

Shirley Brice Heath

Making Learning Work

Two widely different worlds quietly developed parallel ideas during the final decade of the twentieth century. Within post-industrial societies since the mid-1990s, both worlds—business and youth-based community organizations—have begun to join their theory and practice, with surprising implications for making learning work. Both private profit-making enterprises and after school youth organizations have developed similar philosophies of creativity, collaboration, and communication.

This paper examines the significant link between these two worlds and illustrates through the case of one urban youth theater program how their theories operate in practice. Of central importance here is that young artists play multiple roles—as both *dramatis personae* and organization members—and work with a sense of agency, or the power to act outside given structures.

Concluding this examination is a summary of ways that civic and business leaders in countries such as Great Britain, Japan, the United States, and the Scandinavian countries are building a strong movement to take learning and organizations in new directions.

The intention of this paper is to help those who work in school- and community-based after school programs see new partnerships and programs as not only possible, but also profitable in a host of ways.

• Work as Learning

A recent publication of the Harvard Business School bears the subtitle, “Work is theater and every business a stage” (Pine & Gilmore,

1999). The volume draws heavily upon performance theory (previously best known to academics in departments of English and drama), Christian philosophy, economics, and entrepreneurial promotion. Endorsements for “the experience economy” and the benefits of thinking of work as theater come from CEOs of established corporations as well as entrepreneurs. And, the fundamental ideas in the volume are fairly typical of books found in the business section of bookstores, compatible works with titles using words or phrases such as “connexity” (Mulgan, 1997), “fifth discipline” (Senge, 1990), “common sense” (Atkinson, 1994), “a simpler way” (Wheatley & Kellner-Rogers, 1996), “soul of the workplace” (Briskin, 1998), and “the dance of change” (Senge, 1999). These publications repeatedly emphasize perpetual novelty, creative spirit, transformative experience, and freedom to explore ideas with smart, tough fellow innovators and critics in the workplace.

The content of these volumes meshes with the ethos and practice of youth organizations judged as effective learning environments by young people themselves. Youth newspapers such as *LA Youth* echo the sentiments of business publications

and illustrate repeatedly the successful work of young people whose creative talents have been honed in community-based organizations where responsibility, local decision-making, and resourcefulness mark youth as key contributors to the life of the group.

employers, policymakers, and philosophers say will mark the future.

Moreover, students spend only about one-quarter of their time in school, and older children and teenagers have discretion over about 45-50 percent of their time unless parents take charge of

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Another voice of support for changing conventional ways of thinking about learning and for addressing the importance of relationships, responsibility, and relevance comes from the school-to-work literature. This message emerges strongly from the literature that examines the connections between what is required for excellence in the arts and for success in business. Both the Goals 2000 and School-to-Work Opportunities Acts of the 1980s identify skills that relate to “workplace know-how,” as does the Secretary of Labor’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills or the SCANS report (Department of Labor, 1992).

As national standards in the arts have followed from federal initiatives in education, particular features of learning in dramatic, musical, visual, and media arts bear a remarkable resemblance to the key ideas of contemporary writings in business (see a prime example in “Arts and Earning a Living: SCANS 2000” at <http://www.scans.jhu.edu/arts.html>). Educators in a variety of fields examine ways in which new pedagogical strategies, theories of distributed cognition, and project-based learning carry strong links to the world of work. Meanwhile, critical theorists in education also caution that these innovative directions may not be as widely available in workplaces as their proponents currently believe; they also urge greater attention to how “the new work order” will affect both complex systems and specific acts of transformation by individuals and small groups (Gee, Hull, & Lankshear, 1996).

One common worry among both theorists and practitioners is that dependence on formal schooling, even in light of all the current reform efforts, will leave students short of the experience needed to establish the expertise, critical skills, and confidence which are critical to the future world of work and to the altered family and citizenship demands of that world. Schools cannot offer the extensive time for practice and participation and build-up of moral commitment and group discourse needed for students to develop all that

guiding selection of pursuits during the nonschool hours and provide transportation, fees, and support (Carnegie Council, 1992). Parents with the requisite time and finances expect their children’s time out of school to support and extend learning in a host of ways, to complement what they can do as mom and dad. Moreover, they look to experience with organized religion, sports team membership, arts programs, summer camps, and museums to help build in their children a sense of responsibility, knowledge of teamwork, and understanding of the arts and sciences that adults in daily contact with their offspring cannot provide without outside organizational support.

