Afterschool Matters

Democracy in Action

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Colleagues,

"Everyone knows" that young citizens don't vote. "Everyone knows" that youth generally, and poor youth of color particularly, are apathetic toward or disaffected from democratic processes, especially those that have to do with established forms of government. There are some pretty potent reasons for the observations that inform these bits of conventional wisdom, but they don't tell the whole story. We at the Robert Bowne Foundation regularly encounter young people in afterschool programs who flatly contradict what "everyone knows."

One reason is that the afterschool programs we support are, by and large, inherently democratic. Youth-centered programs, in which young people's needs and interests drive content and guide activities, give participants an opportunity for self-determination and self-actualization that many cannot experience in other arenas of their lives. Such commitment to democratic principles and processes is a hallmark of quality community-based afterschool programming.

This issue of *Afterschool Matters* focuses on programs that take this commitment beyond the internal program workings to encourage young people's participation in democratic processes in the larger society. The range of ways in which these programs develop young people's "civic muscle" is impressive. (On "civic muscle," see my article in the September 2005 issue of the Robert Bowne Foundation e-newsletter, *The Page Turner*, at www.robertbownefoundation.org.) Only one article focuses on democracy narrowly defined as participation in elections—and even then the active, literacy-based means by which Mary Cipollone emphasizes the importance of informed voting goes well beyond the dry lessons of a civics class. In an article from The After-School Corporation, an advocacy day brings afterschool participants to the state capital to argue for the programs that are changing their lives and, in the process, teaches communication skills and the value of patience. Describing an incident at another advocacy day, this time for juvenile justice reform, Ruben Austria highlights the fact that both individual transformation and social change are necessary components of service to at-risk youth. Elisabeth Soep of Youth Radio examines how young people learn professional standards of journalism and confront tensions inherent in reporting on volatile issues from a youth perspective. In an interview with Sara Hill, Gerald Eagle Bear describes an annual conference in which Native American youth join together to reclaim their heritage and engage in creating change in their communities.

Even this broad range only begins to capture the myriad ways in which afterschool programs advance the ideals of independence and participation on which our society is based. I hope that reading these articles will encourage afterschool practitioners, researchers, and policymakers to find new ways to challenge what "everybody knows" about young people's participation in democratic processes.

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youth media citizenship
beyond "youth voice"

by Elisabeth Soep

Young people's relationship to citizenship in a democratic society is full of contradiction. Teenagers in the United States can join the military before they are allowed to vote or consume alcohol. On certain issues, young people are seen, at best, as junior citizens, incapable of acting effectively on their own behalf. Other issues, by contrast, trigger fears that young people enjoy excessive power to effect change and disrupt society—fears that suggest a rationale for boosting surveillance and social control. Such scholars as

Nestor Garcia Canclini (2001) even argue that young people today are more likely to attribute a sense of citizenship to the brands and media they consume rather than to abstract rules of democracy or to participation in conventional civic institutions. The globalization of youth culture further complicates young people's relationship to democracy as traditionally conceived. More and more young people define themselves as cosmopolitan citizens, connected through popular culture, digital technologies, and migration histories to social geographies outside their own local and national contexts (Maira & Soep, 2005). Despite these new forms of citizenship in youth culture, however, one familiar image of young people remains unchanged: They continue to be seen as disengaged from organized efforts to lead and represent their communities.

Those of us who work with young people, particularly in community-based youth organizations, know that this image of apathy is deeply flawed. These organizations are fueled by the opposite of youth apathy: youth agency, expressed

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through active participation in policymaking and community organizing and through the exercise of fundamental rights such as free speech.

The media figures centrally in any link between youth and democracy. From mainstream network and cable broadcasts to online blogs, a proliferating array of news sources shapes young people's understandings of the political process. The standards of news media are undeniably in flux, perhaps even crisis. Teenagers and young adults in the U.S. are forming civic identities amid widely publicized scandals surrounding reporting on their president's military record and on treatment of prisoners in Guantanamo Bay, as well as press protections allotted to non-traditional journalists and anonymous sources. Meanwhile, many in the mainstream media are committed to reaching young audiences, yet their efforts often amount, in the words of producer and media scholar Robert Calo, to "dressing their anchors in leather and shooting them at night on an urban rooftop. They're caught in the trap of their own making, fearful to lose the audience they have for one they don't know how to reach" (personal communication, January 5, 2005).

Crucially, young people are joining these debates by participating in the burgeoning youth media movement. They are not only consuming stories produced by adults but also creating their own stories. Youth media is typically defined as media conceived, developed, and produced by young people (Campbell, Hoey, & Perlman, 2001). The primary goals of the youth media movement are youth learning, community and workforce development, civic engagement, creative expression, and social justice (Buckingham, 2003; Fleetwood, 2005; Goldfarb, 2002; Goodman, 2003; Kafai & Resnick, 1996; Sefton-Green, 2000; Tyner, 1998). Youth media education sometimes privileges *media literacy:* the capacity to deconstruct the manufactured images, sounds, and narratives young people encounter as members of a key market. The youth media movement also often includes *media advocacy*—the use of television, radio, print, and the Internet, as well as such underground resources as stickering and postering campaigns, to sway public opinion, support community organizing efforts, advance policies, and improve social capital (Wallack, Dorfman, Themba, & Jernigan, 1993).

> **When young people transform lived experience and policy discourse into powerful public narratives inflected with the aesthetic sensibilities of youth culture, they unsettle what is taken as truth about their own lives and their complex social worlds.**

My primary focus in this article is the dimension of the youth media movement focused on hands-on production in non-school spaces—sites where young people generate original stories for significant audiences. School-based media education programs certainly exist throughout the U.S., supported in the last several years by the development of national media literacy standards and statewide efforts to integrate creative media production into the curriculum (Tyner, 1998). However, sites operating outside of schools, especially independent afterschool programs, are a key force in the youth media movement. Such programs provide a vehicle for young people to tell stories, using dialogue, reflection, and action to convey their truth. When young people transform lived experience and policy discourse into powerful public narratives inflected with the aesthetic sensibilities of youth culture, they unsettle what is taken as truth about their own lives and their complex social worlds.

Youth media programs operating outside of schools, such as the one I focus on here, often deal with democracy on at least two levels—as both content for stories and context for teaching and learning. Young people in these sites take on some of democracy's most pressing themes and issues, while working in an environment that promotes active participation, involvement in decision making, and constant vigilance toward matters of equity. These programs, then, have the potential to do more than simply foster "youth voice," as they are often described in literature touting their virtues. At the same time, they contain tensions and contradictions that emerge in any environment aiming to model democratic practices. My research indicates four features in community-based afterschool media programs that apply democracy in this double sense: peer teaching, collegial pedagogy, multiple outlets, and applied agency. These four features emerged in my ethnographic study of Youth Radio, a single program in the context of the broader youth media movement.

Context: Youth Radio

My participatory ethnographic research was based at Youth Radio, a youth media pioneer now in its fifteenth

year of operation. Youth Radio is a nonprofit afterschool organization in which young people produce stories for local and national broadcasts on radio, television, and online outlets. The program is located in the San Francisco Bay Area, with bureaus in Los Angeles, Washington, and Atlanta. Youth Radio students, primarily working-class youth and youth of color, are recruited from high schools in poor urban districts, as well as through outreach to students in schools marked by vast differences in opportunities to learn afforded to those in remedial versus honors classes.

Young people are selected for the program that meets in Youth Radio's Berkeley production facility through a process that includes an application and interview. The selection process is designed to assess prospective students' interest in the program and to ensure that the incoming class is diverse in terms of ethnicity and gender and is composed predominantly of students from working-class families and those who attend under-resourced public schools. Students take a 12-week introductory class, which is offered four times a year. They come to Youth Radio after school twice a week to learn basic media skills in web, video, music production, and radio, while producing and hosting a two-hour live show called *Youth in Control* that airs on local public radio every Friday night. Most students who graduate from the introductory class return for another 12 weeks of more advanced training, which also takes place two afternoons a week for two hours. In this phase, students specialize in a particular area—for example, engineering, music or video production, news and commentary writing, or web design and programming. Having completed these two course sessions, students are then eligible to become interns at Youth Radio, initially on a volunteer basis, and, after three months, in paid positions.

When staff members recognized that a significant number of young people who could benefit from the program could not, for a variety of reasons, make their way to the Berkeley facility, they launched a series of outreach programs at local public schools, community-based organizations, group

Youth Radio students have produced stories on topics including the effects of standardized testing on young people in "failing" urban public schools, the status of free speech in U.S. classrooms in an era of war and homeland security, reflections from young soldiers returning from the war in Iraq, and debates about the effects of the youth vote on the most recent presidential election.

homes, and juvenile detention facilities. These outreach programs essentially replicate key dimensions of the on-site classes, including on-air and online broadcast opportunities. All learning experiences at Youth Radio maintain a dual focus on professional standards and youth development, supporting the latter through a comprehensive program that both emphasizes critical media literacy and carves pathways into higher education and meaningful work.

Students who want to produce commentaries and feature stories for broadcast on National Public Radio and other outlets apply for internships in Youth Radio's newsroom. Youth Radio students have produced stories on topics including the effects of standardized testing on young people in "failing" urban public schools, the status of free

their adult counterparts, they engage in heated debates about what "balanced coverage" means and how "truthfulness" applies to unorthodox storytelling techniques. Because they are being trained to cover stories about democracy, young people in programs such as Youth Radio can inform researchers' understanding of the extent to which democratic principles inform the learning environments that take hold in community-based organizations. Missing in our current understanding of youth media programs is a clear sense of how they organize themselves as democratic institutions while they simultaneously enable young people to produce stories about the status of democracy in difficult times.

Research Methods

In order to pursue such an understanding, I have studied Youth Radio since 1999, using participant-observation, interviews, and focus groups. This fieldwork builds on research I have carried out nationally over 14 years, independently and in collaborative sponsored studies, on youth learning environments beyond the classroom (Davis, Soep, Maira, Remba, & Putnoi, 1993; Heath, 2001; Heath & Soep, 1998; Soep, 2005a & b; Soep, forthcoming). My present approach distinguishes itself from earlier phases in my work by virtue of my sustained, engaged role in Youth Radio. As a senior producer in Youth Radio's newsroom and the organization's education director, I collaborate daily with young people to produce local and national stories as well as develop and assess programs and curricula with other adult staff.

Carrying out original research from within a youth organization undeniably brings unique challenges. The deadline-driven pace of youth media work can, for instance, make it difficult to jot field notes when a frantic young person needs me to help cut five excess minutes from a public affairs show due to the station by 6:00 p.m. The challenge of carrying out participation-heavy ethnographic research seems more than balanced, however, by the insights that come from direct, intense involvement in the democratic learning environment I'm studying. Moreover, as colleagues, the young people and adults at Youth Radio participate in the research in ways that immeasurably enrich the project. Staff members produce their own field notes on key learning moments in their departments, and we find ourselves regularly engaged in spontaneous conversations about questions, tensions, and findings coming up in the research. This model of participatory

speech in U.S. classrooms in an era of war and homeland security, reflections from young soldiers returning from the war in Iraq, and debates about the effects of the youth vote on the most recent presidential election.

In the newsroom, students research topics, conduct interviews, record scenes and ambient sound, write scripts, and produce stories that air on public radio shows whose audiences number in the millions. Every step in this media production process is highly collaborative. Adult producers and peer teachers work with young people to prepare interview questions and outlines; in some cases, adult producers accompany young reporters in the field. Students might interview a school superintendent, record the scene outside a juvenile courtroom, or tape a frank conversation with a young soldier returning from the war in Iraq. Later, young people mix their pieces in the studio. Throughout a given story's development, teens consult with peers and adult producers in weekly editorial meetings, pitching ideas, raising questions, and reporting progress on especially challenging projects.

Youth Radio students hold themselves to journalistic standards of accuracy, rigor, and truth value. Like

ethnography by no means eradicates the power differentials built into research (Chávez, Duran, Baker, Avila, & Wallerstein, 2003). One group of young people, for example, recently questioned why their real names should be erased from my publications, even though I am writing about, and clearly benefiting from, their creative work as artists and media producers in a field in which they already have to fight constantly for recognition. An effort to engage democratic practices in the research process itself, and to consider critically what to do when those ideals fall short, seems consistent with the overall intent of this inquiry into community-based education as democracy in action.

Youth Media Movement

Democratic ideals resonate throughout the history of the youth media movement, if not always in straightforward ways (see Sefton-Green & Soep, forthcoming; Soep & Chavez, forthcoming). The origins of the movement stretch back to the 1950s. According to Goldfarb (2002), at that time countries including the U.S. and France initiated dubious media education programs in an effort to establish themselves as "benevolent" leaders by introducing new technologies to classrooms and other settings in American Samoa and West Africa. Goldfarb's analysis is somewhat unusual in the literature because he focuses on the colonial underpinnings of these early transnational media education efforts.

