commercialization of Play*: The private sector has responded rapidly to the paranoia of parents, tightly scheduled family lifestyles, and the lack of safe outdoor play spaces. For-profit indoor play centers are developing around the world. Until now, they have offered a narrow range of gross motor activity and packaged birthday celebrations.

## Impact of Restrictions on Children's Access to the Natural World

The sources cited above indicate that the number of restrictions on children's use of the urban outdoors has grown in quantity and severity in recent years. Most alarming is the fact that children are losing contact with nature in their daily lives (Louv, 1990; Nabhan and Trimble, 1994). From being a simple matter of running free in the streets, open spaces, and open country, outdoor play has become highly constrained. Children are spending more time indoors either because it offers new attractions and/or the outdoors has become a threat to safety, or because it is perceived that way. A dangerous self-fulfilling prophecy is underway. In restricting options for autonomous outdoor exploration and personal experience of nature, what magnitude of injury is being done to children's development? What are the implications of these changes for society and planet Earth?

In the early 1970s, studies conducted with children in the interdisciplinary field of design research began to address the issues of environmental quality related to children. Because of its problem-solving thrust, much of the research took a field-oriented, naturalistic approach, involving children themselves in the work and exploring a variety of rural and urban contexts on both sides of the Atlantic. Multi-method approaches included questionnaires, interviews, drawings, and child-led field trips (Hart, 1979; Moore, 1980, 1986a; Moore and Young, 1978). Results of work from this period indicated that there were key controlling factors on the size of children's territorial range (parental controls, automobile traffic) and that there were characteristics and features of the environment that made certain types of places attractive to children (space around the home, low-traffic streets, parks and playgrounds, rough ground, etc.).

In these studies of autonomous use of the outdoors, natural elements such as vegetation, water, soil, and wildlife are attractive to children because their biological attributes are not provided by synthetic environments — a difference articulated by Sebba (1991). Natural environments are attractive because they are alive. Roger Ulrich's research (1983, 1991), demonstrating the beneficial impact of nature on physical, cognitive, and emotional well-being in adults, lends empirical weight to the conclusions of other investigations of children and nature (Bogdanets and Smirnova, 1992; Chawla, 1988; Sebba, 1991). The conclusion is inescapable. Natural settings stimulate children's development in ways not provided by other means.

These results have important implications for the institutions used by children, especially if by obligation, as in schools. The results of research sponsored by the Learning Through Landscapes Trust (U.K.) suggest that the presence of nature is a primary reason why children feel positive about their school environment (Titman, 1994). This is part of the "hidden curriculum" of nonverbal messages transmitted by adults to children, through the environment, about how seriously their needs are being addressed. A study of Swedish school grounds by Lindholm (1995), and Harvey's (1989) study of children's experiences with vegetation, support Titman's conclusions.

School buildings surrounded by asphalt, chain-link fencing, and prohibitive notices communicate control, authority, and unfriendliness. If the place looks and feels like a prison, how will the child feel upon entering, compared to a school setting of trees, shrubs, and flowers? These conclusions were reinforced by findings from research conducted at the Environmental Yard, in California. Children were attracted by the natural settings because of their diversity, sensory variety, and ever changing, interactive potential (Moore, 1986b, 1989). In natural settings, compared to the synthetic settings of asphalt and play equipment, attention spans increased by several magnitudes. Children spent more time in cooperative group activity; the level of positive social interaction was elevated; and there was far more mixing by age, sex, and ethnic background. The whole

atmosphere was more creative and peaceful. Both the formal and nonformal educational advantages of the naturalized school site were extensive. Alert, creative teachers were quick to pick up on the possibilities offered for integrating the formal classroom curriculum into the world of children's high motivation for discovery outdoors through play (Moore and Wong, 1997).

The benefits of natural settings were found to be diverse, like nature itself. Natural settings stimulate all aspects and stages of child development through multi-sensory experience. They integrate informal play with formal learning in natural learning cycles and thus help build the cognitive constructs necessary for sustained intellectual development. They stimulate imagination and creativity in a special, boundless way, and supply construction materials for children's architecture and artifacts. They integrate children by age, ability, and ethnic background. They help children feel good about themselves. They enhance self-esteem and offer children a peaceful feeling. They focus the perceptions of children on the region of the Earth where they actually live. They help children understand the realities of natural systems through primary experience. They demonstrate natural principles such as networks, cycles, and evolutionary processes. They teach that nature is a uniquely regenerative process. They support interdisciplinary, environmental education curricula. They provide microclimatic comfort and flexible, forgiving settings that are aesthetically appealing to all people. By implication, these are some of the advantages to children that are becoming lost as their use of the outdoors diminishes.