But what happens in communities of economic disadvantage or in households where parents have neither time nor money to give such opportunities to their children? Not surprisingly, young people get together on their own, invent ways to pass the time, and look for “something to do.” In the most fortunate of cases, they find their way to community-based organizations that engage them for a substantial portion of their nonschool hours in learning, playing, and working with their peers and thoughtful adults who have professional knowledge and experience in the primary activity of the group, whether that be the arts, sports, or service initiatives. A decade of research between 1987 and 1997 documented the daily life of such groups and took note of changes during the 1990s that brought them to reflect increasingly the ethos and practices of organizational change and workplace relationships advocated by business writers.¹

An Illustrative Case: Youth Theater

Imagine a dead-end street of a block of inner-city apartment houses. Picture there a youth theater on the third floor of a building that formerly housed a school; step into the rehearsal hall or organization office at 3:00 p.m. on any weekday.

Students move around the office, answering phones, checking rehearsal schedules, reading press releases, reviewing the file of head shots from last year's participants, and talking with the adult or college intern who is working on a grant proposal at the computer. Soon the artistic director arrives and moves into the rehearsal hall. After signing in, each student follows him and assumes the same position he has taken, either on the floor or standing. "You're a leaf floating on water; just let go and think about the water and what it gives you, how it pushes and pulls while it supports you."

What follows is a series of relaxation exercises, quiet listening to a literary or philosophical selection read by the director, warm-ups, improv or writing activities, and collaborative practice in small groups to develop a scene in response to the director's prompt. He speaks slowly, with long pauses between each sentence.

Think of a scarf coming down through the top of your head and entering your body. . . . It pushes down across your eyes and mouth and neck. . . . As it unfolds and waves inside you, it drops across your shoulders and to your pelvic area. . . . Let it grow inside you until it touches every part of your body. . . . It's moving you, and as it does, it's bringing you into contact with others. . . . Let it carry you up and down and fill you up, your fingers and feet. . . .

From this activity, the group then shifts into the improv of Zen spaces, moving and interacting with one another to create a unified whole of movement, with individuals switching in and out of directing and pacing roles while simultaneously remaining within the moment, the act, of the group's joined movements. The director silently steps to the side and begins drumming.²

After rehearsing particular segments of a show currently under development, the director quickly reviews the next week's schedule and closes the session several hours later. As the time for public performance of the show draws near, rehearsals heat up, but always after a period of relaxation and dramatic exercises. Sessions close with the opportunity for group members to "decompress" to prepare for exit from the jointly created performance into the real world.

After rehearsal, some students hang around on the worn sofas or at extra desks in the reception area to do homework, while others go off to work in fast-food restaurants or home to prepare the evening meal for younger siblings and working parents. Others work with the intern or adult

executive director to prepare mailing lists for announcements of a coming benefit performance.

From their entry to the theater group through the final performance, members have been engaged jointly in setting goals and identifying problems that may emerge during specific shows, within publicity and promotion, and during travel to distant sites to work with unknown audiences. They show continuously the value of the knowledge and skills they gain in school and how they assimilate these into their practical learning at the theater, particularly as they play roles in the daily operations of maintaining the group.

But they also illustrate the diverse sets of experiences individual members bring: the hidden talent of a quiet Latina who turns out to be an exceptional violinist; the special education student whose passion is drums; the straight-A student who has a knack for history. The theater becomes a place where they can take risks in letting others know what they can bring to the work and play of the group as they develop their own scripts, choreography, and music and travel to local venues as well as to European theater festivals.

The group sees itself as providing work; individuals are paid a minimum wage and docked for tardiness or absences; they go through auditions that require them to bring a piece of their own writing for dramatization; they stay on from year to year based on their sustained commitment and consistency of participation and contribution. Their experience in the theater group helps them build skills and gain knowledge through travel and contact with people they would never meet in their own communities or schools. Resistant as members can sometimes be to signing in and out or being called down severely by the director or team members if they slack off, they admit that "all this pain" matters in the long run.

Their director often insinuates that the world "out there" does not expect much of young people of color from "broken" families, "run-down communities," and sections of town with longstanding negative reputations. "No one gives a damn if you fail. Don't be afraid to fail. If you fail, well, fail gloriously. Really fail. Put everything into it and make it a glorious failure. That is something right there." The group is aware that the arts director depends on their knowing they have experienced this attitude elsewhere, and the theater group is a place that allows risks of all sorts, even those of failure, but the group expects, above all, a sense of agency, purpose, and motivation to be directing behavior. In other words, the adults at the theater know that ultimately what the young people choose to do and how they do it rests within them; all the adults can do is provide consistent

support and the strong framework of high demand, professional socialization, real deadlines, and tough, authentic critics. Ultimate success or failure rests with the youth.

This point applies not only to the dramatic performances in which young people play roles but also to the organizational life of the place. Youth members accompany adults as they pitch their work to clients who will pay for performances as products. Dramatic productions serve as educational experiences in juvenile detention centers, parent support groups, and civic clubs; they find favor with children's hospitals, cultural centers, and civic fairs.