> **The complex positioning of youth media projects like Youth Radio as "in-between" sites of education, operating somewhere between school culture and youth culture, reveals itself in daily practice.**

More typically, researchers cite the 1960s and 1970s as the beginning of a shift from teaching *about* media to teaching *through* media in the U.S., in an attempt to promote active and critical citizenship. In an essay originally published in 1961, video artist Dee Dee Halleck (2002) argued that teaching moviemaking to children, with their "natural curiosity and vigorous imaginations," was one of the best ways to combat the public's "duped acceptance" of mass media messages (p. 50). Soon, video tools and other forms of technology made production both cheaper and more portable (Goodman, 2003). At the same time, the civil rights, student, and anti-war movements supported a view of community-based media as an "empowerment" project mobilizing new tools for production and access (Fleetwood, 2005). The 1980s saw a shift away from community empowerment and critique to a focus on

fostering media literacy, as well as "marketable skills," through vocational training, including, crucially, training provided by community-based afterschool programs (Goldfarb, 2002; Goodman, 2003). The increased visibility of youth violence that made headlines in the 1990s, as well as new public attention to political movements such as "girl power" feminisms (Kearney, 2003) and HIV/AIDS activism (Juhasz, 1995), sparked interest in teaching alternative media production, outside of classrooms, as a way to enable young people to tell stories about issues affecting their own lives and communities, on their own terms. The youth media movement today, like other educational efforts that aim to bridge young people's experience in and out of school, is drawing increased research attention in light of growing interest in the creative and political lives of youth outside classrooms (see, for example, Buckingham, 2003; Heath, 2001; Hull, 2003; Hull & Schultz, 2002; Mahiri, 2004).

The complex positioning of youth media projects like Youth Radio as "in-between" sites of education, operating somewhere between school culture and youth culture, reveals itself in daily practice. Young people use the non-school space of Youth Radio to produce stories, for example, exploring race and class breakdowns in Advanced Placement classes; they incorporate original hip-hop beats into radio shows dealing with topics ranging from civil liberties to statutory rape. While working at Youth Radio, writer and community outreach associate Jesús Quintero captured one such "in-between" moment among a group of incarcerated young men at a local juvenile detention camp, one of Youth Radio's long-standing outreach sites, on the first day of the program.

> Mike hands out Youth Radio questionnaires. While students fill them out, a young man covers his paper as though cheating, clutching his pencil scarred with fresh teeth marks. As I explain the purpose of the questionnaire, I notice this kid eating away, turning the pencil as though eating an ear of corn. Finally, Pencil Eater asks, "Can I go to the bathroom?"
>
> I tell him, "It's cool, go handle it, blood." I am tempted to say, "Be back," because I sense that he

doesn't want to be here. Maybe the rooms of Juvenile Hall are less intimidating than classrooms for Pencil Eater. Seven minutes later and he's still hiding, perhaps imagining that he's the pencil, wanting to disappear, bite by bite. Having gone through middle school and part of high school not knowing how to read, perhaps he is invisible. Nobody ever saw him.

I imagine he's in the bathroom, doing the same routine that has gotten him this far in life: when the issue of writing or literacy comes up, hide in the bathroom until the teacher forgets. Cut class. Just leave if the teacher brings it up, never come back. I tell Mike I'll be back. I gotta use the bathroom.

Pencil Eater is just outside the classroom, on a bench. His back is soaking wet, breathing hard. "Do the people here know what's up with you?" I ask. "With what?" he says, nibbling on a hangnail. He spits it out. "Nah, not really." "Your mom know?" I say. "Yeah," he says. "She tries to help me read, but," and Pencil Eater takes out the chewed pencil from his pocket and starts banging it against his knee, "she just gets mad." "So what did they tell you, the teachers?" I ask. Pencil Eater stops shaking his foot, looks up and with an earnest smile, "They said I was doing good." (Jesús Quintero, excerpts from field notes, May 2005)

Many young people at Youth Radio arrive ready to write—about themselves, their families, their communities, and the issues that affect their lives. However, many others struggle with writing; even more feel lost in the system. Every young person who walks through the door, or ends up in an outreach program like the one at this juvenile detention camp, carries a relationship to a public school system in which vast numbers of students fall through the cracks. Afterschool programs like Youth Radio create a space for young people to tell stories from outside the pathways of school-based education. Through these perspectives, Youth Radio students explore some of most pressing social and political issues of our time, including immigration, education, youth violence, and public health.

Democratic principles, and the tensions that invariably surround them, inform both the learning environments of youth media programs and the content of student stories.

Beyond Youth Voice

The editorial process, in particular, reveals the complexities and tensions built into an environment where young people produce and share original work. At Youth Radio, adults do not merely hand young people recording equipment and send them off to "find their true voice" (for relevant critiques, see Fleetwood, 2005; Tannock, 2004; Trend, 1997). Rather, young people and adults continually negotiate thorny questions about how to shape material so as to maximize impact and audience reach without compromising young people's visions for their stories.

Youth Radio is both a youth development agency and a professional production company. In many cases, that dual mission provides clear guidelines for producing narratives that support young people's learning and well-being while informing a public through provocative broadcasts. There are times, though, when these two organizational "identities" raise tensions. In these situations, Youth Radio has a strong policy that youth development principles override broadcast pressures. Young people have the final editorial say over the content and distribution of their work.

Youth Radio has a strong policy that youth development principles override broadcast pressures. Young people have the final editorial say over the content and distribution of their work.

Negotiating that policy on a day-to-day basis, however, is not always easy. Recently, we worked with a young soldier who had just returned from serving in Iraq. He kept a journal throughout his months on the front lines, which we together edited into a five-minute radio piece. Embedded in his writing were criticisms of day-to-day military practices on the ground, together with troubling descriptions of interactions with Iraqi citizens. It was provocative material; this young man was a vivid writer whose stories seemed an important antidote to sanitized war coverage. Our challenge was to figure out this young soldier's relationship to Youth Radio's youth development mission. Had we been a "regular" newsroom, we might not have given much thought to the potential consequences and even dangers this young man could face for sharing his story. He had not gone through the

Youth Radio program as a student, yet he was a young person sharing a story through Youth Radio. Broadcasting the story without naming the soldier was not an option because the outlet prohibited use of unnamed sources in cases like this. Early in the process, we reviewed with the young enlistee the probable risks in what he was doing—"outing" himself as a soldier who was also a witness and storyteller. Initiating this conversation about risk jeopardized the story, in a way. He could have decided to pull out—but he did not. In the end, however, an officer in his division killed the story on receiving word of the soldier's intent to broadcast his diary. This editorial process raised issues that go far beyond word-choice and story structure; at stake were fundamental rights surrounding freedom of expression and the role of the press, as well as government and military policy. Despite no longer having access to the young man's journal, Youth Radio set out to explore the limits—both external and self-imposed—placed on young soldiers' free speech and to examine the impact of those limits on public information about the war.

Related issues arose through the editorial process in a different story that was part of Youth Radio's war coverage. In the wake of the Abu Ghraib scandal, Youth Radio visited some young Marines who had returned to college in California after taking part in the U.S. invasion. While we were recording, one of them opened a website he had created, in which he had added captions to digital photographs he had taken in Iraq. He called one snapshot of a burned Iraqi man "Mr. Crispy." Another photo showed Americans in camouflage giving candy to Iraqi children with the caption, "Hey kids, here's some candy. Now make sure you don't sneak up on me tonight or I'll have to shoot you." The other young Marine began talking on tape about a corporal who had invited him to abuse an Iraqi prisoner. We included these moments, but not the name of the officer, in the story. Here was another instance of tension between investigative journalism and youth development. Youth media producers typically take some responsibility for the impact of any story on all young people involved in it, whether as subject, character, reporter, or commentator. However, Youth Radio is deeply committed to offering a counter-

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narrative to the tightly controlled messages put forth in the mainstream press, and messages about the war are no exception. When the content of the story raises questions *about* democracy, the process of creating the story seems to challenge easy formulas that romanticize the idea of "youth voice" as always and automatically a site of freedom.

These last two examples are not the kinds of incidents that occur every day in afterschool programs. Challenges like these are, to a certain extent, specific to a youth development program aiming to broadcast high-impact stories on volatile topics in difficult times. Yet every community-based organization in which young people experience and examine issues fundamental to a democratic society faces its own challenges when it comes to reconciling youth development goals with social justice work. In the case of Youth Radio, journalistic integrity and rigor built into our mission are added to this mix.

Features and Tensions of Democratic Practice

Looking across ethnographic moments such as the ones I have presented here, against the backdrop of comparative analysis I have conducted within ten additional youth media production sites across the U.S., several key features of such learning environments emerge. These features may hold particular relevance for programs in which young people produce original work for large audiences. However, they can be applied as a lens to community-based learning in a larger sense, across sites where youth and adults work both to embody and to question the idea of education as democracy in action.

Collegial Pedagogy

The learning environment at Youth Radio is guided by a process of *collegial pedagogy,* in which young people and adults jointly frame and carry out projects in a relationship of interdependence and mutual accountability (Soep & Chavez, forthcoming). In collegial pedagogy, young people offer a key substantive contribution; they possess something the adults don't have—a certain kind of access, understanding, experience, or analysis directly relevant to the project at

the same age as the young men. All of them shared popular culture references, styles of speech, and other generational markers that set a tone quite different from a typical interview between an adult reporter and young respondents, particularly when the reporter was asking questions about such sensitive topics. That said, the Youth Radio reporter came to this challenging task having trained with a series of adult professional journalists and media artists, and I, as a producer, accompanied her for tape gathering. In collegial pedagogy, mentoring adults provide access to equipment, expertise, in-the-moment advice, and crucially, a network of relationships with outlets for young people's work. Progressive educators often speak of young people and adults co-producing a learning environment, but in the collegial pedagogy of Youth Radio, that co-production goes beyond metaphor: Youth and adults literally co-create an original product released to a real audience.

Peer Teaching

In every program at Youth Radio, experienced young people, often high school students themselves, teach newcomers to the organization. When new students arrive on a Wednesday for their first introductory class, a corps of peer teachers greets them and introduces them to the basic elements of a live radio show, as well as the ground rules at Youth Radio. By Friday, peer teachers and new students go on the air together to broadcast their show, *Youth in Control,* on KPFB-FM, as they do weekly for the next three months. Young people at Youth Radio routinely report that a highlight of their experience, and something that draws their continued commitment, is the fact that they learn from other young people. We replicate this structure of peer teaching at Youth Radio's outreach sites, including those serving youth in group homes and detention facilities, such as the one where Pencil Eater sat down to write his first radio commentary. A goal for those programs is for graduates, when they are released from incarceration, to enroll in one of the organization's various on-site programs.

Peer teaching is consistently one of the most popular internships at Youth Radio, a position for which young people apply once they've completed introductory and advanced class sessions. Very quickly, peer teachers begin linking their own accomplishments to those of their students, who, in some cases, may be the same age as their peer teachers, if not older. When one of their students overcomes nervousness "on the mic" or gets a story on the air, peer teachers will boast, "That's

hand. The adults could not carry out the task themselves, even if they wanted to. In a sense, that is the whole point of youth media—to contribute insights and challenging perspectives to a mainstream media that too often ignores the experience and intelligence of youth. Such insights and perspectives were particularly instrumental in the case of the story described above, produced in the wake of the prison abuse scandal at Abu Ghraib. The reporter who interviewed the Marines about their experiences in Iraq and about the digital photographs they brought home was roughly

my student!" The structure of peer teaching promotes a sense of responsibility for contributing to the learning environment of Youth Radio not only as receptive learners, but also as engaged citizens who facilitate other young people's development. To become a peer teacher, interns must invest in additional professional development for themselves. In special intensive workshops and faculty meetings, peer teachers discuss lesson plan development, pedagogy, and classroom management. Their students see that they, too, can move into peer teaching roles, if they stay involved and build up their skills as producers and community-based educators.

Multiple Outlets

Youth in Control, which young people broadcast beginning their first week at Youth Radio, has a real audience. But that audience is quite small, and the show is therefore a relatively protected outlet for young people who are new to the microphone. As young people accumulate experience, they have opportunities to produce stories for expanding outlets, ranging from commercial stations to highly trafficked websites to major shows like *Morning Edition* and *All Things Considered* on National Public Radio, with audiences estimated at well over 20 million listeners. Clearly, the stakes and production values of broadcasts on these shows are high. Moreover, some of these national outlets have a certain sensibility and sound; not every story is a viable candidate for their programs. Critical, then, to the capacity for Youth Radio students to express a full range of perspectives and aesthetics, and to reach audiences of peers as well as adults, is the array of outlets they can target as they develop their stories. These outlets include local and national commercial and public radio stations, Youth Radio's own website, www.youthradio.org, as well as webcasts and podcasts. The importance of multiple outlets has been particularly important in our war coverage. Our experience with the young soldier whose journal was blocked from broadcast by his military chain of command highlighted the value of outlets that do not require subjects in his position to reveal their full names. The breadth of outlets in Youth Radio's repertoire has allowed us to produce stories such as one based on a series of emails between an active-duty

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soldier and his sister. As the soldier stipulated, the story kept his identity off the air. This feature of multiple outlets may seem specific to youth media programs. However, this notion of linking young people to varied sectors of "the public sphere," providing them with the skills to understand and make decisions about how to reach those audiences, holds relevance to community-based youth education programs across the board (Kelley, 1997).

Applied Agency

In her influential study of culturally relevant teaching, Gloria Ladson-Billings (1997) calls for literacy education that legitimates young people's lived experiences and engages young people in collective, intergenerational work toward social justice. Youth Radio shares this approach, which foregrounds youth agency without underestimating the power and persistence of inequalities surrounding young people's position in both youth communities and the wider society (Hull & Katz, 2002). This focus on supporting youth agency entails going beyond the goal of getting a young person's story on the air—no matter how important that one piece might be, regardless of what honors and awards that broadcast might bring. Sites like Youth Radio can make a lasting and meaningful impact on individual young people and their communities only when programs support young people's educational and professional opportunities, their sense of social responsibility, and their participation in efforts to unsettle ideologies and institutions that reproduce the uneven distribution of power. When students go through an experience that upsets, angers, or even enrages them, we aim to provide the tools to translate that reaction into a mediated intervention that makes an actual difference for themselves and others. Recently, several Youth Radio interns were harassed by the local police, in one case while en route to an all-day organizational retreat, and in another case while escorting students in the introductory class up to the studio to go on the air for the *Youth in Control* show. Such experiences, all too familiar especially for young males of color, undermine youth agency in a very real sense. And yet through Youth Radio, the interns were able to draw on the details of their own encounters with law enforcement in a number of highly productive and provocative ways: through

spirited in-house meetings for students and staff; through a public forum bringing together community members, teens, and the local chief of police with members of his own staff; and through a series of highly challenging commentaries and reports for various outlets (with one currently being pitched to a national public radio show). Supporting youth agency, then, does not mean merely "giving youth voice." Rather, it means working on a systemic level to help open concrete opportunities and expose injustices where they exist.