Strangely, the field of people-plant relations that has emerged in the U.S. over the last few years, driven by horticultural scientists, horticultural therapists, and landscape designers, has paid little attention to children. Biannual interdisciplinary meetings held since 1990 have yielded three volumes of fascinating proceedings, but include very few studies related to children-plant relations (Flagler and Poincelot, 1994; Francis, Lindsey, and Rice, 1994; Relf, 1992). Is this lacuna attributable to a scientific bias away from children's needs, to the difficulty of attracting research funding, or to an assumption that issues related to children lie only within the domain of education?

Natural scientist Stephen Kellert's research into the relationships between human values and nature (primarily animals) did include children. His book, *The Value of Life* (1996), not only enlarges the people-environment field in breadth and depth, but also considers the development of childhood values both genetically and societally. Here we find significant support for the experiential value of primary experience of nature and the critical role of education in the process of children acquiring pro-nature values on the path to adulthood.

Restricted access to nature has an impact not only on the quality of children's lives, but also on their development. The need for nutrition, good air, and water is obvious. Kellert's nine basic values broaden the scope beyond this obvious level of physical survival. For example, what are the implications for human

development if children's needs for sensory stimulation are not met? Kellert points out that early childhood is the time when we acquire an emotional response to the physical and social world. Informal play provides us with primary experience of nature, through which our values are formed. The problem is that the natural sources of primary experience are being eroded from children's lives. In his book, *Necessity of Experience*, Edward Reed (1996) argues that Western philosophical thought has consistently devalued primary experience in everyday life. His arguments are lucid, powerful, and convincing, and they gain force from being linked to the wisdom and insights of John Dewey, the United States' most formidable educator, who started raising the alarm on these issues over 100 years ago. How much more pertinent they are today, in a culture drowning in depersonalized secondary experience — in childhood especially (see Rivkin, 1998, for recent commentary).

In a world where children have space and time for primary, playful engagement with their everyday surroundings, childhood culture has the possibility of being continuously renewed by the experiences of the new generation, especially in understanding the processes of nature (Rivkin, 1995). The problem is that in our present-day society, primary experience of nature is being replaced by the secondary, vicarious, often distorted, dual sensory (vision and sound only), one-way experience of television and other electronic media. Reed paints a grim picture of a nihilistic society resulting from these trends. Where lies the future of the Earth if human society is driven by the dominance of values for synthetic rather than natural experiences?

### Social and Environmental Aspects of the Ecology of Childhood

In making sense of the apparent withdrawal of children from primary experience of their local outdoor environment, Bronfenbrenner's ecologically based analytical framework of human development provides a useful frame of analysis (Moore, 1986a: 5). First, at the micro-level of individual development, the ecology of child development has an aesthetic dimension, which we might call "informal," in contrast to transmission of formal, classic culture. Children live through their senses. Sensory experiences link the child's exterior world with their interior, hidden, affective world. Since the natural environment is the principal source of sensory stimulation, freedom to explore and play with the outdoor environment through the senses in their own space and time is essential for healthy development of an interior life (Cohen, 1994).

Ecology is a process through time. Children, like many other animal species, are genetically programmed to learn about the world and to grow and develop in it through free play. If sensory perception is the means, then play is the process of activation. As context, the natural world provides both the major stimulus and the most significant content of experience. Free play is so important because human beings are so diverse. The stimulus for individual development must come from

inside the person as a reflection of their particular needs at any point in time. These needs are so complex and variable that there is no possible way they can be matched by environments managed as resources based on predictive needs, as “bureaucracies” often do. This approach is only appropriate in special therapeutic situations to resolve very specific developmental problems. Typical, healthy children need to choose stimulants from their physical surroundings. Nature (the seemingly infinite universe of plants, animals, soils, precipitation, air movement, skyscapes, temperature, and light) is the best option because by being alive, it offers constantly changing diversity and the broadest range of possible interactions. It is the most open-ended experiential universe possible, supporting all the physical, social, and psychological dimensions of development. It is the source of dynamic perceptions that stimulate thought and build knowledge.