But the characteristics of this site apply also to other grassroots youth-based organizations (YBOs) observed during this research which are housed within highly flexible and imaginative performing arts centers; differences among these derive primarily from the type of activities the group pursues. Sports groups, for example, spend more time discussing specific rules of their particular sport and sportsmanship than do arts or community service groups. Arts groups provide more time for open-ended talk with adults and development of highly imaginative ventures than do community service groups more likely to immerse participants in exploration of local civic, political, and environmental issues.

Playing Roles in the Arts

A close look at arts-based youth groups in theater, visual arts, and music illustrates how work in the arts depends upon members assuming numerous roles. Whether acting as receptionists answering the phone in the late afternoon, wearing organizational T-shirts to city arts events, or mediating between two participants whose tempers have flared, youth members have to sustain everyday life in the organization.

Figure 1 provides a visual sense of how work within an arts-based YBO moves from planning and preparing to practice and execution. Through the full cycle of any project, group members frequently call on individuals to explain, self-assess, and lay out their planned next steps on a piece of work.

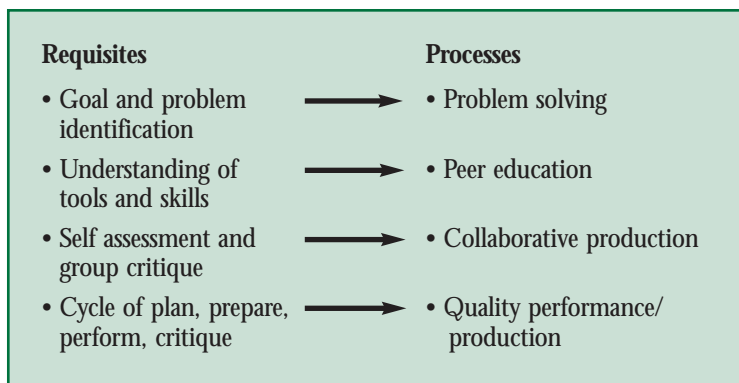
These skills parallel in large part those currently required within information-based companies that depend on collaborative project development and assessment as well as recruitment and negotiation of diverse individual talents needed for excellence in group performance. Phrases such as “continuous improvement,” “bold new thinking,” and “an eye to the future” appear frequently in corporate goal-setting sessions and annual reports and in the thousands of advertising forms every citizen sees or hears daily.

Such slogans reflect the fact that corporate entities today measure their assets and see their resources as residing in human capital and the availability of intelligence. YBOs live this resource reality minute by minute, knowing that their slim budgets and current favor with funders depend on their young members and the transformations of their talents and experiences into excellent products and performances. That these very skills have been identified as of prime importance in the workplace and in today's most successful businesses comes as no surprise to young artists.

One difference, however, for YBOs—especially those in the arts—is that work in any specific performance or product moves along with the expectation that each individual will also take up general responsibilities necessary to maintain the organization. For example, within theater groups, from auditions to closing-night celebrations, individuals engage not only as actors, dancers, or musicians in their performance, but also within the organizational infrastructure as receptionist, publicist, reader, scriptwriter, critic, salesperson, recruiter—tasks essential to the group's maintenance.

In the course of active participation for the first month of each season of the youth theater program described here, any student member might take on a dozen different roles for three hours per

Figure 1.
Performance/product oriented group work in the arts.



role; such roles include those noted above as vital to infrastructure as well as those more familiar in the theater. Figure 2 illustrates one week's range of roles, both organizational and dramatic. This multiplicity of roles especially characterizes youth organizations in economically disadvantaged areas because these groups rarely have a budget sufficient to employ enough adults to handle all the tasks needed to maintain the organization. Individual student members might assist with jobs like stuffing envelopes and proofreading while older members might instruct, coach, mentor, demonstrate, and reinforce ideas with younger and novice members. This process establishes the pattern that as individuals grow through the group, they shape the learning environment that supports group product and performance development.

Particularly in public relations, whether taking place on-site or in meetings with board members, potential clients or funders, young people have to assume the manner of dress and speech of characters they never play at school or with peers outside their organization. Youth members in these roles cannot fail to feel their responsibility as fundraisers or organizational spokespersons. Specific activities include: public speaking, processing information for action, writing brief notes as well as extended texts, mentally calculating numerical information, and working with printed materials for either organizational decision-making or dramatic interpretation. Those who bring academic

achievement in skills such as reading, writing, editing, computing, and public speaking figure as key assets; similarly, those who know how to find information and check facts and figures or locate experts often have to deliver such help within a very short time frame.

Humorists, mediators, and caregivers are also valued for their effect on the social climate of the group, especially in times of high tension. In addition, everyone must know how to respond spontaneously to often seemingly unrelated questions. Answers from the youth cannot be flippant but must reflect their artistic, philosophical, or analytical perspective: "I look for the tension to take me somewhere" (Worthman, 1999, p. 91).