Democracy in Action

This constellation of features creates conditions for a dynamic and complex learning environment for young people and adults.

A context marked by **collegial pedagogy** locates young people within a larger field of practice, in which they have meaningful relationships with adults in various positions of expertise, authority, and lived experience. This context provides resources for young people to consider their immediate decisions against the backdrop of the history of knowledge accumulated in a given field.

Despite the important role of adults, key to youth programs that embrace democratic practices are structures for **peer education**. Through peer education, young people develop opportunities to form critical judgments based on what they have learned from having to teach.

The opportunity to target and reach varied audiences through **multiple outlets** provides flexibility when it comes to decisions about how to present young people's work. While these decisions may be formed collaboratively, and adults may urge young people to make compromises in order to reach the biggest audience, in the end, the final editorial judgment must reside with the youth.

Applied agency is a key feature of democratic practice in community-based education. The word *applied* invokes an abstract principle realized through concrete action. For "positive youth development" to mean more than a superficial opportunity for a young person to enjoy a fleeting moment of recognition, programs are well advised to engage their youth in broader efforts to unsettle social structures and histories that reinforce inequalities and distorted tellings of important truths.

To return to the story of Pencil Eater and his learned instinct to run away when called on to write, it is the role, and really the obligation, of community-based educators to follow such young folks out of the room, to ask questions, to listen, and to create opportunities that make escape less attractive than engagement.

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creating
engaged citizens

Using Young Adult Novels and Thematic Units to Encourage Democratic Action

by Mary Cipollone

Franklin D. Roosevelt noted, "Democracy cannot succeed unless those who express their choice are prepared to choose wisely. The real safeguard of democracy, therefore, is education" (quoted in Beilenson & Beilenson, 1982, p. 29). Thus, a foundational principle of U.S. society is that educators must equip our young with the knowledge and skills to be active participants in our democracy. Countless educators and political theorists have espoused the belief that citizens are not born but must be created (Dewey, 1916/2004; Goodland, 1996; Niemi & Junn, 1998). Conscious, creative educational efforts can help to develop informed young citizens who will be able to lead us toward a just world.

People who read become absorbed in a process of discovery about the world around them; books open doors to otherwise inaccessible places and introduce readers to profound new ideas. A wide body of young adult literature creatively blends fictional stories with nonfictional settings in a way that exposes young people to important historical and contemporary issues. When children are given a safe and enjoyable forum in which they can freely explore and expand on the new ideas they encounter in books, they are positioned to benefit from their experience of a text. They relate to the novels' young protagonists and become curious about the situations of the protagonists' lives. They can learn about their poten-

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tial impact on society when educators guide them to relate the books' themes to their own lives.

The StreetSquash Book Club encourages young people to become active, engaged citizens by means of thematic units that use young adult novels as entry points for discussion, games, community interaction, and civil activism. The multifaceted and engaging approach of the StreetSquash Book Club not only instills a love of reading and writing in students but also pushes them to comprehend and employ the awesome powers they possess as citizens of a democracy.

Program Background

Approximately 15 seventh-, eighth-, and ninth-grade members of the StreetSquash Book Club meet on Friday afternoons to read, write, and discuss topics inspired by their reading. All of the students attend public schools in Harlem and are African American or Hispanic; most are female. Participation in the program is completely optional; members tend to be self-selected by the title of the program and by the daunting commitment of spending the first afternoon of weekend freedom in the school building. Most already have an interest in reading and are looking for a safe space to explore their passion. They tend to be excited to get their hands on new reading materials and are enthusiastic about the projects and discussions. Students receive reading assignments to complete between meetings. The Friday afternoon activities are designed to supplement this reading and to augment the students' knowledge of each unit's theme.

This paper will explore two of the book club's thematic units: the civil rights movement and the presidential election of 2004. The club focused on the civil rights movement for five weeks during the spring of 2004, coinciding with the fiftieth anniversary of *Brown vs. the Board of Education*. We investigated the presidential election for six weeks during the campaign season of Fall 2004.

Understanding Our History

In *Civic Education*, political scientists Niemi and Junn (1998) examine the civic awareness of American students, analyze the gaps in students' knowledge, and suggest ways that educators can better prepare students to make effective contributions to their democratic society. Consideration of racial and ethnic differences in performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Civics Assessment reveals that Hispanic and African-American students consistently perform lower than their Caucasian counterparts (Niemi & Junn, 1998). Niemi and Junn attribute this discrepancy not to a lack of intelligence or interest on the part of minority students, but to the fact that the civics material being taught to these students and tested on the NAEP is less relevant to minority students than to white students. The fact that African-American students performed with greater parity on questions about the civil rights movement and other topics of black history supports this explanation (Niemi & Junn, 1998). To the end of developing a democracy in which citizens from all backgrounds have equal preparation for and access to participation, Niemi and Junn suggest that educators should not avoid controversial subjects, but rather should help students realistically examine the complex issues of past and present racial discrimination.

To that end, the StreetSquash Book Club delved into the history of the civil rights movement using a set of engaging, hands-on activities built around a young adult novel and other texts. My experience with youth has taught me that children love to learn, as long as the learning is engaging and relevant to their lives. Students do not want to sit and listen to a lecture—certainly not after school, and especially not on a Friday! Dewey (1916/2004) writes that using playful activities in the classroom provides "magnets for gathering and retaining an indefinitely wide scope of intellectual consideration" (p. 199). Students become more inquisitive and retain more information if lessons are interactive. Hence, my rules of thumb for designing the book club curriculum are to make every lesson into a game, incorporate physical activity whenever possible, use video and audio clips to draw the students in, and find ways to relate the topics to their lives. To plunge into the civil rights movement, we not only read texts but also played Civil Rights Movement Jeopardy, listened to the period's inspiring music, and engaged in the activities described below.

Bringing History to Life

On an early Saturday morning in May 2004, the Street-Squash Book Club departed from our ordinary Friday afternoon schedule to host a joint session with an adult book club from Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem. Abyssinian is an African-American community church that sees Thurgood Marshall Academy, the school that most book club students attend, as its partner school. On the agenda was discussion of *The Watsons Go to*

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Birmingham, Christopher Paul Curtis's 1995 historical novel for young adults set during the civil rights movement. The novel's beginning as a light, humorous family story eases readers into the violence and tension of the period as the family travels south to Alabama. The young protagonist's experiences personalized the period's racial violence for StreetSquash students, becoming their entry point into what might otherwise have seemed like a distant time in history. The students had also prepared interviews for the Abyssinian elders as part of an oral history project about the civil rights movement.

After introductions, we had a lively discussion about *The Watsons Go to Birmingham*. The students impressed me with their candid answers to questions I posed to the group and with their lack of intimidation in a setting where adults were the majority. The presence of the adults provided a unique opportunity for the students to hear the perspective of older community members who had done the same reading. The students had their insights validated by the fact that the adults had some of the same responses and questions as they did.

Discussing the book's conclusion, in which the Watson family witnesses the 1963 bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, provided a segue to the next item on our agenda: watching a clip from Spike Lee's 1997 documentary *4 Little Girls*. The film segment we watched recounts events of that tragic Sunday morning from the viewpoints of family members and friends of the four young girls who were killed. It is a powerful clip, with emotional commentary from the deceased girls' families and some graphic photos of the fatally injured girls. When I turned the film off, the room was silent. Several adults and students had been moved to tears. I allowed a few moments for everyone to silently process the violence they had just seen before beginning the discussion.

The intensity of the footage evoked emotional responses that stimulated honest and meaningful conversation. As the discussion delved into the very heart of the issues surrounding the civil rights movement, the students sat on the edges of their seats, listening to their elders tell stories of segregation, racism, and hate. A community member shared her memory of a department store on 125th Street—the heart of historically African-American Harlem—that was open only to white patrons.

> **No longer was the civil rights movement a flat and boring event from history textbooks. It became an essential struggle of recent history, one in which real people were involved and by which they were deeply affected.**

During a student-led interview, one church member told of being covered with a blanket in the back of a car so that her progressive white neighbors could sneak her into a drive-in movie. She also shared her memory of blacks and whites sitting in separate areas at movie theaters because "the whites didn't want you in the same space as them" (student-led interview, May 15, 2004).

The students were engaged; history was coming alive before them. No longer was the civil rights movement a flat and boring event from history textbooks. It became an essential struggle of recent history, one in which real people were involved and by which they were deeply affected. During an interview a year after the meeting, one book club student expressed this exact sentiment: "I already knew about racism and discrimination, but listening to the community members' stories made me realize even more that it was really real" (interview, May 13, 2005). As James W. Loewen (1995) so aptly states, "Emotion is the glue that causes history to stick" (p. 300). The personal and emotional stories of members of the students' own community would certainly echo in their heads far longer than the definitions they had copied out of their history textbooks.

Our conversation gradually shifted to include more recent stories of ignorance and hatred. Tears streamed down one participant's cheeks as she recounted the discriminatory treatment she and her African-American husband had received in a restaurant because they were a racially mixed couple. It was clear to everyone in the room that, despite all the successes of the civil rights movement, racism is an issue we still confront today.

However, the mood in the room was not defeatist. The church elders encouraged the children to see that they too had an important role to play in the struggle for a more just world. Someone noted that simply discussing the injustices of the past and the present was productive and would help further the cause of equality. The intergenerational meeting gave the students a precious opportunity to recognize a potent aspect of history: its relation to the present. As John Dewey (1916/2004) states in *Democracy and Education,* "The segregation which kills the vitality of history is divorce from present modes and concerns of social life" (p. 205). Listening to their elders made history personal for the book club members and gave them a greater sense of responsibility in the battle to

create a more just world. I could say of the book club students what Wigginton (1985) said of his students who documented life in Appalachia: Interacting with community elders gave each student a chance to understand "who I am and where I'm from and the fact that I'm part of a long continuum of hope and prayer and celebration of life that I must carry forward" (p. 75).

Bringing History into the Present

As was made clear during the joint session with the adult book club, the dreams of the civil rights movement have not yet been fully realized. With their new understanding of the roots of the struggle for racial equality, the StreetSquash Book Club students could begin to understand their responsibility in the present. This unit was intended to help them envision African-Americans as a people who struggle for what is just, to give them a deeper understanding of the causes and effects of inequality, and to provide them with the skills necessary to be active and engaged citizens who strive for social justice.

Another activity brought home the lessons of the civil rights movement by demonstrating the inequalities

that continue to pervade our education system. That same May was the 50th anniversary of *Brown vs. the Board of Education*. I split the book clubbers into two teams and had each design its own classroom using a budget I gave them. What I did not reveal was that one team was given the budget of the average classroom in the affluent suburb of Manhasset, Long Island, while the other got the budget of the average classroom in the impoverished neighborhood of Mott Haven in the Bronx.

Each team received a list of items a classroom requires: a teacher, desks and basic supplies, transportation, books, teacher's manuals. Team members had to use their budget to decide what quantity and quality of each item to purchase. Should they hire a teacher with less than five years of experience for $40,000 or splurge on a more experienced teacher? Should they buy used and slightly out-of-date textbooks or the latest editions? Should each student have their own textbook or should the students share? Then there were optional extras if the budget allowed: teacher's aides, computers, sports teams, extracurricular activities, classroom decorations, field trips, and whatever the children's creative minds wanted to add.

During the students' planning process, I threw in some obstacles and bonuses. The Bronx team encountered a flood in its school building and had to pay for cleaning up and for replacing damaged books. In contrast, the Manhasset team was lucky enough to have a student's parent donate money for new athletic facilities and sports uniforms. The Bronx team quickly ran out of money while still providing for the basic needs of its students, while the suburban team had funding for parties, a variety of after-school activities, and a week-long field trip to Miami.

When the two teams shared their descriptions of the classrooms they had built, the Bronx team was infuriated by the inequality. They too wanted computers and sports teams. Why weren't they given enough money for the kinds of extras the Manhasset team enjoyed? As we compared the classrooms, all of the students agreed that the competition was completely unfair. We discussed how the differences at the two hypothetical schools would affect students in the long term: where—or whether—they would go to college, what jobs they would get, and what opportunities they would have.

And then I revealed the statistics: Over 98 percent of the students at the wealthier school were white, while over 99 percent of the students at the struggling school were African-American or Latino. We had a lengthy and vibrant discussion about the interaction between race and class in American society and how these issues affect our education system. We discussed the significance of *Brown vs. Board of Education*, but then looked around to see that our own group comprised entirely minority students. We realized that actual desegregation was not yet a reality. As we explored the legacy of *Brown,* the remaining educational inequality, and the complex social structures that cause such inequalities, students became aware of another arena in which the struggle for racial equality must still be fought.

At the end of the activity, the suburban team had a special announcement to make: Since it had so much extra money in its budget, it wanted to make a large donation to the Bronx classroom for computers and a special field trip. If only the magnanimous book clubbers were truly in control!