Children are experiential beings. They learn together by interacting with their environment through their senses. This type of self-activated, autonomous interaction is what we call free play. Individual children test themselves by interacting with their environment, activating their potential and reconstructing human culture. The content of the environment is a critical factor in this process. A rich, open environment will continuously present alternative choices for creative engagement. A rigid, bland environment will limit healthy growth and development of the individual or the group. A boring environment will likely lead to antisocial, unhealthy behavior.

Defined as an ecological phenomenon, health is a quality of the organism, including its relations with other organisms and their shared habitat. It is the health of this ecosystem that offers each child the opportunity to grow and develop, to reach full potential, and together with others create culture. The natural environment offers the diversity of experience that children seek.

As we know, however, nature is not benign. It can be a source of disease and threats to health. Children need protection from nature’s negative, aggressive aspects. Protection must not result in withdrawal, though. There is a difference between reasonable and necessary protection — and unhealthy overprotection that can have a detrimental impact on child development. To the extent that a child grows up with inadequate opportunities to interact with the natural world outdoors, developmental potential will be lessened. The most critical result may be the diminished sense of personal competence and self-esteem of the child who is not allowed to freely and safely roam outdoors. Natural spaces and materials stimulate children’s limitless imaginations and serve as the medium of inventiveness and creativity observable in almost any group of children playing in a natural setting (Moore and Wong, 1997).

For healthy, prosocial community development, the best strategy is to combine creative play leadership with the stimulus of a natural environment over which children have control. This was the genesis of the adventure playground movement launched in Denmark over 50 years ago (Brett, Moore, and Provenzo, 1993).

It combines two realms: a space dedicated to children's free-play interaction with each other and the basic substance of the natural world (earth, fire, water, plants, and animals), and nurturing, facilitative relationships with trained professional play leaders working in a nonformal educational setting.

If such environments do not exist, what then? The traditional approach has always been for adults to step in and make up for the lack of opportunities in the child's "deprived environment." From the point of view of play and child development, adults can act as creative play leaders or facilitators of playful, open-ended activity if they themselves are playful and open-ended, and can stimulate creative action. Parents and other adult family members are the other critical social factor, obviously; because of our contemporary lifestyle, however, these significant adults are becoming replaced by others with child-rearing roles: childcare center staff, classroom teachers, recreation leaders, youth club workers, leisure center staff, and so on.

Yet let us not overlook the importance of child-to-child relations. Most children are naturally inclusive social beings. As Margaret Mead pointed out many years ago, one cannot talk of the "child," but only of children as social beings constantly interacting, learning from each other (good and bad), reinventing culture. Because of their constantly changing diversity, natural settings provide a richer spectrum of choice for supporting prosocial behavior among children.

All children need help to reach their potential. More than ever before, they need help to *prevent* them from becoming unhealthy, or to *restore* their health when negatively affected by dysfunctional environments. The planet, too, needs the same approach.

The ultimate truth is that the human species is utterly dependent on the biosphere for its survival. It does not work the other way around. Planet Earth will continue to evolve without *Homo sapiens.* Indeed, at this point in its history, it would revert to a more healthy state if our species were removed. We are permanently reducing the ecological quality of the planet at an unprecedented rate, to the point of destroying whole ecosystems containing thousands of species not yet discovered (Wilson, E.O., 1992). Fools may argue that Earth has recovered from natural calamities in the past and it will do so this time. Yet this crisis is different, brought on by one of the Earth's own species, rather than by greater cosmic forces (Leakey and Lewin, 1995; Wilson, E.O., 1992). Furthermore, we have the unique ability to recognize, analyze, and reflect on the consequences of our own behavior — and to change it if necessary to restore or enhance the quality of our lives. The invention of plumbing systems is a good example. In much of the world (although still not enough), humans have learned how to protect themselves from the scourge of the most common communicable diseases through the development of physical systems for delivering clean water and disposing of human waste. The collective use of these systems is motivated by individual behavior. When such motivation is lacking, because the threat to our quality of life

is more distant in time and space, as in the case of natural resources, the collective will fades and we have the *Tragedy of the Commons* (Hardin, 1968). The "commons" has become the whole biosphere and the impacting unit has changed from medieval herdsmen to gigantic global corporations of unprecedented power, competing to maximize profits.