In essence, within highly effective youth organizations, members combine their resources in order to act, think, and assess. Of critical importance is that a sizable proportion of role-playing takes place alongside instruction and facilitation with an adult professional. In the case of the theater group highlighted above, such professionals available during the practice phase of one season can include a writing coach, musician, artistic director, executive director, and administrator. In addition, board members who come from all walks of life often drop in during rehearsal and serve as quasi-mentors (as well as impressive references) and role models for young people from poor neighborhoods. On most occasions when a young person takes on a new role, adults are on

Figure 2. Role Opportunities Requiring Spoken and Written Language Uses Usually Identified Primarily with Adults

Role Opportunities Category of roles	Number of Occasions of Involvement	
	Dramatic	Organizational
Institutional adult (associated with key institutions, such as family, school, government, or religion—such as parent, minister, nurse, mayor)	12	0
Group representative planning financial and logistical details of group travel	0	9
Organizational structural position (receptionist, publicist, dramaturg, fundraiser, etc.)	6	18

Based on calculations drawn for a sample week in practice phase of an urban theatre group of 16 young people aged 12 to 18 meeting an average of 10 hours per week during this phase of the drama season. Note that practice cycle coincides with the time of heaviest activity

related to scheduling performances locally and elsewhere. The number of occasions was calculated only for those exceeding 5 minutes in length and are reported here only if they involved at least 50 percent of the group at least once during the week.

hand to monitor and support, and ample opportunities exist for practice, apprenticeship, and talk with older youth who previously held these roles or remain as adult staff members.

But what is it about playing different roles that matters? How does representing more than the individual self and one's own self-interests and

others' responses as well as the self, interpreting feedback and deciding how to respond. Such readings take place not only simultaneously with one's behavior and interaction, but also in memory and in future representations, sometimes in narrative form, voiced either internally or orally, and often through highly self-conscious artistic

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achievements relate to learning? In particular, are there linguistic and motivational payoffs that come with all the roles and responsibilities of these YBOs?

In recent social science, no name is more closely associated with an understanding of role than that of sociologist Erving Goffman. Drawing heavily upon theatrical metaphor for his social theory, Goffman explores how we appear to ourselves and to others (1959). A sense of self-identity and of the projected self never lie entirely "within," but always in dialectical constructions of how one appears to others. Goffman illustrates the highly mimetic nature of relationships between persons. Each individual learns to become human by doing what others already do, but in incorporating this general model, each "plays," at different times and in multiple ways, a wide range of roles. It is, therefore, difficult to assume roles one has never witnessed; verbal explication and demonstration by a caring respected adult or older peer help make this possible.

Since Goffman's work, much has been made of both the multiple roles any individual assumes and of the learning impetus that comes when metacognitive language—that which stops action by commenting directly on what is happening and how language works—surrounds roles. Recent work in performance theory, in particular, has led to widespread acceptance of the idea that individuals carry at all times several different role representations as well as varying levels of deliberate awareness of interpretations of others and of the self (Schechner & Appel, 1990; Parker & Sedgwick, 1995). One's stance, character, and emotional state are all, in turn, read by interactors and audience through their prior experience. This process makes listening and viewing highly selective—often on the basis of deeply embedded prejudices and stereotypes. An individual also reads

expression (writing memoirs, painting remembered scenes or images, for example).

This awareness of self and role gets verbalized as a matter of course within YBOs, and their marginal status is felt by adults and youth members alike. A readiness prevails to identify what is going on by stepping outside an ongoing course of action by the organization in ways that occur rarely in institutions (such as schools and families) whose position within society is accepted to the point of being taken for granted. Zippy, analytic one-liners ("Let's do an improv.") insert themselves into an intense practice or serious budget meeting to break the tension of the moment and to underscore what the group knows well; even when the script or the balance sheet has been written, "improv" may be the saving action. Talk goes on about topics such as motivation ("How hard were you working to mess up that entrance?"), focus of attention, and effect of one person's behavior on the group ("Yea, if Carlo has his way, this play will become a sitcom!"). Everyone has to see his or her role as potentially transformative ("messin' up" takes the whole group down) as well as persistently transitional ("Remember: only three weeks to opening night").³

Such metacommentary brings linguistic payoffs in what may be thought of as "practice effects"—having repeated opportunities to engage in intense debate, push a plan of action, critique a scene, develop a group exercise. Creating future scenarios motivates group members to think about what could happen as well as what they hope will happen. Goal theory research that attempts to understand motivation—how learners' perceptions of the purposes of achievement influence cognition and behavior (Meece, 1991; Urdan, Midgley, & Anderman, 1998)—reinforces the idea that a sense of one's place within a learning environment matters. Extensive research illustrates ways that the process

of work can feed motivation when there is higher-order need and social fulfillment (Kleinbeck, Quast, Thierry, & Hacker, 1990).