Giving Students a Voice

If the StreetSquash students were to continue the struggle for equality as the Abyssinian elders and the "unequal classrooms" activity encouraged them to do, they needed not only motivation but also tools. One such tool is effective communication; the ability to convey one's point of view is a fundamental part of being an active citizen in a democracy. So during the unit on the civil rights movement, I set out to develop the students' public speaking and persuasive writing abilities.

We began this process by watching clips of compelling civil rights orators, including Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and President John F. Kennedy, to observe their techniques. The students noted that the successful speakers projected their voices, spoke clearly and slowly, and used powerful body language to communicate their messages. Having made this analysis, the students were anxious to show that they could follow suit.

They began their performances by reading a speech that was very familiar and therefore accessible to them: Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream." Being on stage energized the students, and the room filled with excitement when we discovered the natural orator among us. What young Allegra lacked in size, she more than made up for in volume. While her booming voice had earned her plenty of admonishment in the classroom, it was suddenly winning her the respect and praise of her peers. Allegra's voice filled Dr. King's words with such passion and life that the other students hushed in awe of her power.

After critiquing the performances first of the historical orators and then of their peers, the students analyzed the texts of the speeches and discussed what made them successful. They learned about parallelism, emotional appeal, and the use of extended metaphors. Then they began to use these techniques to write their own persuasive speeches. I gave several suggestions of topics—some light, some serious—but I also encouraged students to come up with their own ideas. I instructed them to write about something they were passionate about—something that made them incredibly happy or angry or sad. I gave the option of writing in pairs. One pair of students was excited to argue the case for not requiring uniforms in school. Another pair took on the more controversial issue of gay marriage. After several drafts, the students were ready to deliver their speeches to the group using their strongest voices and most convincing body language.

It was satisfying to see that even in the short time between reading "I Have a Dream" and performing their

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own speeches, the students' persuasive abilities had improved. They were speaking clearly and looking directly at their audience. More importantly, they were clearly enjoying themselves while practicing skills vital to being active democratic citizens.

The StreetSquash Book Club unit on the civil rights movement began with a young adult novel that developed the students' curiosity. From this entry point, we were able to interact with community members to gain a more personal perspective on history and the applicability of history to our present lives. The activities and games ignited a passion for social change and empowered students with the tools necessary to fight for it.

Understanding Our Political Process

In *Civic Education*, Niemi and Junn (1998) restate the common belief that the success of a democracy rests on having "citizens who understand their own interests and are informed of their options" (p. 1). Unfortunately, many American citizens are incapable of clearly articulating their political beliefs. This disability contributes to the absence of the essential democratic element of intelligent debate among the populace. Niemi and Junn (1998) recommend that budding democratic citizens be taught more about the controversial nature of politics.

In a time of increasing youth apathy toward and disillusionment with the political system, young people need experiences that will bolster their participation in politics. Stolle and Hooghe (2002) note that people's approaches to politics are defined by early life experiences. My own experience of my mother getting dressed up and taking me to the polls on Election Day has instilled in me a sense of pride in the special power of U.S. citizens to choose our leaders. Stolle and Hooghe also assert that involvement in politics helps young people develop a sense that they can affect the political process. Just as exposure to books from a young age makes one more likely to read as an adult, students who have positive experiences with politics from a young age may be more likely to become active, voting citizens.

The 2004 U.S. presidential election provided the perfect opportunity to involve StreetSquash Book Club stu-

dents in the political process. The text that we used as an entry point was *Vote for Larry*, Janet Tashjian's 2004 novel about an eighteen-year-old social activist who runs for President of the United States. This book, combined with games, discussions, examples, and community interaction, contributed to the students' understanding of the political process and their potential involvement in it. The unit taught the students about the presidency, the process of selecting our President, and political campaigns. The students examined the social and economic issues that are raised (and not raised) during elections, began to discover which issues affect their lives, and learned to articulate why specific issues were important to them. They also spent a day experiencing their first taste of civil activism.

Developing a Vocabulary

Tackling the election meant introducing the students to a whole new world with its own words and concepts. Again my goal was to make this learning process interactive and enjoyable. Rather than listening to lectures on the political parties and their symbols, students used newspapers and magazines to complete an election scavenger hunt. To explore the campaign issues, we examined political cartoons.

To explain the electoral college, I staged a mock election for President in which groups of students represented states. We held a popular vote and an electoral vote for the candidates, music artists Nelly and Li'l Fizz. When the winner of the electoral vote was not the candidate chosen by the popular vote, the students more easily grasped the complications of the 2000 presidential election. In fact, remembering this activity a year later, a book club student who said she had never heard about the electoral college prior to this activity was able to perfectly articulate both the way the college works and the relationship between our demonstration and the 2000 election (interview, May 13, 2005). The student discussed her "anticipation" in waiting for the outcome of our mock election and her excitement when her candidate won. "It made me think about how crazy it must feel to wait for votes to be counted in a real election" (interview, May 13, 2005).

Learning the Issues (Thanks to Larry)

The students had a great friend to help them broaden their knowledge about social policy and the presidential campaign. Larry is the progressive 18-year old protagonist of Janet Tashjian's 2004 novel *Vote for Larry*. His out-

> **To explain the electoral college, I staged a mock election for President in which groups of students represented states.**

rage at the state of social inequality in the U.S. inspires him to run for President.

Several chapters in the novel begin with a page of Larry's sticky notes on different topics such as "America's Youth," "The Environment," and the "Increasing Gap between the Rich and the Poor" (Tashjian, 2004). These notes contain informative statistics such as, "Every minute, a baby in the United States is born without health insurance," and "One in 3 U.S. children is poor at some point during childhood" (Tashjian, 2004, p. 66). Larry's statistics made these social issues accessible to the StreetSquash middle school students. While reading this text, students discussed the concrete implications of Larry's statistics and developed the ability to articulate what issues mattered to them. We connected different stances on these issues to those of the candidates in the 2004 election by watching debates, reading party platforms, and reading news articles. Students began by regurgitating what they had heard in their primarily Democratic, African-American homes. With encouragement, however, they were able to progress from "George Bush is wack" to "George Bush is wack because his educational policies have not provided adequate funding for public school students." I constantly reinforced the message that if they wanted to engage in intelligent debate, they needed facts to support their opinions. After the election, an eighth grader demonstrated her new ability to articulate her beliefs in a journal letter to newly reelected President Bush: "Please repair our relationships lost with other countries… And would you please consider stem cell research?" (student journal, November 12, 2004).

Larry also taught the students that only 32 percent of people between the ages of 18 and 25 voted in the 2000 presidential election (Tashjian, 2004). The middle school students were too young to vote themselves, but Larry's activism inspired us to make a contribution to the election.

Taking to the Streets of Harlem

The Friday before the election, the StreetSquash Book Club students set up a nonpartisan voter pledge table in front of their school. Their task was to approach community members and remind them about the upcoming election. The students then asked the potential voters to sign a pledge promising that they would go to the polls on Election Day. They also handed out fliers delineating

important voting information, such as the date of the election and how to find polling sites.

The students were initially wary about approaching strangers—not something one normally does on New York City streets. But with some encouragement and several hesitant trials, the students warmed up to the idea and began confidently encouraging their fellow Harlem residents to fulfill their civic duty. In keeping with my practice of making activities into a game, I divided the students into teams to see which could get the most pledges.

By the end of the afternoon, the StreetSquash Book Club had garnered 174 pledges to vote from community members. Considering that the 2000 presidential election was decided by just over 500 votes, the young activists' accomplishment was not insignificant. More important, these students had their first experience of civil activism. They engaged in productive work to contribute to the success of the election. They interacted with their community members to discuss the responsibilities of citizens in a democracy. "It was an experience to hear how people really felt about voting," explained one student who participated in the activity (interview, May 13, 2005).

Purpel and McLaurin (2004) assert that maintaining productive democracies depends not just on teaching "about democracy" but also teaching students "to do democracy" (p. 131). The book club unit on the presidential election went beyond classroom activities to engage the students in democratic action so that they would have a greater sense of their capacity and duty, even as citizens too young to vote, to contribute to the political process of their community. In a journal entry, an eighth grader said, "I think what I can do to have an impact on politics … is just speak up and let my voice be heard by speaking up" (student journal entry, November 5, 2004). This direct experience with democracy is what Dewey (1916/2004) so firmly believed would instill in our young the importance of being active citizens.

Building toward the Future

Both units, on the civil rights movement and on the 2004 presidential election, used a young adult novel as an entry point for StreetSquash students to explore a topic that may otherwise have seemed inaccessible to them. The experiences and actions of the novels' young protagonists allowed students to imagine, in the one case, their own place in the ongoing struggle for justice and, in the other, their own efficacy in the political arena. Through games, discussion, and community inter-

action, the students gained both knowledge and skills necessary for active participation in our democracy.

The task of building effective citizens is especially important in minority communities that historically have been disenfranchised and are overrepresented by the ranks of the poor. Educators must provide young minority students with the skills and knowledge necessary for active participation in our democracy. When we approach this responsibility with enthusiasm and creativity, we can inspire our youth to be passionate young citizens who will lead the movement toward greater social equality. Books, especially young adult novels that make significant historical and contemporary issues accessible, can help provide young people with the tools and the desire to fight for change.

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growing leaders in
Native American communities

An Interview with Gerald Eagle Bear

by Sara Hill

In the summer of 2005, I interviewed Gerald Eagle Bear about his work to promote civic and cultural engagement among Native American youth. Eagle Bear is program manager of the Oyate Networking Project, an affiliate of Christian Children's Fund, in Mission, South Dakota. The organization focuses on early childhood education, youth violence prevention, and community education. It holds an annual Youth Leadership Conference in Rapid City, SD; last April's conference drew 550 participants from five states. Participants in the conference are recruited through advertisements in magazines and Native American newspapers. In addition, Eagle Bear visits schools and makes door-to-door visits to recruit youth.

Sara: Can you tell me about the background or history of the youth conference?

Gerald: We've had the conference in South Dakota for five years. It used to be called Youth 2000, and started in the early eighties. It was sponsored by the high schools of two Native American reservations, the Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations. Back then there was a lot of rivalry, and it happens a little today, but back then they wanted something that would get kids together, ways of learning to deal with issues. And they set up a conference called Indian Youth 2000, because they wanted to achieve some youth goals by the year 2000, like battling drugs and alcohol, issues that the youth were facing on the reservations. I used to be a par-

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ticipant as a young kid attending the conference, and, as an adult, I began to get involved with the actual coordination and sponsorship of the conference.

Sara: What was it like for you as a young person at the conference?

Gerald: It was something that we looked forward to every single year. It was an annual event. We had to raise money in order for my group to go to the conference; I was in ninth or tenth grade, and we had to raise money for it. We knew that all these kids were going to get together, and we would see old friends and make new friends and learn something new there. It was also a time to get off the reservation, because it was held in our state capital, Pierre.

Sara: How did you take on running the conference, how did that happen?

Gerald: In 1999, the conference was held in Pierre, South Dakota, and our governor at the time was William Janklow. He was a well-known Indian fighter. He went against laws that would help Indian people and the tribes in South Dakota. We knew that, and we had our conference in the city where he had his offices. We asked for a donation, and got back a handwritten letter from him saying, "I choose who I want to donate to" and he sent back a conference T-shirt that we had sent him. The organizers showed the letter on a big screen to the kids at the conference. They marched on the governor that very day. The kids were hurt, and it was hard for the adults to see the kids so hurt. I walked with them. We walked from the hotel all the way to the state capitol. We led 300 kids on that march. We formed a big circle in front of the capitol building and three of our kids went inside to give that T-shirt back. The kids went in and said, "It was a gift from us, and we want you to acknowledge it." We did a prayer and then we left. After that there was a lot of controversy across the state. Some of the people lost their jobs. I was one of them. It was a peaceful march but I lost my job at the high school because I let the kids march on the governor. I would never change what I did because those kids had a lot of power that day. That conference meant so much to me, and I took the reins and we continued to have the conference for eight years. It lost the city of Pierre a lot of money, because we moved the conference to Rapid City.

Sara: And you become a separate organization?

Gerald: This conference followed me to every organiza-

> **It was a peaceful march, but I lost my job at the high school because I let the kids march on the governor. I would never change what I did because those kids had a lot of power that day.**

tion I worked with. We became affiliated with Christian Children's Fund three years ago. We're very aligned with what CCF is trying to accomplish. I'm working with a lot of other programs, because I couldn't do it alone. I work with schools, tribes, Boys & Girls Clubs across several states.

Sara: How many tribes are represented at the conference?

Gerald: This year we had seven schools and eighteen tribes. The furthest away was the Boys & Girls Club of Mescalero, New Mexico.

Sara: What do you think are some of the outcomes of the conference? What do you think it's achieving?

Gerald: What I hope it accomplishes is that the kids come out of the conference having more pride, more self-identity. Being proud of their culture. We're losing it. My people are losing their language. Once you lose your language, your culture, your heritage, your land, you won't be recognized.

Sara: What are some of the activities at the conference that support that goal?

Gerald: A very popular session is for the girls called "Female Traditional Roles" and another session for the boys called "Male Traditional Roles." We run it three times so that girls can go to the boys' session and boys can go to the girls' session. We have Native speakers, Lakotas, presenting at these sessions. Another popular session is "Fear Factor, Native Style," where we have youth eating traditional foods, things they wouldn't normally eat like tripe and raw kidneys.

Sara: So you blend popular culture with Native values?

Gerald: Right. We also have something called "Native Teen Showdown," which is our version of *Family Feud*. We also have workshops on drug and alcohol prevention, diabetes prevention, gang prevention, teen pregnancy prevention. If you're not healthy, you can't take on leadership roles.