## International Action to Save the "Commons"

Global concern was activated in the 1960s leading up to the Stockholm Summit on the Environment (1972) and was followed by the Vancouver Habitat Conference (1976). Environmental issues were brought to a world summit again in Rio in 1992, this time attempting to coexist with "development." The issues of shelter and urban development came up again to the global level at the Habitat II conference in Istanbul in 1996. Initially in the agenda-drafting process, children and youth hardly appeared in the text, again demonstrating a peculiar blind spot of adult intelligence and the need for constant pressure to get children's interests represented.

Each of these international meetings produced declarations and policy statements to stimulate national and local-level actions to implement environmental and urbanization policies — Local Agenda 21, for example. It is easy to be skeptical about the fine words and paper frameworks for action, and to overlook the function of these meetings to cause a stir, bring many interests together, reach agreement on actions that must be taken, and, above all, help extend and deepen the network of those involved in addressing the issues, to strengthen our sense of global solidarity.

Recognition of children in this work has been strengthened by a growing acceptance of their rights. In 1959, the U.N. *Declaration on Children's Rights* gave children international legal standing. In 1989, these rights were greatly amplified by the CRC, now ratified by almost all nations (but still not by the United States, which is perhaps indicative of the low standing of children in our country). Fundamental in the CRC is the right to a healthy, developmentally appropriate environment. Disregard of children's rights, and lack of visibility of their needs in political agendas, trickles down to ensure their exclusion from all manner of initiatives where children should be included. For example, in the latest urban planning trend toward "new urbanism" (reducing suburban sprawl with higher density neighborhoods by placing more focus on social relations among residents), children are almost never mentioned as *bona fide* residents with needs of their own. A review of recent books in the field revealed only one work that included the word *children* in the index. In the equally current field of "ecological design," the same observation can be made.

Another key concept that has emerged through international meetings is "sustainable development," i.e., development today that does not steal natural resources from tomorrow — from all our tomorrows. Yet, as we confront the post-

Rio and post-Istanbul calls for sustainable development, the trend of childhood away from nature continues, with serious negative implications. The degree to which the environmental needs of children are overlooked in both design research and practice is profound and disturbing.

## Needs for Action

Reversing the trend of childhood away from nature will require a massive, coordinated effort by professional researchers, practitioners, and political allies. All professionals working with children, including designers and especially those involved in the urban greening movement, need to work together as advocates for and *with* children to highlight their environmental needs in urban design policies. The aim is to create neighborhood landscapes that offer safe, unrestricted places where childhood and its natural inheritance can be reunited and flourish together.

*Giving Voice to Children and Youth*: Children have a *right* to a voice in issues that affect their lives (CRC, Article 12). One of the problems with professional meetings is that it is difficult to meaningfully involve children and youth. It is difficult to convince adults of the wisdom of this strategy. Furthermore, logistically and practically it is not easy to ensure genuine and legitimate involvement unless facilitated by experienced and committed adults, who must be constantly vigilant to assure that the interests of children are not trivialized. For genuine participation, the local level is more effective (Hart, 1996). Children are the evolutionary bridge, continuously rebuilding the connection between present and future states of planet Earth.

*Landscapes for Learning and Development*: The leading 19th– and 20th-century educational philosophers and child development theorists emphasize the importance of experiencing the natural world daily throughout childhood. Nature was considered an essential educational vehicle by Dewey, Froebel, Montessori, Steiner, and others. Furthermore, these educators endorsed the significance of children's play as the process of self-learning, especially through engagement with natural surroundings. Piaget, too, recognized this (Howe and Johnson, 1975). Within the progressive education movement, concern for the experiential quality of the child's everyday environment is still strong (Adams, 1991; Cohen, 1994). The field of environmental education also shows concern, although in the primary grades the focus is too often on telling children what is wrong with the world instead of helping them discover how beautiful it is (Hansen-Møller and Taylor, 1991; Wilson, R., 1995).