If one is not committed to individual learning as a positive group resource, attractions abound among adolescents for working hard not to achieve, not to belong, by avoiding work, resisting help, and learning to be helpless, actions often found in bright students who do not want to be seen as academically capable (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Covington, 1992; Fordham, 1996). Within schools, such moves often win respect from peers, who applaud the risks individuals take by defying authority, ignoring assignments, and deflecting others from the task at hand. YBOs turn this risk on its head: Student members have authority, design assignments, and negotiate, strategize, and create with others to keep something going that they believe matters to their self- and group-image.

For these young people, ritual retellings of events in the history of the organization play vital roles for intensification of membership and for acceptable sanctions against any moves to resist the reality of deadlines, budget limitations, or cooperation even in the heat of a practical joke gone sour (Heath, 1994). Within arts organizations, scenes and characters for projects in photography, painting, dance, and script development often come from individual and group memories. Recognizing shared circumstances provides the glue that cements and sustains relationships within the group and draws newcomers toward becoming “one of us” by making them part of the creative process. A common theme to emerge is the sense that others “outside” need to understand more of what young people experience and how they feel; particularly called for is recognition from others that young people have to be many things to many people in order to survive—with intimates and strangers, peers and adults, in school and beyond.

• Agency—The Power to Act beyond Structure

Within institutions such as schools, opportunities to think and act outside the constraints of the expected role of student or the structure of curricular and extra-curricular requirements come rarely. Moreover, schools in many post-industrial nations increasingly require standardization of product or outcome, determined by quantifiable measures of performance on standardized tests. Thus the agency of individuals in undertaking learning outside expected roles and structures must be submerged. Similarly, because the display of knowledge and skill within formal

schooling rests primarily on written expression, individuals whose talents lie more in visual or other means of communication have limited outlets to reveal what they understand.

Youth organizations, particularly those devoted to the arts, place a high value on acting beyond structures to identify and solve problems, express and assess ideas, and create and test new processes and products. For example, in arts organizations that generate part of their financial support through sales of commodities and services, young members work directly with clients (individuals, corporations, and nonprofit agencies) to learn what clients want and to develop designs for performances and products. Much discussion and testing of ideas goes into the design process, which consistently requires reflexivity and critique. And as deadlines approach, the language of youth members in arts organizations mirrors that of physicists facing a deadline for a conference paper and thinking about ways to draw on multiple communication forms to construct and perfect the final product (Ochs & Jacobs, 1997).

Open-ended problem-setting and -solving talk, as well as narratives explaining how certain effects can be imagined and attempted, move the work along. Youth members question one another about how the current bit of work or portion being done by an individual will fit into the whole; they challenge group members to keep in mind both deadlines and relevance to the project as a whole (Soep, 1996 & forthcoming). They see themselves as capable of acting outside and beyond the expected. Such perceptions gain support from the engagement of adult professionals within the workings of highly effective YBOs. This practice is best illustrated within artistic organizations, where artists explain and demonstrate technical processes, such as videoediting, firing kilns, or selecting paint for outdoor murals. Older members who have been with the organization for several years also offer guidance and critique, but their instruction is no substitute for that of someone who actually works in art—some of whom may, of course, be individuals who have gone through the youth organization and moved into the professional world.

All arts-focused organizations studied in the research on which this paper is based included key roles for professional artists whose identity depends not only on their “day jobs” in the arts but also on their tight communication with artistic institutions. These artists never question the absolute need for young people in YBOs to have as much access to the world of fine arts as to that of practical or commercial arts. It is as reasonable to expect young actors to be able to perform on

the stage of well-known local theaters and performing arts centers as it is to want them to have tickets to performances of visiting celebrated groups.⁴ Such special opportunities, as well as the daily interaction with professional artists working in their youth arts organization, strongly reinforce a sense of agency on the part of young artists.

Learning opportunities that grow from sustained contact with professional artists and a range of types of art work come with the strongly espoused view within such YBOs that learning is for sharing expertise, opinions, and information as well as for motivating action. Hence, older youth members with long records of participation in the group can take on occasional teaching roles as well as administrative and planning roles for the organization. The youth group then works not only as a community of practice but also as a community of collaborative preparation for the possibility of instructing younger members. When professional artists have to be away, older youth members take over, and after several trials they may take on roles that increasingly combine both administration of certain aspects of the program and instruction in group projects or processes. Youth members thus move back and forth between the role of young artist learning and organizational “expert” teaching.