We also have speakers. The first year we had Tex Hall [chair of the National Congress of American Indians]. This year we had Dominic Redwater. He's a 28-year-old professional comedian. He's in California, and he's traveled everywhere to do his comedy. The kids really liked him, because he blended his comedy with stories of growing up on the reservation in South Dakota. He joined the Navy and did two Persian Gulf tours. He came back and dealt with alcoholism, and got out of that and is sober now. Another speaker we had was the first Native American Miss South Dakota,

Vanessa Short Bull. She was also very funny and blended her humor with talking about body image. The speakers are young, they're Native, they're successful, and they know about life on the reservation.

This year something special at the conference was that we brought kids from Red Lake High School, where there was the school shooting tragedy. I got a call from the youth coordinator at the high school asking if the conference could help them. So what I did was waive all their fees, and the high school brought 20 kids. We did a healing ceremony with them. The kids really liked that, not just the Red Lake kids, but all of the conference participants.

Sara: Given that the theme of this journal is "democracy in action," how do you think the conference models or encourages youth to engage in democratic processes?

Gerald: Every year we try to show youth that they have choices. The conference belongs to them, and they own it. If I'm not doing something right, they need to let me know.

We also teach them about politics. On every reservation there's politics: who's going to be the tribal president and who's going to be on the tribal council. The kids hear about it, and it's in our local papers all the time. So what we started is an ambassador program. There's a female ambassador and a male ambassador for the youth leadership conference. Every year we pick one. It's kind of like a mini-tribal election. The day of registration you go up to the ambassador table and fill out an application, and you're asked questions. After the application process, the very next day, they have to answer a question that we draw from a hat in front of the entire group. Then right before our teen dance—because everyone wants to go—they can't get in until they've cast their vote for the ambassadors.

Sara: And what are the responsibilities of the two ambassadors?

Gerald: They go around to other youth conferences and represent the Youth Leadership Conference. They're basically our spokespeople. This year a donor gave the ambassadors their own laptop computers as prizes.

Sara: So in all the years you've been doing this, what is most striking or surprising?

Gerald: What surprises me each year is the amount of support, from the number of participants that show up to the number of donors or sponsors that want to be involved in coordinating the event. Every year I learn what I need to do, what I need to change. I rely heavily on the youth and their evaluation forms.

Sara: What do you think youth learn at the conference?

Gerald: I think that goes back to what I said earlier. To be proud of their culture and learn different ways and gain tools for dealing with things that they face back at home. And that they take what they've learned back with them, because not everyone gets to come to the conference, so they need to go back to their community and share with others.

Sara: What are some questions that you are left with?

Gerald: I work with kids every day. That's my job. The conference comes once a year, but it's an every-day job. My question: Is what I'm doing helping them? When I get positive answers, it shows me that what I'm doing makes a difference.

Sara: What do you think are some next steps for the conference?

Gerald: No matter where I go, the conference is going to happen; even if I'm pumping gas at a gas station, it's going to happen. We're going to keep up the theme of leadership. What I see the conference doing is growing even more, more people getting involved. We need to be able to sponsor more kids to be at the conference.

Sara: Do you see any of the young people at the conference becoming another Gerald?

Gerald: Yes, I do. And I really need them, too. Everyone wants to be a part of it. This year I had a group who attended last year and graduated high school. They called me and asked when the conference was coming up and volunteered to help. I took six of them, and they came and helped and did an excellent job.

in action **democracy**

Experiential Civics Learning in Afterschool Advocacy Days

by Susan Blank with Lucy N. Friedman and Kathleen Carlson

> I didn't think that many people would think afterschool was so important. There were so many people there, it kind of took my breath away… Advocacy Day teaches kids to stand up for something. If you don't stand for something, you can fall for anything. —Randy Wilson, participant in a New York City afterschool program[1]

> About 20 of us met with the [state] senator and we asked questions. A lot of kids got to speak up… My advice? If you have the chance, get involved. —Sara Cusumano, participant in a Hudson, New York, afterschool program

Last winter, Randy Wilson and Sara Cusumano were among over 1,000 youth from around New York State who converged on its capital, Albany, for After-School Advocacy Day. The annual event, which includes over 100 scheduled meetings with legislators and their aides, is designed to help young people convince legislators to continue and expand afterschool programming. The young people who attend are between the ages of 8 and 18, typically 10 to 13. By design, they far outnumber the adults—parents and program staff members— who travel with them to Albany. Wearing T-shirts with quotations and statements about the importance of afterschool programs, the youth spend

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Advocacy Day Sponsors

The After-School Corporation (TASC) was established in 1998 with a $125 million challenge grant (which is matched by other funders on a 3:1 basis) from the Open Society Institute. The organization's overall purpose is to make high-quality afterschool programs universally available and publicly funded in New York City, New York State, and across the nation. To further this mission, TASC gathers and disseminates information on best practices and outcomes, as well as making grants to a wide variety of nonprofit groups, including many community-based organizations, to manage school-based afterschool programs. Today over 300 programs, most in New York City, collectively serve 55,000 students in grades K–12. These programs, led by fulltime, year-round directors, offer educational enrichment, technological skills development, and homework help, as well as arts, sports, and community service activities.

Founded in 2000 with the help of TASC, Coalition for After-School Funding (CASF), part of the group Citizen Action of New York, is an afterschool advocacy campaign with more than 350 member organizations throughout New York State. CASF's mission is to promote the availability of high-quality afterschool services in New York State. Advocacy Days are an important focus of CASF/TASC joint efforts to further this goal.

the morning at a rally that features speakers, performances by afterschool groups, awards to outstanding young leaders, and role-plays to prepare the young people for their sessions with legislators.

Following a brief march to the capitol building, delegations from the different localities meet with their legislators or with staffers. In addition to the role-plays immediately preceding the meetings, students have had training in their home programs to prepare them to talk to legislators. Once the day is over, staff of participating afterschool programs plan follow-up activities such as site visits by legislators and letter-writing campaigns.

Cosponsored by Coalition for After-School Funding (CASF) and The After-School Corporation (TASC; see box), After-School Advocacy Days have been held annually in Albany since 2000. These events are enormously helpful to the two sponsors' efforts to influence officials who make decisions about funding afterschool programs. Karen Scharff, executive director of Citizen Action of New York, CASF's parent organization, noted that legislators are presumed to respond most readily to "money or votes—and kids have neither." Nevertheless, she believes, young people "change these dynamics. They are our most effective voice." Politicians agree. "These are not Gucci-clad professional lobbyists," said New York State Senator Sam Hoyt,

"but they can be a breath of fresh air. If they say to me, 'I need your help,' I will listen."

However, besides the role that a strong youth presence plays in delivering the Advocacy Day message to lawmakers, the day's organizers cite equally important educational and youth development purposes for the event. Advocacy Day exposes young people to an experiential civics lesson that gives them a feel for participating in democratic processes. The event's active and participatory nature also offers youth opportunities to exercise leadership and speaking skills that contribute to social and emotional growth.

Youth and Government: Not Enough Connection

Advocacy Day takes place against a backdrop of concern about whether today's youth will be ready and willing to participate in civic affairs when they become adults. Admittedly, the conventional wisdom that the younger generation "doesn't care" about anything except its own well-being is losing currency. Pointing to rates of youth volunteerism in community activities that exceed participation levels for past generations of young people, a 2001 report from the Grantmaker Forum on Community & National Service argued that "…portraying youth as disengaged … fails to acknowledge … [their] direct one-on-one service in and on behalf of their communities" (Gibson, 2001, p.4).

However, the report immediately goes on to cite an opinion that this heartening trend does not tell the whole story:

Charity and/or volunteerism may not be enough, Delli Carpini notes … The problem, he writes, is that 'civic engagement has become *defined* as the one-on-one experience … What is missing is an awareness of the connection between the individual, isolated problems these actions are intended to address and the larger world of public policy.' (Gibson, 2001, p. 4)

"These are not Gucci-clad professional lobbyists," said New York State Senator Sam Hoyt, "but they can be a breath of fresh air. If they say to me, 'I need your help,' I will listen."

Compared to their willingness to be involved in one sphere of civic engagement—good works—young people seem to be less attracted to political involvement. While the proportion of young people who voted in the 2004 presidential election rose significantly over the previous election,

the youth voting rate was still considerably lower than the participation rate for the overall electorate (Faler, 2005; CIRCLE, 2005). Furthermore, although next year's National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) in the area of civics could show a significant upturn in students' knowledge of this subject, the climb to what most people would consider acceptable levels of mastery will need to be steep. The NAEP's last civics assessment, conducted in 1998, revealed that only around a quarter of students in grades 4, 8, and 12 had a proficient or better knowledge of civics (National Center for Education Statistics, 1999). Analyzing results from its study of civic engagement among U.S. youth, the National Association of Secretaries of State (1999) concluded that many young people feel distanced from democratic institutions:

> In theory, most American youth believe that government has a legitimate role to play in people's lives and acknowledge that government has at least some impact in their own lives. In reality, they … see few connections between government's problem-solving role and the concerns they currently face in their daily lives.

TASC and CASF have found that Advocacy Days help students make those connections.

How Advocacy Days Foster Learning

By giving young people a chance to meet with public officials, Advocacy Days put a human face on democratic institutions and bring the concept of political participation to life. This hands-on connection is especially important because TASC has found that finding good ways to translate the concept of political participation into program activities can be a challenge. Staff of TASC-sponsored programs have little or no trouble conceiving of a wealth of specific activities—a chess club, a theatrical performance, or a team, for instance—to help students build mathematical, artistic, or physical skills. Projects that involve the charitable-volunteering side of civic engagement are also a staple of TASC programming.

For the "democracy-in-action" side of civic engagement, some TASC programs have successfully operated mock trials and student government projects. Advocacy

By giving young people a chance to meet with public officials, Advocacy Days put a human face on democratic institutions and bring the concept of political participation to life.

Days are a welcome addition to the repertoire of program ideas that help young people understand democratic processes while offering them the same quotient of fun and engagement as other active projects. Many youth discover that, like performing in a play or being a member of a sports team, acting politically is an experience they and their friends can enjoy. Shaneisha Payne, who came to the 2004 Advocacy Day as a seventh grader from Niagara Falls, recalled that what she liked most about the day was "meeting different people from different places." She said that she would tell friends to attend because "it's a great experience to look at places besides Niagara Falls." "It was fun to see lots of people in one place for one cause," said Michelle Vicsama, who attends a program at New York City's Martin Luther King, Jr., High School that is managed by the Lincoln Square Business Improvement District. Attending meetings with legislators where students were expected to speak "brought out some of my shyness," she acknowledged, but she said that she was able to become more comfortable "because I was around other kids and it was for a good cause."

As these recollections suggest, the political experience of Advocacy Days can go hand in hand with opportunities for personal growth. Indeed, many staff members of participating afterschool programs value the way in which the experience can help young people feel efficacious and experience themselves as part of a larger social network—two of the ingredients that experts see as building blocks of positive youth development (National Research Council, 2002; see Executive Summary, p. 7). "Even though studies—including the five-year PSA [Policy Studies Associates] evaluation of TASC-sponsored programs—show that participating in afterschool programs can make a difference in academic outcomes," said TASC President Lucy Friedman, "it's becoming increasingly clear that we should care at least as much about the capacity of these programs to round out the educational experience of the classroom. And one way to do that is to help young people feel stronger connections to their communities and to society."[2] In one respect, Advocacy Days are particularly well-positioned to promote such connections: Because they place youth and adults on the same "team," they model cross-generational efforts to improve community and societal conditions.

Like many kinds of experiential learning, Advocacy Days can also reinforce classroom education. Anastasia Brown, an eleventh grader from the Martin Luther King, Jr., High School program, has attended two Advocacy Days. She said that she learned about the First Amendment and free speech in school, but the trip to Albany was different: "You're learning it, but you're not realizing it, because you're doing it."

Some Challenges in Organizing Advocacy Days

Programs or coalitions that consider organizing their own advocacy days are likely to face two initial questions, one legal and ethical and the other practical.

Legal and Ethical Concerns

Nonprofit organizations that, like TASC, manage or oversee afterschool programs should make sure that sponsoring an advocacy day will not jeopardize their tax-exempt status. They should obtain legal counsel to be certain that they understand any requirements about reporting lobbying activities. However, TASC, CASF, and many other groups that organize events to advocate for their causes find that keeping track of expenses is not particularly burdensome.

Aside from legal concerns about lobbying, another question is whether it is right to involve young people in this activity. That concern would be justified if youth were brought to these events as passive participants. The case is different if they help to shape what happens. When young people are encouraged to own the experience, the dual goals of these kinds of events—to help secure funding and to educate youth about democracy in action—are complementary. The educational component is enhanced, in this case, because participants who value their afterschool programs see the need to keep them alive as the kind of close-to-home issue that gives advocates a sense of genuine connection to political participation.

Logistics

Orchestrating Advocacy Days requires close attention to detail, but the tasks are manageable when an organization develops a system for pulling those details together. If staff time is tight, the event need not be large-scale. The experience can be as meaningful for

delegations of one or two dozen students as it is for the some 1,000 young people who travel to Albany.

The two elements of planning that require the most attention are the arrangements for visits to political leaders and for transportation. For the visits, programs should start contacting the officials they wish to meet far in advance of their target dates, often through the legislators' office schedulers. Programs should be prepared, and prepare the youth, to meet with policy aides as well as elected officials. These aides are often key to moving legislation, and youth who do meet with them are learning that the political process is not limited to elected officials.