*Establishing Priorities*: Research-based urban development policies that address the need of children for daily experience of the natural world through outdoor play have been presented elsewhere (Moore, 1986a). This earlier formulation must be revised in light of the newly emerging issues of increased restrictions on children's spatial range. More than ever, we need to plan and design appropriate settings for children of all ages where they can interact safely

with natural materials and phenomena. Growing "green children" as a social and environmental strategy for saving the planet from destruction requires children to live in green places, with "green" parents, attending "green" schools, in a "green" corporate society managed by "green" governments. How can we contribute toward this goal as child environment professionals? We must address the needs of children in the emerging "new urbanism" and "ecological design" movements. We should focus on formal education environments — the places where children are legally obliged to spend many hours each day in school and childcare settings. Canada, Sweden, and the U.K. have national organizations working on improving school grounds; many U.S. organizations are beginning to follow suit. We should also recognize the potential of after-school nonformal education programming with trained animators and play leaders in natural settings, where "it is O.K. to pick the flowers!" Such places could be located in parks, playgrounds, school grounds, and greenways. They should function as nonformal education "safe havens" or play sanctuaries for urban children — as an antidote to mindless, secondary TV experience. An added advantage of natural urban places is that they accommodate the needs of children of *all abilities* more readily than places where only manufactured play equipment is available.

For positive support, we have the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations, 1989), the Istanbul Declaration, and the Habitat Agenda (UNCHS, 1997), which together make explicit the connections between childhood, environmental quality, participation, education, and sustainable development. With this international commitment, we must forge a new partnership with young people to redirect the course of history.

## A New Sense of Child-Biosphere Relations

Each child is born from and into the biosphere upon which all humans depend. Healthy humans cannot exist without a healthy biosphere. It is our home. Indeed, health in the broadest sense can be defined as a quality of relationship between people and planet.

To feel part of the biosphere, children must live in it, intimately, in a way that is developmentally appropriate. Chawla (1988) emphasizes that children's concern for the natural world is shaped through opportunities for direct contact with it. Urban children, in particular, need to live in a landscape designed to meet their needs, where they can explore and experience natural materials and phenomena each day of their lives. Children need places where their own culture can flourish. As a design researcher of such places, I believe they must be based in nature — for the good both of children and the planet.

The childhood significance and developmental function of direct interaction with the natural environment have been succinctly summarized by Sebba (1991). If we assume that early childhood experience becomes embedded in the psyche of healthy adults, permanently affecting their behavior, attitudes, and values, then we

had better start paying greater attention to the quality of the environments where those dimensions of personality have their experiential roots.

The last 20 years have seen a lull in action research related to the urban environment of childhood. Notable exceptions have addressed the enormous issue of traffic and its negative effects on the childhood landscape all over the world. In countries where cars have been celebrated and accommodated uncritically as a positive aspect of 20th-century living, children's freedom has been reduced. This is most obvious in the U.K., as evidenced by Hillman and Adams' (1992) longitudinal study. It is also the case in the U.S., where, ironically, the "new urbanism" initiatives aimed at reducing the dominance of the private automobile have so far largely ignored children as a potentially beneficial group.

In countries where policies have been developed to control traffic in urban neighborhoods with the aim of creating pedestrian-friendly, child-friendly environments, children have managed to retain a larger degree of freedom as measured by such basic territorial "licenses" as being allowed to cross roads on their own, come home from school on their own, travel to leisure destinations on their own, use buses on their own, and bicycle on main roads.

Germany, Sweden, Denmark, and the Netherlands have addressed the issue of childhood environmental quality — most clearly by introducing traffic-calming design policies at the individual street level and neighborhood-wide. One reason for success is the higher density of cities in these countries, compared to cities in the "New World" of North America and Australia. For example, the lower destiny of the planned city of Canberra results in a far more traffic-dominated environment than characterizes older European cities. This introduces the perceived, if not actual, risk to children of physical harm from traffic. It also disperses the relatively ample supply of open space further from the children's homes. Because most adults drive and the destinations are more dispersed, the streets contain far fewer adults, who might otherwise look out for children. This increases parents' fear of their children being molested (Tranter, 1993).