• Widening Perspectives on Learning

A popular automobile bumper sticker in the late 1990s asserted, “Technology drives the future; the question is—who steers?” Societies around the world whose economies are post-industrial and dependent on information technology have much to learn and unlearn about work and how to make learning work. For citizens of these nations, no one denies the absolute need for continuous learning to keep pace with changing technologies and their effects on patterns of behavior, the social and ecological environments, and communication. The ability to play any role in “steering” the driving forces of technology depends vitally on knowing not only which skills, attitudes, and information must be unlearned and replaced but also how to maintain learning as a habit of mind.

Professional development and training programs for adults actively promote the idea that what is gained in formal instructional settings must be practiced and tested within actual workplaces. The same principle would apply for students: What is learned in school should “go to work” each day after school in action and reflec-

tion. Young people fortunate enough to have access to arts organizations of the sort described here in their own communities can study literature, including drama, during their English class each day and then move with this background into their after school participation. There, they not only read, write, recite, and perform, but they also learn about sound boards, professional stage sets, and theater technology during their visits to major performing arts centers.

Though educators have not always endorsed such nonschool learning opportunities as vital to academic support and career development, economists, civic leaders, and juvenile justice professionals are increasingly taking up this idea. As they do so, they speak out directly on the matter of the potential of after school hours in the lives of students for expanding, complementing, and supplementing formal classroom learning. Moreover, some leaders, particularly in nations worried about growing evidence of the ability of disenfranchised youth to disrupt civic life and dislodge public faith in the moral climate, see the civic value of such learning as vital to the moral health of their communities.⁵

Throughout the 1990s, leaders of post-industrial nations have begun to lean toward balancing concerns about school reform with attention to nonschool environments, and attention is going not only to neighborhoods labeled “disadvantaged,” but to all communities. Such concerns tie in closely with the acknowledgment that late twentieth-century economics and standard-of-living expectations have produced households with two working parents or with single parents who work at least one full-time job outside the household. Both situations mean childcare for the very young by nonparents and widespread independence of older children and youth during the late afternoon. Extensive dependence on peers outside organizations such as those described in this paper shows up in unexpected ways that have strong repercussions on community life and individual learning. Young people without some involvement in creating projects with adults in joint work lack practice in cognitive and linguistic performance that reflects “the art of the long view” (Schwartz, 1991).

Whereas young children receive their language input and explanations about the world primarily during caregiving interactions with adults, older children have fewer opportunities for explication in the midst of joint process as they grow independent and interact increasingly with their peers. Precisely because the majority of these occasions for explanations occurs within tasks of work for very young children (tying a shoe lace, preparing

cookie dough, or building a castle of sand or blocks), they carry within them both action and consciousness about cause and effect and, often, also about emotive or mental states and intention. But it is this talk-with-work that older children and young people often miss in families of post-industrial societies.

ries . . . the places where the innovative advances into the learning society will take place” (Markkula, 1999, vii). Ironically, in several locations this move has emerged primarily because of dual recognitions: teacher shortages reaching crisis levels and acknowledgment that much teaching and learning, often of cutting-edge quality, occurred outside for-

More and more spokespersons are stepping out for new kinds of partnerships and for previously unimagined combinations.

In the daily world of two-working-parents households and single-parent families, older children have relatively few opportunities to engage with adults in sustained tasks of joint work, particularly those involving creativity as opposed to those merely sustaining food preparation, cleaning, and doing laundry. But the practice of taking on collaborative work roles and talking about the work is greatly needed. Moreover, participation in such occasions must take place frequently enough to enable repeated opportunities to both hear and state explanations and to reveal metacognitive awareness of process and of self and other within roles that help accomplish the task at hand (Heath, 1998).

Furthermore, when adult family members and older children engage jointly in work, the young often play roles that differ markedly from those of more ordinary adult-youth interactions, such as parent-child, teacher-student, or traffic officer-teen driver. Joint work enables participants to exhibit any special talents they may have and to discuss the process and its path of success or failure. Such engagement generally means a commitment to a successful outcome; hence, intention and motivation are often brought out into the open by co-participants.

Recognizing that strong contextual changes will be needed to enable the young to think ahead, consider consequences, and act morally, some national and local political leaders in post-industrial societies have begun to locate contexts in which habits of continuous learning and assessing work for young people and adults outside the usual formal institutional dependence on family, school, or government.

In Great Britain, the Scandinavian countries, and Japan, the move to ensure “learning cities” developed in this decade from the conviction that dwelling complexes (cities, towns, and regions) would have to be “. . . lifelong learning laborato-

mal institutions of learning and without formally designated teachers (Longworth, 1999).