For TASC and CASF, transportation—buses to Albany—is by far the biggest expense of state Advocacy Days. (Other expenses include lunches and T-shirts.) Especially for programs operating smaller events, getting parents and staff to volunteer to drive vans and cars is a way to save on this cost.

Maximizing the Educational Value of Advocacy Days

As in many areas of afterschool programming, mastery of the logistical details of Advocacy Days is necessary but not sufficient for success. Running good Advocacy Days also depends on knowing how to structure them into rich, exciting learning experiences. Over the years, TASC and CASF have developed insights about strategies that help turn Advocacy Days into meaningful educational events.

Preparatory and Follow-Up Activities

The paramount guideline for turning single events into true learning experiences is to surround the events with preparatory and follow-up activities. TASC-sponsored programs typically brief young Advocacy Day participants on topics such as the structure of the legislature, legislative perspectives, and the funding situation for afterschool services.

A number of programs also engage youth in role-plays, which are then reinforced by the ones staged at the Albany rally. In these role-plays, youth learn of the range of reactions they may encounter from legislators. CASF's scripts of suggested role-plays feature Senator I'm Late, who tells students, "It's a shame I don't have time to meet with you"; Assembly Member Whatever U Say, who greets students with "Welcome, welcome

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to Albany! It's cold out there, isn't it?" and Senator Stayon Topic, who, contrary to his name, tries to divert the conversation into a more general discussion of the education crisis. During the role-plays, youth learn how to respond to these scenarios, for example, by pointing out that the group has traveled all the way to Albany and will take only a few minutes to make its presentation or by pressing for specifics from a politician who wanders from the topic.

Jenny Seaquist, a teacher-artist in a TASC-sponsored New York City program operated by the Educational Alliance, said that students in her program's role-play practiced politely refocusing the conversation from generalities to the funding needs of their programs.

In fact, most legislators and aides engage well with youth. Jenny Seaquist recalled her students' meeting with a top aide of Senator Liz Krueger. "When they asked, 'Why doesn't the funding get through?' she told them, 'Some people want one thing, some another, and there's a need to compromise.' She was very respectful." But Jennique Sanford, who is now 17 and has attended two Advocacy Days, said that some legislators have looked less interested than others. "You can see

> **The paramount guideline for turning single events into true learning experiences is to surround the events with preparatory and follow-up activities.**

on their face—'whatever.' They're listening with closed ears." She added that she has learned not to be overly frustrated by such reactions: "I would do it again, as long as I got a chance to speak."

Adults who accompany program participants to meetings with legislators, as well as the lawmakers themselves, have described the youth as engaged, confident, and well spoken. "They were very well prepared," recalled Assemblywoman Crystal Peoples, "and they were able to articulate the importance of afterschool services."

Once Advocacy Day has ended, programs try to keep its issues and spirit alive. Many follow up with postcards or notes to the officials who hosted their delegations, thanking them for the visits and making follow-up requests for support of afterschool services. Some staff and students invite elected officials who have met students in their offices to visit the afterschool programs. For youth who have traveled to Advocacy Day, a second meeting reinforces the initial experience. For example, young people in a Brooklyn program operated by Project Reach Youth, which had in past years lost important funding, saw a visiting legislator honor their request to publicly sign a

pledge to try to do his utmost to sustain their program. Youth who have already met with a legislator in Albany and then written a follow-up postcard or met with a legislator a second time are learning that advocacy is a process, not a one-time event.

Youth Control

Over and above the value of making Advocacy Days part of a continuous educational experience, adult planners should give youth as much control of the events as possible. Organizers counsel that it is important to let young people take the lead in talking to elected officials. "Ultimately the meetings are between them and the legislator," said State CASF Director Davia Gaddy-Collington, articulating the organizers' view of the mindset they recommend for adult leaders. "A lot of teenagers don't realize they have a voice," said Anastasia Brown, who participates in the Martin Luther King, Jr., High School program. "In the program we learned that we're the employers of the people in the senate, and if they're not helping us, we can fire them." Brown said her delegation generally had positive responses from legislators: "Some people were taking down what we said and how we felt." One legislator, however, who Brown said was "hard to read," remarked that he was not "the only one" making the decision about afterschool funding. "One person can make a difference," Brown recalled a student answering. "If you speak up for us, someone else can understand."

> **Any educational opportunity that aims to give young people a voice must balance the needs for adult guidance and for free expression.**

Allison Fleminger, a coordinator for the afterschool program operated by Project Reach Youth (PRY) at New York City's P. S. 230, asserted that Advocacy Days help youth know that "their opinions hold weight." She speculated that this affirmation may be particularly important for the many youngsters from immigrant backgrounds who come to the PRY program from its highly diverse Brooklyn neighborhood. These youth, Fleminger said, may hesitate to question authority, but Advocacy Days help them find positive ways for voicing their opinions.

Any educational opportunity that aims to give young people a voice must balance the needs for adult guidance and for free expression. Illustrating that creative tension, staff who are involved in organizing Advocacy Days offer two different but complementary perspectives on preparing students for the meetings.

Describing training sessions where youth are asked, "What do you want the legislator to do?" Karen Scharff of Citizen Action of New York emphasized the need to help youth anticipate how sessions might unfold. For example, she endorsed the CASF approach of walking young people through different scenarios to help them take charge of conversations. At the same time, a number of staff cautioned against over-preparing youth to speak about their experiences, noting that strong unrehearsed statements about the importance of afterschool programs in their lives are the most powerful messages.

The Importance of Patience

Staff who have worked on Advocacy Days also stress the importance of exercising and inculcating patience. Staff members themselves need a high quotient of persistence to schedule meetings with busy elected officials. Hero Tamakloe, who directs a TASC-sponsored program operated by the YMCA of Greater New York in P. S. 95 in Queens, described the chain of events leading up to a follow-up visit by a local legislator. "He was supposed to be here by 3:30, and then at the last minute his schedule looked too crowded and he wanted to cancel. We told him it was fine to come for only ten minutes. He agreed to do that—and then he ended up staying for over an hour. And he said he'd make a return visit." The legislator also promised funding for the program.

Part of encouraging young people to have the patience they need to successfully navigate Advocacy Day involves helping them understand that the event will be more challenging than a recreational field trip. Staff pointed out that young participants should be told that the day will be long, that often they must be quiet, and that they must be ready to cope both with delays in legislators' schedules and with extended waits for security procedures. More fundamentally, young people can be helped to understand that—as Senator Krueger's aide told the delegation she hosted—the democratic process itself requires compromise. "I think kids start to get a better idea of how much pressure the politicians can get," said afterschool program participant Sara Cusumano, expressing her perspective on how Advocacy Day can educate youth about the patience it can take to seek and find consensus.

Positive Spirit

While staff are careful not to characterize Advocacy Day as a purely social outing, they recommend making a concerted effort to infuse the event with a positive spirit. The rally, with its chants, performances, and awards, as well as the march to the capitol building, help to create that spirit. "Everybody was walking in a big line," recalled tenth grader Erick Merchan from the Martin Luther King, Jr., High School program. "We had posters, there were cameras, and people wondering what we were doing. People were, like, 'Ohmigod, what's going on?'" As this memory suggests, the experience of civic engagement for youth who attend Advocacy Day can be emotional as well as intellectual.

Beyond Good Works

Among the many goals that afterschool programs can pursue, promoting civic engagement—and especially the kind that goes beyond good works by engaging youth in the political process—can be particularly challenging. Democratic participation can feel like a remote experience even for adults. How much more so for youth who have never even had a chance to vote in public elections? TASC has found that Advocacy Days are one way of creating an enlivening situation in which an ideal that society tries to inculcate—civic engagement—makes sense to young people.

The idea of including young people in public policy efforts to support afterschool services is spreading. For example, the national nonprofit Afterschool Alliance now invites youth to join the state delegations that participate in its two-day Afterschool for All advocacy event, held in Washington, DC. While the Alliance's first two annual Afterschool for All sessions were limited to adults, 80 youth attended the event in 2004; in 2005, the number of young participants rose to 120.

Like a number of other learning-by-doing ventures, Advocacy Day consists of a seemingly straightforward idea—inviting young people to travel with adults on buses to the capital to speak to lawmakers—that has the potential to become a rich educational experience. To make the most of that potential, planners should recognize that bringing youth to Advocacy Day involves much more than planning the logistics of a trip. Organizers must provide youth with enough guidance and information to help them make sense of the political process, while at the same time offering them the opportunity to claim the experience as their own.

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[1] Unless otherwise noted, all quotations in this article come from telephone interviews conducted by Susan Blank in 2004 and 2005. Some quotations were also included in an entry on TASC Advocacy Day in Sherrod, Flanagan, Kassimir, & Bertelsen, 2005.

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toward
a movement

Uniting Organizers and Direct Service Providers in a Movement for Juvenile Justice Reform

by Ruben S. Austria

Every spring since 1998, the Juvenile Justice Coalition has traveled from New York City to Albany to plead its case for juvenile justice reform, in an event called Advocacy Day. While participants include public defenders, policy analysts, community organizers, clergy, and parents, approximately 85 percent of the participants are young people who have been incarcerated. In 2005, more than 200 people made the trip. All morning and afternoon, teams of advocates met with more than 75 state legislators, outlining specific plans for reform. Every team had several youth who had been adjudicated delinquent and could offer personal testimony on the negative impact of incarceration or the positive effect of community-based alternatives.

At approximately 4:00 p.m., the group was preparing to depart the state capitol building to board homebound buses. Several youth, tired and hungry after a full day of presentations, stopped at a fast-food restaurant in the underground mall

no more youth jails

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that connects the capitol building to the state legislature. No one knows exactly how things spun out of control. Some say words were exchanged over "flagging," or openly displaying symbols of gang affiliation; others claim there was bad blood between two individuals who had been locked up together at Rikers Island. Whatever precipitated the disagreement, it erupted into a fistfight. The scuffle turned into a full-fledged melee as other young people jumped in to break up the fight or defend their friends. The brawl made its way through the concourse and into a parking garage, as youth leaders and staff members desperately sought to pull people apart. Within minutes, state troopers descended on the fracas, restoring order and bringing several youth and staff members into custody.

Miraculously, though those taken into custody were held for about 45 minutes, no arrests were made, and no one was seriously injured. By 5:00 p.m., all the participants had boarded buses back to New York City. The mood on the return trip, however, was gloomy. The purpose of Advocacy Day was to convince legislators to reform harsh policies that shuttle youth of color into the juvenile justice system. We had worked hard to present an alternate image of young people by introducing legislators to adjudicated youth who were now excelling in school, holding down jobs, and positively influencing their peers. Would anyone remember these images, or would the violent finale of the day simply confirm America's worst fears about urban youth of color?

As a member of the Juvenile Justice Coalition's steering committee, I am tempted to downplay the fight in hope of eventually eliminating it from public memory. Yet I begin my article with this incident because its implications force the youth justice movement to come to terms with an important reality. When two young men who have been incarcerated have a fistfight in the state capitol, we see how deeply intertwined are the personal and the political, and we are forced to reject the false dichotomy between individual transformation and social change. Direct service providers, who help adjudicated youth overcome personal challenges, and community organizers, who fight against systemic injustices, have at times clashed because of their differing orientations. As we work together, we are coming to realize that the struggle for justice on a societal level cannot be separated from the work of nurturing, healing, and developing our young people. In this article, I will describe some of the ten-sions between direct service providers and community organizers in New York City's juvenile justice movement and explore how working together to build a movement forces us to overcome the dichotomy between individual development and systemic change.

A View from the Trenches

In my work with adjudicated youth, I have witnessed both the personal struggles of young people and the systemic injustices perpetrated on America's "least favorite youth" (Rust, 1999, p. 3). In 2000, I started BronxConnect, a community-based alternative-to-incarceration program. My original intention was simply to help a few young people stay out of jail. Working from a justice-oriented faith tradition, I was not blind to how poverty and racism perpetuated the cycle of incarceration. Still, I looked at the work primarily in terms of individual development, desiring to help adjudicated youth overcome the many personal challenges they faced. As I spent time in the courts, however, I saw young people—almost exclusively African-American and Latino youth from poor communities—being shuttled through the system in a manner that virtually ensured incarceration. To be sure, many of these young people had committed crimes that rightly resulted in police intervention and court supervision. Yet I also saw hundreds of young people arrested and sentenced for reasons that might raise an eyebrow even of ardent supporters of tough-on-crime legislation. Young people were being arrested on charges of loitering for standing on a street corner and of criminal trespass for being inside an apartment building other than their own without ID. Incidents at school—a shoving match between two young people or the theft of a teacher's pen—that once were dealt with in the principal's office were now being turned over to the local police, with youth spending days and even months in detention.

As a court-mandated alternative-to-incarceration program, BronxConnect sought to hold young people accountable for their actions, to diagnose and treat mental health disorders, and to provide educational support so adjudicated youth could develop skills and basic competencies. Yet staff members also saw how futile it was to treat the problem simply as individual pathology. Could we honestly tell ourselves we were serving youth in the best way possible, when for every ten young people we helped, hundreds more were being incarcerated? The question from the old parable comes to mind: Do you just keep pulling babies from

the water, or do you eventually march upstream to confront whoever is throwing them in?

Though we never changed our primary focus, the work of BronxConnect has become intertwined with local and national movements to change juvenile justice policies and practices that unjustly affect poor youth of color. This process has forced us to move into areas less familiar to traditional youth development practitioners. Like any other youth service agency, we are subject to subtle pressure to view young people as problems we are paid to fix. We could easily become another institution profiting from the continued misery of those we serve, never challenging the systemic forces that bring youth into our care. Youth organizers, on the other hand, view young people as the solution to problems caused by forces that the entire society is responsible to confront. Youth organizers place young people in positions of real leadership, reminding direct service providers that we too often relegate youth to passive dependency. Furthermore, the political analysis of youth organizers forces us to consider the big picture even as we continue our work with individuals.