On the basis of analyses of children's mobility in Canberra and the study of European approaches, Tranter proposes a set of policies for creating child-friendly cities that include changing the legal status of local streets, lowering residential speed limits, traffic-calming interventions (both local and citywide), increasing the sense of community and neighborhood, and changing the perception of the street as a shared, or pedestrian-dominant territory. In both the Canberra and U.K. studies, one of the measures of mobility was the number of leisure places children were allowed to go to alone. Unfortunately, no details were given about the types of leisure destinations; thus, the contribution of the "pull" of these places could not be evaluated and compared to earlier studies (Hart, 1979; Moore, 1980, 1986a), where the attributes of place featured as an important aspect of the analysis.

## Needs for Research

Our world is changing at an ever accelerating rate. This is especially true of the circumstances of childhood. There is a sense of new generations becoming alienated from nature, although we lack research to demonstrate how much, how fast, and with what long-term consequences — for children, society, and the planet. For this author, who spent his childhood roaming free in the woods and fields of southern England, it feels almost as if we are leaving a long, historic period of exquisite outdoor freedom and are heading toward a murky future far more challenging than before. Research priorities that could inform policy development to help address this challenge are as follows:

*Everyday Natural Settings*: Investigation of the role of the natural everyday environment in early childhood development. What do children learn through experience of the natural world? How does it support their development? What happens when children lack these experiences?

*Child-Friendly Urban Design*: Designers and urban policy developers need empirically based case studies of the best practices and model examples of how to provide greater access to natural environments and support autonomy of the child's exploration of his or her surroundings.

*Special Childhood Places*: Research on where children and youth do find autonomy and access to the natural world is underway and needs to be expanded. Urban examples include the nonformal education sites mentioned earlier, as well as parks and playgrounds. We also must be concerned with special natural areas and features in the landscape that go unrecognized and get destroyed in the development process. Urban conservation policies are required to preserve them for future generations of children.

*Children's Participation in Planning and Design of Their Environment*: Some of this work has been done, but more is needed, especially regarding impacts of these activities on children's self-esteem, sense of empowerment, and enhancement of democratic skills (Hart, 1996; Moore, Verheyen, and Anderson, 1995).

*Cross-Cultural, Transnational Studies of Childhood Environments*: The precedent for this direction was set in the Growing Up in Cities project by Kevin Lynch and collaborators 20 years ago (Lynch, 1977). It is difficult to control the variables in such studies to achieve consistent comparisons. Nonetheless, the effort has several advantages, including highlighting the global nature of emerging childhood environment issues, discussing how they might be addressed in professional practice, understanding how they relate to stages of national development (i.e., comparisons between least developed, developing, and developed countries), and opening doors to increased understanding of cultural and social differences between disparate geographic locations. A follow-up study of the Growing Up in Cities project is currently underway, involving an international research team spanning nine sites in eight countries: Argentina, Australia, India,

Norway, Poland, South Africa, the U.K., and the U.S. (Growing Up in Cities URL, n.d.).

### Conclusion

Daily hands-on contact with natural settings is essential to children's health. It is also a prerequisite for sustainable development education. Given that, there are negative implications for child development in the growing restrictions on children's use of the urban outdoors. Recent U.S. volumes express concern about children's loss of daily contact with nature (Louv, 1990; Nabhan and Trimble, 1994; Pyle, 1993). In the U.K. and Canada, articles in the popular press indicate a sharp increase in parental restrictions over children's use of the outdoors. Although these data are primarily anecdotal, they reinforce an increasing concern about negative implications for both child development and the future of the Earth. Longstanding restrictions caused by traffic danger are now joined by the worrisome "Bogeyman Syndrome" or fear of strangers. Reversing these trends will require a massive effort by parents, researchers, landscape designers, architects, horticulturists, educators, urban planners, and other professionals responsible for child development. We need to create safe, natural havens for urban children where childhood and its natural inheritance can be reconnected — as a right. We can do this by making the issue of children's access to nature an action-research priority, and by giving voice to children and youth in creating policies for improving children's access to environmental diversity.

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# And Do You Feel Like This Is Your Country?

## Peggy Saika Interviews Sipfou Saechao

SAIKA: I'M PEGGY SAIKA AND I'M EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF APEN — THE ASIAN Pacific Environmental Network — which is a community organization concerned with environmental justice for Asian and Pacific Islanders. Today I'm talking to Sipfou Saechao, who is 16 years old and a 10th grader at Richmond High School in Richmond, California, on the San Francisco Bay. Sipfou has been part of our girls program for almost two years. So Sipfou, tell us a bit about yourself.