Several nations, simultaneously, have faced the recognition that formal institutions do not learn either quickly or efficiently; thus, school systems find it difficult to re-orient toward learning with technology, perceiving problems and designing solutions, and collaboratively developing projects—abilities increasingly called on in both the employment and civic sectors (Senge, 1990, 1999). Amid complaints about the weakening of the moral and civic values in post-industrial life, public spokespersons often call on schools to integrate such teaching into school curricula, arguing that families and communities fall short of their obligation in these arenas. However, in post-industrial nations, major efforts to reform schools from the late 1980s and through the 1990s generally produced disappointing results at great expense. Those attempting to link employer needs and school outcomes consistently pointed out how school demands and work opportunities in the post-industrial labor market rarely mesh effectively (Bernhardt & Bailey 1998; Murnane & Levy, 1996; Levy 1999).

In contrast, community organizations that young people recognize as effective learning environments provide multiple roles and responsibilities that tie closely to those businesses and civic groups identified as essential for the future. Figure 3 reproduces the Charter for Learning Cities (Longworth, 1999) and the ten actions such groups declare as their commitment. The ten points of this charter are set out for comparison with the major motivations and processes that effective youth organizations express when asked to “explain” their group.⁶

Embedded within both these lists is the view that learning is not an individual gain but a continuing communal commitment, going even beyond life work, that self-chosen work we do to

A Charter for Learning Cities	Youth-Based Organizational Goals
<p>We recognize the crucial importance of learning as the major driving force for the future prosperity, stability and well-being of our citizens.</p>	<p>We recognize creativity, group process, and learning as major forces to help ensure that young people see themselves as learners and community builders.</p>
<p>We declare that we will invest in lifelong learning within our community by</p>	<p>We commit to responding as best we can to needs felt by the youth of our community and to their willingness to learn and lead by:</p>
<p>1. Developing productive partnerships between all sectors of the city for optimizing and sharing resources, and increasing learning opportunities for all</p>	<p>1. Developing collaborative partnerships among policymakers, the business community, educators, and local citizens to increase learning opportunities for all</p>
<p>2. Discovering the learning requirements of every citizen for personal growth, career development and family well-being</p>	<p>2. Working with every young person's sense of self as learner and of individual needs in preparing for careers, family building, and community development</p>
<p>3. Energizing learning providers to supply lifelong learning geared to the needs of each learner where, when, how and by whom it is required</p>	<p>3. Promoting dynamism and creativity to model on-going habits of learning, self-assessing, and project critiquing</p>
<p>4. Stimulating demand for learning through innovative information strategies, promotional events and the effective use of the media</p>	<p>4. Stimulating young people to recognize the continuous pattern of learning by individuals and groups they regard with respect and to promote their own learning through effective means of communication, including the expressive arts</p>
<p>5. Supporting the supply of learning by providing modern learning guidance services and enabling the effective use of new learning technologies</p>	<p>5. Linking young people with multilinear opportunities for further education that meet self-chosen possibilities for employment as well as avocational pursuits</p>
<p>6. Motivating all citizens to contribute their own talents, skills, knowledge and energy for environmental care, community organizations, schools and other people.</p>	<p>6. Motivating young people to assess their talents and creative gifts and to look for ways to bring these to bear in their communities with a sense of social responsibility</p>
<p>7. Promoting wealth creation through entrepreneur development and assistance for public and private sector organizations to become learning organizations</p>	<p>7. Promoting social entrepreneurship that moves human and financial resources toward opportunities for community economic development and enhanced possibilities for positive learning with all local sociocultural groups</p>
<p>8. Activating outward-looking programmes to enable citizens to learn from others in their own, and the global, community</p>	<p>8. Making possible opportunities for youth to engage as actively as possible with not only local cultural institutions but also with youth organizations and related programs in other parts of the world</p>
<p>9. Combating exclusion by creative programmes to involve the excluded in learning and the life of the city</p>	<p>9. Helping young people engage realistically with prejudicial behaviors that target youth, particularly those regarded as "different" by virtue of racial, ethnic, national, or religious identification</p>
<p>10. Recognizing the pleasure of learning through events to celebrate and reward learning achievement in organizations, families and individuals.</p>	<p>10. Relishing the pleasure and the challenge of learning by working as instructor, mentor, role model, and advisor for younger or less-experienced peers.</p>

Figure 3. Learning Cities & Youth-Based Organizational Goals Compared (Longworth, 1999, p. 206)

sustain our spirit, our inner soul and those we care about (Hall, 1993). Such learning thrives on complexity and connections, on groundedness as well as vision and expansion, on flexibility and movement across learners rather than authority within fixed institutions.