However, as we build a youth-based movement for justice with those who are directly affected, we must integrate youth development principles into our work. Organizations like ours that emphasize individual development in a community context bring balance to the movement, as advocacy efforts can sometimes lose sight of the real people involved. These youth—despite their resilience, energy, and creativity—have often experienced more abuse and neglect than we can imagine, both in the streets and at the hands of a retributive justice system. Even well-intentioned efforts run the risk of exploiting the charisma and passion of young people for the sake of the cause, while failing to help them develop into healthy, competent adults. Partnering with agencies rich in services and infused with youth development practices can help organizers ensure that young activists are developing competencies in *all* areas of life.

Definitions

In this paper, I use the terms *direct services* and *organizing* to contrast the individual approach with the systemic approach. *Direct services* refers to intervention approaches that work directly with youth in the justice system. *Organizing*, on the other hand, refers to approaches that work on the systemic level. These labels cannot, of course, capture the complexity of the varied agencies in the movement. There are many areas of overlap, and an increasing number of agencies incorporate more than one approach.

Table 1

Individual Growth	Systemic Change
Youth intervention	Advocacy and research
Youth development	Community organizing

The left column of Table 1 shows two components of the direct services approach, which emphasizes individual change. *Youth intervention* is an approach that sees needs in a young person and aims to provide the appropriate remedy. In the context of juvenile justice work, this approach may include family therapy, anger management programs, or GED instruction. Direct service also includes *youth development*, whose practitioners, rather than concentrating on deficits, engage young people in activities that develop their strengths. In juvenile justice work, youth development might include, for instance, entrepreneurship programs that train young offenders to start their own businesses.

The right column of Table 1 shows approaches that prioritize systemic change. *Advocacy and research* groups seek to change polices and practices by producing and disseminating information that demonstrates the need for reform. In juvenile justice work, this approach might involve conducting research on disproportionate minority confinement and sharing that information with city agencies. *Community organizing* groups focus primarily on empowering community residents to take control of the issues that affect them. Such an approach to juvenile justice might organize parents of incarcerated youth to meet with local elected officials.

What all these approaches have in common is that they are typically *adult-led* efforts on behalf of youth. Youth organizing, which privileges the ideas and leadership of young people themselves, has the potential to

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Youth Organizing

LISTEN, Inc. (2003) defines *youth organizing* as "a youth development and social justice strategy that trains young people in community organizing and advocacy, and assists them in employing these skills to alter power relations and create meaningful institutional change in their communities" (p. 9). Youth organizing provides young people with political education to understand how the systems they encounter affect their day-to-day lives, and then provides them with skills to challenge and change these systems. While taking many forms, youth organizing is often recognizable by the leadership of young people in planning and carrying out activities such as peer education, campaigns, and protests.

Collective social action by young people is hardly a new phenomenon. From college students registering Black voters during Mississippi's Freedom Summer in 1964 to university students standing up to tanks in Tiananmen Square in 1989, youth have energized movements for social transformation. Revolutionary political movements such as the Black Panthers and the Young Lords sprang from the frustration of inner-city youth of color who took direct action to combat the racial injustices perpetrated on their communities. As Hosang (2003) points out, "[a]ll the notable U.S. social movements of the 1960s… drew their leadership and base from politically committed youth activists" (p. 3).

In the last decade, however, we have witnessed a new phenomenon: the emergence of independent youth organizing agencies. In the past, youth social change efforts usually remained unincorporated or functioned as junior divisions of adult organizing initiatives. In the 1990s, youth movements "became formally incorporated as nonprofit entities with independent budgets, dedicated staff, and organizational infrastructures" (LISTEN, 2003, p. 6). These independent youth organizations defined themselves not only by their focus on

numbers of youth entered the juvenile justice system. These practices, though traumatic and disruptive to young people, created common experiences—incarceration, police harassment, school suspension—around which disconnected youth could rally. Hosang (2003) suggests that this very hostility "created the conditions for the emergence of 'youth' as a *political identity,* a shared worldview that provided the basis for collective action" (p. 5).

Youth organizing, at its best, begins to bridge the dichotomy between efforts for individual and systemic change. Among the components in Table 1, youth organizing clearly is most closely connected to community organizing; it focuses on empowering those directly affected by the issues and on challenging unjust systems. Youth organizing also frequently involves research and advocacy, as young people gather data that they use to educate their peers and to plan direct action. However, youth organizing groups also achieve positive outcomes in individual growth. By treating "at-risk" youth as leaders and giving them a framework to address their most difficult experiences, youth organizing has engaged a cohort of youth that otherwise would have remained disconnected from social services and afterschool programs. The emphasis on leadership produces excellent youth development outcomes. When youth organizers plan a rally against the construction of a new detention center, the process requires youth to conduct research, apply for permits, prepare speeches, promote and advertise the event, write press releases, and negotiate with city authorities. The skills learned through such campaigns are often invaluable to a young person's development.

Youth organizing, by the nature of the issues it confronts, must also function as a youth intervention strategy. Youth campaigns, when they address such issues as police brutality, school inequalities, and juvenile justice reform, often attract youth who are marginalized and alienated from mainstream society. Youth organizers are quick to reject deficit-based thinking that views young people primarily in terms of their problems. However, the young people that youth organizing attracts—particularly youth involved in the justice system—frequently face multiple burdens: undiagnosed mental health issues, substance abuse problems, homelessness, and learning disabilities, to name a few. The very real needs of young people in the justice system means they require *more*—not fewer—direct services than advocacy groups usually provide.

issues of concern to young people, but also by their commitment to youth ownership of organizational development and decision making.

Often these youth organizing efforts were launched in urban areas among the most marginalized young people. Some theorize that the growth of youth organizing was a direct response to the increasing criminalization of youth (Hosang, 2003; Pintado-Vertner, 2004). In the 1990s, youth—particularly urban youth of color—became the targets of increasingly harsh justice polices. As young people were cast as "superpredators," the response was to build more detention centers, transfer juveniles to adult courts, and increase penalties for young offenders. Record

Ideally, youth organizing should draw from both the individual and systemic approaches, resulting in a strategy that develops those directly affected into leaders and unifies the various schools of thought into one movement. LISTEN, Inc. (2003) summed up this idea in an equation: "Community Organizing + Youth Development = Youth Organizing." In real life, equations rarely work out this neatly. In the context of juvenile justice, very real tensions between organizers and direct service providers can threaten the work done by and on behalf of youth.

Tensions in the Youth Justice Movement

When I began attending meetings on juvenile detention, I noticed a sharp, sometimes acrimonious divide between direct service providers and organizers. Tensions between the groups, though obvious, were rarely discussed directly and openly. A breakthrough came at a 2002 meeting, when Clinton Lacey, a respected leader in the youth justice movement, opened by saying:

> I'm really glad we could come together in cooperation, since we don't always trust each other. Organizers usually look at direct services and think, "You're just teaching youth to cope and that makes you complicit in the system." Meanwhile, direct services are looking at organizers and thinking: "Yeah, but your kids' lives are all messed up."

There was a tense moment of silence, and then we began to laugh. Clinton had broken the ice by stating plainly what everyone was secretly thinking. The contrast he evoked remains a critical area of tension in the movement. Thankfully, this tension can make all of us better youth workers.

Fault Lines

Clinton's statement highlights several fault lines that threaten to fracture the movement. The first fault line is the question of whether direct services help or hinder a social change movement. Community organizers, especially those influenced by Alinskian methods, come from a school of thought that views direct ser-

Youth organizers remind me that direct service providers commit a great injustice when their response to a young person's rage at being harassed by police, jumped in detention, or humiliated in school is to prescribe an anger management program.

vices as a tool of the oppressor designed to keep the poor passive and dependent (LISTEN, 2003). Instead of mobilizing the masses for change, organizers argue, direct services perpetuate the status quo by pacifying the suffering of the oppressed. Youth organizers rightly give young people a framework to fight systems that exploit them, instead of focusing on individual pathology. I think, for instance, of a young man who, prior to joining BronxConnect, had been mandated to several anger management classes. The classes never helped him. When he was exposed to youth organizing, he learned to channel his anger in a positive direction and became a leader in the youth justice movement. Youth organizers remind me that direct service providers commit a great injustice when their response to a young person's rage at being harassed by police, jumped in detention, or humiliated in school is to prescribe an anger management program.

Direct service practitioners, on the other hand, rightly prioritize helping young people who have been incarcerated to overcome challenges in their lives. Recognizing the deep needs of youth in the justice system, we focus on individual growth and development—but sometimes at the expense of crying out for justice. I struggle, for instance, with the ramifications of BronxConnect's new performance-based city contract. When we started the program seven years ago, we operated on a shoestring budget, piecing together whatever funding we could find to pursue our dream—and we never held back from critiquing city agencies that were harming our youth. Now, as we earn a dollar amount for each unit of service provided, it feels almost as if we are doing business with young people as commodities. We are perhaps gentler in our criticism of city agencies. If we are not careful, BronxConnect will become another institution in this nation's broken juvenile justice system that processes young people through its various stages without ever setting them free. Working with organizers keeps me true to our original vision: to work toward the day when a program like ours is no longer necessary.

The second fault line has to do with youth leadership. Youth organizers, deeply committed to having

youth define strategies for juvenile justice reform, go to great lengths to ensure that their initiatives are youth-led and youth-controlled. As youth organizers put decision-making power back in the hands of youth, we see young people rise to a level of responsibility and efficacy that we never dreamed possible. I am continually reminded that many of us in youth service frequently violate young people's sense of agency by making decisions about what they need without their input. Youth organizers are critical of agencies that keep youth in positions of dependency, feeding them services without ever giving them the tools to challenge and confront the systems that oppress them.

Yet direct service providers also rightly question the wisdom of thrusting young people into leadership roles when their most basic needs remain unaddressed. Young activists have been known to neglect school or put off finding jobs to devote their time to the movement. I've seen young people I was mentoring and cultivating for leadership wind up back in jail after making their first brilliant public presentation. I wonder whether my pride at seeing them represent our program blinded me to deeper unmet needs. Alfonso Wyatt describes this phenomenon:

Responsible youth workers, whether direct service providers or organizers, must care more about a young person's overall development than about his or her immediate contribution to the agency or the movement. Otherwise, we are guilty of exploiting young people for our own purposes.

How did youth work lose these promising young peer leaders? Too often, I fear, we adult youth workers are to blame. Unwillingly perhaps, we've committed a form of youth service malpractice. We're guilty of an egregious breach of basic youth development tenets by having failed to install… a realistic leadership development component for these youth… Perhaps no long-range plan was ever formulated for young peer workers. Maybe the adult staff became so caught up in the "adult-like" mannerisms of these young people, they missed important cues or cries for help. They did not perceive that even the seemingly most motivated peer leader can slowly drown in the same negative forces besetting many youth— hopelessness, anger, self-sabotage—in plain view of well-intended adults. (personal communication, November 11, 2005)

I am now extremely wary of thrusting youth into leadership roles before they are ready. Responsible youth workers, whether direct service providers or organizers, must care more about a young person's overall development than about his or her immediate contribution to the agency or the movement. Otherwise, we are guilty of exploiting young people for our own purposes.

The third fault line is the issue of adult involvement. Young organizers rightly protest the lack of youth representation in decisions that affect them. As James Warwin, founder of The Brotherhood in Harlem, put it, "If you had a problem in the black community, and you brought together a group of white people to discuss it, almost nobody would take that panel seriously… But every day, in local arenas all the way to the White House, adults sit around and decide what problems youth have and what youth need without ever consulting us" (LISTEN, 2003, p. 6).

Yet I have seen this logic taken far beyond what is healthy for young people. In its extreme form, adult involvement is cast as a threat to youth self-determination, and youth liberation is seen as the rejection of adult-defined standards of behavior and morality. This logic, appropriate for anti-racist or anti-imperialist movements, makes little sense for youth in our communities. Too many young people, especially those who have been through the justice system, have never had the benefit of healthy community and family. As a resident of the South Bronx who deals with young people not just in program settings but on street corners and stoops, I rarely see young people suffering from *too much* adult involvement. Families have been shattered by drugs, long prison sentences, and even murder; too many young people have been left to fend for themselves. Young people, particularly youth in the justice system, need stronger and more consistent adult involvement in their lives as we raise them up to be leaders and decision makers.

The final fault line is tension over personal accountability and responsibility in the context of a discriminatory justice system. The tension emerges when, for example, a young person risks violating his

or her probation for continuing to fail drug tests. Why does an inner-city Black or Latino youth get a prison sentence, youth organizers argue, while a suburban white youth gets sent to a drug rehabilitation program? As a service provider and community member, I ask the same question about the broader inequalities, but my immediate issue is, "How do we help this young person stay drug-free so he or she won't spend the next 12 months locked away?" I cannot afford to excuse or rationalize youth misbehavior because I believe the consequences are unfair. Knowing just how discriminatory the system is forces me to do *more,* not less, to see that young people avoid the pitfalls that await them. I must challenge them and hold them accountable, even when they don't like it. There is a certain ideology, says Victoria Sammartino, that says:

> Young people have to be empowered to make their own decisions, so you can never challenge them on fundamental things like going to school, or not staying out all night, or telling them they can't smoke weed. But then you're functioning like a permissive parent, which is part of the reason these kids are in trouble in the first place! It's about social justice and societal change, but *God!* It's about these kids' lives too!" (personal interview, May 21, 2005)

I am thankful that organizers and direct service providers have reached the point where we can discuss these issues without rancor. In 2001, when I first became involved in juvenile justice reform, I wondered if we would ever overcome our prejudices to work together effectively on behalf of youth. The story that follows is one example of the way we have worked together to build a movement and achieve real victories in the struggle for juvenile justice.