**Saechao**: I was born in Taiwan. I was two and a half when we moved to Sacramento. My aunt and them lived in Sacramento. When I was five or six, I moved to San Pablo. I only have a mom. My dad died. We were coming home from my ceremony on the freeway, and my dad was driving. My uncle was in the passenger's seat, and in the back was me, my mom, my brother, and my cousin. And then my dad, he accidentally bumped into the curb, so then the car won't start. So my dad and my uncle got out of the car on the freeway to look for a phone. My dad went across the street, I mean across the freeway, to find a phone. Then my uncle looked up and he saw this big ol' truck coming and then my uncle yelled, but it was too late. So the driver accidentally crushed my dad and the top half of his body was like hanging from the freeway. He was 37. I have one brother. After my dad died, the three of us moved to San Pablo. My mom stays at home and takes care of us.

**Saika**: How did you get involved with APEN?

**Saechao**: The Asian Pacific Island staff came to our school. I was at Helms Junior High. There was an orientation for Laotian girls, so our teacher excused us out of class to go to the orientation. And they said that there was a program, like to help us understand ourselves and our community. I had just finished eighth grade and I didn't have anything to do in the summer, so I joined the APEN program in the summer of 1995.

The first week was hard because I didn't know anyone in there, and we didn't really know each other. So it was, like, hard trying to fit in 'cause everybody was thinking, "What am I going to say?" and all that stuff. And we were really

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uncomfortable. But as the weeks went by, we started to talk and hang out, and we got closer and we became sisters. There were 12 of us.
**Saika**: And what kind of things did you learn that first summer?
**Saechao**: At first I didn't know any of the girls. And I thought they were like just like any other girls you know, who didn't really care. They just wanted to pass by. But then we all really got into it. We were really committed. They were fun and I trusted them.
**Saika**: And what did you learn in the program?
**Saechao**: I learned about reproductive health, about my environment, gangs, violence, and we learned about toxics in the community. I did a little survey about fish — you know, what fish our people are eating and where it comes from.
**Saika**: And what did you learn about yourself?
**Saechao**: Well, all my life in school I never stood up for myself. I had low self-esteem. I just let anyone say whatever they wanted and I didn't really care. But after I joined the program, I started noticing that I was sticking up for myself. I talked when I wanted to. I asked questions when I didn't understand, and I had higher self-esteem and I was talking about myself.
**Saika**: At the end of that first summer program, you got to go to U.C. Berkeley to participate in an international global youth seminar. What was that about?
**Saechao**: It was a week at Berkeley, where you have to take like actual college classes that taught us lots about our environment, and community organizing, and how to teach other. We all went for a whole week. We went to different classes and it was really interesting. We learned a lot.
**Saika**: And you were able to meet...
**Saechao**: ...new people from around the world.
**Saika**: And how do you feel about all of this now, after two years?
**Saechao**: [Laughs.] I think it has helped me a lot to understand myself and my community — like how to care for it, how to get help when I need it, and where to go.
**Saika**: When you look at what's going on in your own community, what do you think?
**Saechao**: Well, most of the time I'm in school, so I don't think about it. I just block it out 'cause it's too much to handle. And there's not a program or a group within the school that could help us to understand and to teach others to cope with it. So we can't really do anything about it.
**Saika**: What kinds of problems do you see in the school?
**Saechao**: Racial tension, violence, drugs, weapons, and just immature people...and there's a lot of pressure on girls, especially Laotian girls, because we're living two lives. At home we're supposed to be a kind of housewife, and at school we're supposed to do what's expected of us by our teachers. So we're listening to one person at home and listening to a different one at school. It's also hard because the guys get more opportunities, and the girls often get put down by guys that say we are not smart enough or we're not strong enough.