Cities, neighborhoods, public-private ventures, and innovative community organizations—entities never before considered primary sites of education and learning, but rather of commerce, politics, and service—now reflect the openness and flexibility in learning for the future (McKnight, 1995; Ranson, 1994). Operating at the margins of visibility, well outside either mainstream education or politics, these constellations have yet to benefit from wealth creation at the unprecedented levels that post-industrial societies have seen during the final years of the twentieth century. But more and more spokespersons are stepping out for new kinds of partnerships and for previously unimagined combinations. Advocates of these innovative partnerships now say without hesitation that changing conventional alignments across and within organizations fits well with the rapidly increasing admission by many that what they want in work is “transforming” experience (see Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Senge, 1999, and especially Shore, 1999). “Same-old, same-old” in hierarchical organization, single-task operation and mere product delivery have little attraction for those who see the promise in contexts of collaboration and creativity.

Still ahead for these groups is serious and thoughtful consideration of the implications of these new directions for young people. Many youth, especially those fortunate enough to have worked within effective YBOs, have had extensive experience in project-based learning, widely distributed role-playing, and exposure to a keen sense of moral and civic responsibility. They have come to know that they can be successful through their work in making learning highly visible; but they also understand the importance of their mentoring and partnering as invisible teachers of one another and their audiences, clients, and funders. These youth and their organizations show what it means to engage horizontally, succeed in quickly adapting to multiple means of communication, and offer the experience of learning as transformative work. In economists’ terms, these young people understand that the more intangible what they offer one another and their communities becomes, the more tangible the value (Pine & Gilmore, 1999:190). The challenge is for funders and policymakers from the public and private sectors to catch up with them, join hands, and keep moving.

Notes

¹ Carried out under a grant from The Spencer Foundation to Heath and Milbrey W. McLaughlin, this ethnographic research explored macro- and micro-organizational features of youth organizations judged by local young people as desirable places to be. These ranged from local branches of Boys and Girls Clubs or Girl Scouts to grassroots groups and performing arts center youth programs. The research was carried out in over 30 regions of the United States in 120 youth organizations (centering on either athletics and academics, arts, or community service) that involved approximately 30,000 youth over the decade. Special attention in this research went to members of these organizations who remained as active participants for at least one full year with at least eight to ten hours of engagement per week. The youth researchers collected data through four primary means: fieldnotes and audiotapes documenting the organizations’ activities, activity logs and journal writings of young people, reflective interviews with both adults and youth members, and statistical analysis comparing responses of a selection of these youth with the national sample of students who took part in the 1992 National Educational Longitudinal Survey. For further information on research methods and details related to selection of sites, see Heath and McLaughlin, 1993; Heath, Soep, and Roach, 1998.

² Our own fieldnotes, plus the work of Worthman, 1999, as well as videotapes of a two-year film project within this theater program, provide abundant illustration of the ebb and flow, pacing, and interdependence of group members. Worthman’s work provides especially rich examples and extensive transcripts drawn from two years of participant-observation within this youth group that, in the early 1990s, shifted from being a drama group to being a “program” through which theater, and all that surrounded its many enterprises, enabled employment and skills development for young people.

³ As noted above, audiotapes of language during all phases of youth organizational activities provide a large portion of the data collected by the research team working with Heath and McLaughlin. A specially designed concordance program allows analysis of transcripts of these audiotapes, so that particular vocabulary items, phrasal structures, and patterns of syntax can be traced and correlated with local circumstances; fieldnotes supplement and support audiotaped data.

⁴ Such access is much more difficult to achieve for community service or sports organizations than for arts groups. Ecological service groups, for example, often have to travel great distances to visit outstanding environmental projects; furthermore, many adults who work with these groups have a passion for conservation, environmental education, and the like,



but it is rare for such adults to have their professional life or full-time work be in fields directly related to ecology. Similarly, sports groups may be spectators at professional sports events or meet players on special occasions, but rarely is it the case that the full-time coach of youth sports groups is a professional whose employment is fully within the world of sports (see Thompson, 1998, for a discussion of volunteer sports coaches).

⁵ Numerous publications on teaching and learning repeatedly advocate for the power of community learning and for wide-ranging integration of knowledge from individuals whose expertise on a subject or skill strongly depends on evidence of their strong relationship to continuous learning. See, for example, chapters IV, V, and VI in Palmer, 1998. Parallel to these ideas are those reflected in publications of the Demos Foundation in London in the late 1990s; see, for example, Bentley, 1998, especially Chapter 6, 11, and 12.

⁶ This generalization is based not only on content analysis of transcripts of interviews with leaders of these organizations but also on mission statements and proposals submitted by these groups for funding. Confirmation that these broad outlines for behavior actually get operationalized in daily life comes from fieldnotes and transcripts of youth at work within their organizations and in off-site gatherings of group members beyond the presence of adults (see Heath, 1996).

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- Art Credit: The images in this article were created in programs of the Studio in a School, New York, N.Y. The originals are in full color and have been interpreted in two colors for this publication. On page 44, a group painting by students at P.S. 20. Drawing on page 45 by Nicole Leonardi, P.S. 42.