Building Synergy

In 2001, New York City planned to expand two recently opened juvenile detention facilities. The proposal, coming at a time when funding for youth services was being cut across the board, was too egregious to ignore. The city planned to add 200 additional beds, at a cost of $68.6 million, despite the fact that the average daily population in the city's three detention centers was well below capacity.

Two coalitions led the fight against detention center expansion: the Juvenile Justice Coalition, composed primarily of adult professionals including legal advocates, direct service providers, and policy analysts; and the Justice 4 Youth Coalition, a youth-led group deliberate about keeping those directly affected in control of decision making. Though different in culture and philosophy, the two groups were united in their opposition to the expansion.

The early months of 2002 saw a flurry of activity aimed at stopping the planned expansion. The Justice 4 Youth Coalition staged rallies and protests in front of City Hall. As the protests grew more visible, the New York City Council convened hearings to explore the wisdom of expanding the centers. Adult members of the Juvenile Justice Coalition testified at City Council hearings, while Justice 4 Youth brought hundreds of young people to protest outside. Policy analysts dispassionately described numerical trends, alternative-to-incarceration programs talked about their success rates, and youth activists hollered—but we were all saying the same thing: Stop putting kids in jail. The diversity allowed each facet of the movement to remain at the level of confrontation they were most comfortable with, while still contributing to the larger cause. When I took the microphone at hearings, I outlined my arguments against expansion quietly and respectfully. The director of an alternative-to-incarceration program can't publicly berate a city agency with which we partner. Yet as I took my seat, I silently cheered the next youth presenter who aggressively lambasted the city's plan.

We don't know what eventually tipped the scales, but, in June 2002, the city announced that it was canceling the expansion. Stunned disbelief was followed by rejoicing throughout New York's youth justice community. As Malikah Kelley, a youth organizer, wrote in her 2002 article on the campaign: "The city's decision to cancel the expansion plan showed us that we have real power in influencing policy changes, and in building a citywide movement, led by youth" (p. 23).

Through the process of working together, something changed in the relationship between organizers and direct service providers. We began to relate to each other as brothers and sisters in a common struggle. Four key factors have facilitated the development of a united youth justice movement:
- Cross-agency collaboration led by youth
- Co-enrollment of youth across programs
- Hybrid organizations
- National networks that provide the opportunity to build relationships locally

The collaboration encouraged by these factors should also be possible in other areas where direct service providers and organizers need to work together to effect change.

Youth-led Collaboration

It was the young people who spearheaded inter-agency relationships. If the fight on Advocacy Day sprang from conflict between two young people who had been incarcerated together, seeds of cooperation grew from a different kind of relationship formed at Rikers Island. Chino Hardin, a youth organizer with Prison Moratorium Project (PMP), reconnected on the outside with a fellow inmate who was involved with Friends of Island Academy, a direct service agency: "Me and Liz were locked up together, and then we met on the steps of City Hall. I told her about PMP and she told me about Friends" (personal interview, May 17, 2005). Youth from both agencies began attending each other's meetings and learning from each other. Friends of Island Academy offered their space as a meeting site for the Justice 4 Youth Coalition, which is associated with PMP. Clinton Lacey, then the associate executive director of Friends, recalled, "It made sense, and it seemed more beneficial to everyone. At Friends we offered space and bought some pizzas and they brought 40 kids to the room… just those kinds of small things that go a long way" (personal interview, May 14, 2005). Eventually, the two organizations entered into a formal partnership. PMP provided political education to Friends participants, while Friends offered GED classes, counseling, and job placement to young PMP activists, some of whom were fresh out of jail. Eventually linkage agreements were signed, but according to Hardin, the friendships between young people were what made the bridge-building possible: "Different individuals became part of both organizations. The politics came later... meetings with executive directors… but the relationship building came first" (personal interview, May 17, 2005).

Co-enrollment

As a result of such relationships and of work together in campaigns such as the one to fight detention center expansion, a number of young people were co-enrolled in more than one program. Young people served as role models to adult staff members, who sometimes let politics and competition for funding divide them. Larenz Suggs, a BronxConnect graduate who is now a youth organizer with PMP, put it this way: "Okay, these two guys at Advocacy Day fought with their fists… but is that so different from two programs fighting over which one is better… or fighting over funding?" (field notes, May 16, 2005). When youth are co-enrolled, it makes agencies less likely to criticize each other. Following the fight at Advocacy Day, youth leaders were quick to cut off suggestions that any particular organization was to blame, insisting that the whole movement shared responsibility.

Co-enrollment makes programs more accountable to the youth they serve and to each other. Youth from a direct service agency may begin to push for increased youth ownership and decision making when they see what is possible from peers in youth organizing circles. Meanwhile, connections with direct service agencies can influence organizing groups not to minimize young people's needs for services as they provide political education and leadership training. When youth are co-enrolled, it is more likely that *all* their needs, from basic education to political awareness, can be met.

"Okay, these two guys at Advocacy Day fought with their fists… but is that so different from two programs fighting over which one is better… or fighting over funding?"

Hybrid Organizations

A growing number of agencies in the youth justice movement integrate the goals of individual change and systemic development. Many of these agencies, which often began as grassroots community-based movements, are led by individuals who come from the same background as the youth they serve: Many are people of color in their 20s or 30s who grew up and still live in the neighborhoods where their organizations are headquartered. Perhaps they earned their GEDs in prison and then completed college degrees and professional training after release. They are youth activists by background and adult professionals in their current work life as organizational leaders.

One of the best examples of a hybrid organization is GEMS (Girls Educational and Mentoring Services), a Harlem-based organization dedicated to fighting the

commercial sexual exploitation of adolescent girls. Rachel Lloyd, the executive director of GEMS, was inducted into prostitution at the age of 17, left "the life" at 19, and founded GEMS at the age of 23. While GEMS provides direct services for girls who have been sexually exploited, it also trains its members to educate and advocate on the local and national level. GEMS is currently leading the effort to pass state legislation to protect minors under the age of consent who are picked up for prostitution. Rather than charging such youngsters with a crime, the legislation would send them to supportive services. Rachel Lloyd swears by the importance of girls speaking out for justice as an essential aspect of healing and recovery. "However," she says, "in my first week out of 'the life' I didn't need to speak out. I needed a place to live. I needed clothes, food, and people to love me" (personal interview, May 2, 2005).

National Networks, Local Relationships

While local coalitions stopped the expansion of the juvenile detention centers, a national movement for youth justice helped bring about the unity that characterized this local effort. The Community Justice Network for Youth (CJNY, www.cjny.org), a national

coalition of organizations working with youth of color in the justice system, has provided local advocates with opportunities to gather with like-minded folks from across the country. CJNY's national conferences allow organizers and direct service providers not only to engage in constructive dialogue during formal sessions, but also to "hang out" and build relationships during free time. At CJNY, many of us experienced a sense of solidarity and family that we had never before felt in the work.

CJNY models the ethics of unity amid diversity. Refusing to promote a single ideology, CJNY demonstrates that diverse entities can rally together for the sake of young people in the justice system. One conference included presentations both from a Louisiana coalition that had organized to shut down the notorious Tallulah Juvenile Detention Center and from the deputy commissioner of Missouri's juvenile justice system, who explained the state's decision to eliminate large juvenile prisons in favor of a therapeutic model that places youth in small group homes. Conference participants began to grasp that victory in this movement would require those who rally against the juvenile justice system to break bread even with those who administrate it.

Developing "Love Warriors"

The fight at Advocacy Day is a reminder that even as the youth justice movement wrestles against oppressive forces from without, it must also confront and heal within. While we want ultimately to see the day when the juvenile prisons are largely unnecessary, getting to that day requires transforming not only policies and practices, but also the lives of individual young people. Individual development and systemic change are both clearly necessary.

Direct service providers like me have much to learn from youth organizers. As we help young people develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they need to succeed, we often fall short of promoting genuine youth ownership and decision making. In the midst of caring for those we serve, we must always ask ourselves whether we are doing enough to challenge the systemic injustices that make our programs necessary.

Organizers can also learn from direct service providers. Youth in the justice system—whose development has been under constant attack from poor schools, violent streets, neglectful foster care, traumatic jail experiences, and shattered families—often face a steep growth curve. Confronting the systemic factors that have hindered young people's development is not in and of itself a solution for their present needs. Adjudicated youth also need basic education, job skills, and character development in an atmosphere of discipline and love.

Building a unified juvenile justice movement means moving continually toward both collective empowerment for systemic change and care for the individual. Direct service providers and organizers will each continue to operate in our own unique orientations, but we must work together to build our young people into leaders of free and self-determined communities. We must put aside our differences for the sake of helping young people develop into what Alfonso Wyatt (1999) calls "love warriors": healed and transformed leaders who fight oppression, injustice, and violence with the tools of spirit, hope, and love.

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Afterschool Matters Initiative

The Robert Bowne Foundation (RBF), seeking to have a long-term and substantial effect on the field of out-of-school education, launched several new initiatives to accomplish this mission. Afterschool Matters is one of the initiatives, the goals of which are to:

- Generate and disseminate research about community-based organizations serving youth during out-of-school hours
- Build a network of scholars studying community-based organizations serving youth
- Contribute to basic knowledge and the improvement of practice and policy in the area of community-based youth programs

Afterschool Matters/Occasional Papers

One of the projects of the Afterschool Matters Initiative is the journal *Afterschool Matters*, a national, peer-reviewed journal dedicated to promoting professionalism, scholarship, and consciousness of the field of afterschool education. The journal serves those involved in developing and running programs for youth during the out-of-school hours, in addition to those engaged in research and in shaping policy. Articles for the journals are solicited from the field, and a range of academic perspectives are considered along with personal or inspirational narratives and essays, book reviews, artwork, and photographs.

The RBF Occasional Papers is a peer-reviewed series published twice a year. The goal of the Occasional Papers is to provide a venue for publishing research that explores key issues and topics in the practice and theory of afterschool programming, youth development, and learning during the non-school hours. In addition, the Occasional Papers address key policy issues in the area of youth development. The intended audience for this series includes researchers, university staff, afterschool program managers and practitioners, and policy makers. Prospective papers are solicited by the RBF.

Copies of both *Afterschool Matters* and the Occasional Papers are available on the RBF website, www.robertbownefoundation.org.

Research Grants/Research Fellowship

The RBF sponsors a national Research Grant competition. Four grants of $10,000 are awarded to support either original empirical research in or about community-based youth programs during the non-school hours or research syntheses or policy analyses of community-based youth programs.

Now in its fourth year, the RBF Research Fellowship is dedicated to building the capacity of youth program staff to design and conduct research in the areas of youth development and education during the out-of-school hours. The goals of the Research Fellowship include generating and disseminating research in the area of education in community-based organizations serving youth during the out-of-school hours, building a network of scholars, contributing to basic knowledge and the improvement of practice, and informing policy in the area of community-based youth programs.

For more information about the RBF Afterschool Matters Initiative, contact:
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Your Program in Art

Does your youth development program have children's
art that you would like to contribute to *Afterschool
Matters*? If so, please submit high-resolution image
files to:
Sara Hill, Ed.D., Research Officer
The Robert Bowne Foundation
345 Hudson Street
New York, NY 10014
sara.hill@bowne.com
We will ask you to fill out a form indicating that you
have the artists' permission to publish the works in
Afterschool Matters.

Afterschool Matters

Call for Papers
Spring 2007 Issue

Afterschool Matters, a national, peer-reviewed journal dedicated to promoting professionalism, scholarship, and consciousness in the field of afterschool education, is seeking material for the spring 2007 issue. Published by the Robert Bowne Foundation, the journal serves those involved in developing and running programs for youth during the out-of-school hours, in addition to those engaged in research and in shaping youth development policy.

Afterschool Matters seeks scholarly work, from a variety of disciplines, which can be applied to or is based on the afterschool arena. The journal also welcomes submissions that explore practical ideas for working with young people during the out-of-school hours. Articles should connect to current theory and practice in the field by relating to previously published research; a range of academic perspectives will be considered. We also welcome personal or inspirational narratives and essays, review essays, artwork, and photographs.

Any topic related to the theory and practice of out-of-school-time programming will be considered for the 2007 issue. We invite you to discuss possible topics in advance with our editor. Suggested topics include:

- Descriptions and analyses of community-based youth organizations as institutions that support youth development through civic engagement, social and emotional development, arts development, academic achievement, or other means
- Descriptions and analyses of programs that collaborate with a range of community institutions, such as faith-based organizations or businesses
- Exploration of employment-related topics, including, for example, youth organizations as spaces for training and employment, youth as workers, community economic development and youth programs

Submission guidelines
- Deadline is May 15, 2006, for the sixth issue of *Afterschool Matters,* to be published in January 2007.
- Submissions should be double-spaced in 12-point font, including quotations and references, and submitted electronically or on a disk in Microsoft Word or Rich Text format.
- Submissions should not exceed 5,000 words.
- Include a cover sheet with the manuscript title, authors' names, addresses, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses.
- The names of the authors should not appear on the text, as submissions are reviewed anonymously by peers.
- Follow the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 5th Edition, for reference style guidelines. Present important information in the text and do not use extensive footnotes or endnotes.

Inquiries about possible articles or topics are welcome.
To inquire or to submit articles, contact:

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