**Saika**: What about in the community, what kinds of problems do you see?
**Saechao**: It's basically the same ones. It's always the guys who get all the credit and opportunity. They get more choices than girls. All we have to do is go to school, become a wife, that's it. And then there's the elders. They think that we're not serious about our communities. They think that we just want to do drugs or hang out — that we don't care about our community, our people. They don't understand that we do want to help, and we don't know where to go to find help.
**Saika**: Are drugs still a big problem in the community?
**Saechao**: Yes, especially for young Laotian guys.
**Saika**: What about teen pregnancy and stuff for the girls?
**Saechao**: A lot of girls are getting pregnant, like in junior high and high school. And they think that it's okay, you know, just, they always be bragging, "Oh I got a kid," and all that. Some of them are younger than me.
**Saika**: What about gangs? Is that a big problem?
**Saechao**: Uh-huh, there's a lot of gangs.
**Saika**: Even for the girls?
**Saechao**: Uh-huh. Even the girls have gangs. But APEN taught me that I deserve more. Like, I'm better than wasting my life being in gangs and violence.
**Saika**: So you feel like you have hope for the future?
**Saechao**: Sometimes I do and sometimes I don't. When I'm with APEN I feel like, "I could do anything." But then when I go back to the real world, everybody's always putting you down, like "You can't accomplish this. You can't do that. You did this wrong. You're a girl."
**Saika**: So the program is a place where you get the support and the nurturing that you can't find in other places?
**Saechao**: Uh-huh, because it's mostly girls working here, and women staff, and it's also because we have counselors that aren't much older than us, so they can relate to how we feel.
**Saika**: What are your hopes for the future? You have dreams of what you want to do?
**Saechao**: Sometimes I think about being a Laotian leader in my community.
**Saika**: You were active doing precinct work before the elections last November. You worked *really* hard against Proposition 209. How do you feel about that experience?
**Saechao**: It really taught me a lot because before I didn't really care much about politics. I just always felt, "Oh, they don't listen to what we have to say, how we feel, or what we really need." It's always the congressmen or whoever, they're deciding everything for us. So why should I bother when they're not even going to listen to me? But with Prop. 209, I felt like it was going to hurt my community, especially me, 'cause I want to go to college. And I felt, what if two persons are goin' up for a job, and one of them's me and one of them's a white person? And that white person's more qualified? When Proposition 209 is not there, you know, I might have a chance.

**Saika**: Affirmative action is really to make sure that when you are qualified, then people of color and women and other folks have a chance and an opportunity, right? It's about making sure that different groups of people are not discriminated against. So, when you were walking the precincts — and you were actually one of the top five in Youth for Justice right, signing up people against 209 — what was that like?
**Saechao**: It was kind of a good and bad experience. It was hard because all through the time when I was walking, I was still confused about 209 and affirmative action. All these people kept on putting new things in my mind, trying to confuse me. But it was also good because I learned how other people feel in my community, and like I got a sense of what they wanted.
**Saika**: And do you feel like this is your country?
**Saechao**: Not really.
**Saika**: How come?
**Saechao**: I don't know. Probably 'cause everywhere you go, it's white man's country, or whatever. It's always there, you know, whether it's on TV, on the radio, or whatever. They're always saying that this is my country, but they're always using their own rules. They don't really care about how I feel.
**Saika**: What else have you been able to do as a part of this program that you think has made you grow as a person?
**Saechao**: I've been able to attend different meetings that concern my community. And we're doing community organizing. Like we go to the Institute for Youth, and we're on their Board. We work with a bunch of youth from all different organizations around the Bay Area, trying to get their input and to work together on what we need and to decide who's going to do it. Everywhere I go, when people ask me, "Where are you from?" I say, "I'm from APEN." And they're always interested, you know. I keep answering their questions and at school, some of the other girls and I are always talking about APEN. We're always having activities, so then other people come around and ask us what we're doing. Then they say, "Oh, it's so fun," and, "You're really doing a good job." They always say that they want to be in a program, too.
**Saika**: That's great. That's really great. Are there things that you hope you're going to be able to do as a part of the program, things that you've been thinking about?
**Saechao**: I want to start a newsletter. By youth. Just inform the youth about what kinds of activities are goin' on in the Bay Area and make a little journal section where youth, especially Asian kids, can write in. It would be like talking, where they could feel they could trust us enough to tell about our problems, and we could try to help them resolve it.... Oh, and I also want to be a counselor. For the younger girls. I think that Americans should be thankful that the different people of the world come to America. You know, we could teach them so many things if they would just listen, like our culture, our knowledge, and our understanding.
**Saika**: You feel like you have something to offer and you want to be involved?

**Saechao**: It makes me want to be involved more. Because I'm starting to see what's happening to my community, my friends, and myself. If I'm not really doing anything about it, a lot of other people are going to say, "If you don't do it, no one else will."

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