

FAITH BASED INSTITUTIONS AND YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT: ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

by

James W. Wilson

B.A., Social Welfare (2000)
University of California, Berkeley

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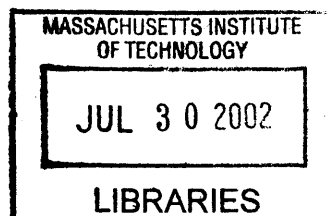
Professor Ceasar McDowell
Department of Urban Studies and Planning
Thesis Supervisor

Accepted by:



Professor Dennis Frenchman
Chair, MCP Committee
Department of Urban Studies and Planning

ROTCH



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ABSTRACT

There is growing interest among schools, other public agencies, and secular non-profit organizations to involve young people in current community planning efforts. Missing from discourse, however are the roles churches and other faith-based institutions can play in involving youth.

Across the nation, churches and church-affiliated community organizations provide adults opportunities to revitalize their communities. In this thesis, two types of challenges that hinder these organizations from providing similar opportunities to urban youth will be examined. One such challenge focuses on internal obstacles within faith-based organizations that dissuade new models of participation. The second challenge focuses on several relational obstacles that contribute to a disconnection between leadership of faith-based organizations and contemporary urban youth culture.

In spite of these challenges, this thesis suggest that some churches and church-affiliated community organizations serving low-income communities are well positioned to include urban youth bring in their community planning efforts. This thesis will explore the merits of that claim.

The goals of this thesis are (1) to identify the various institutional and relational challenges that impede collaborations between faith-based institutions and urban youth in community development; and (2) to draw the attention of youth serving- and other church-affiliated community organizations to innovative and progressive approaches for youth participation.

Thesis Supervisor: Ceasar McDowell

Title: Associate Professor of the Practice of Community Development

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Are schools, public agencies and nonprofit secular organizations best positioned to incorporate the tremendous social capital that urban youth are bringing to the field of planning for community development? Is it impertinent to look at opportunities for youth participation in community planning through the lens of faith-based institutions in urban communities?

These questions relate to my chosen topic of interest in faith-based institutions and youth participation in community planning and development. Research shows that faith-based organizations are more responsive and attuned to serving urban youth, than schools, public agencies and other secular institutions (P/PV 2000). Yet faith-based institutions while outnumbering secular community institutions receive far less government and foundation support (Dilulio 1999).

The same research also finds that schools and other secular institutions are incorporating more of a leadership orientation towards young people by involving them in the decision-making. In light of the growing interest in engaging youth in community building efforts, and coupled with previous community development work with young people, I am curious about the possibilities of youth-serving faith based organizations becoming community-builders in partnership with young people. I am also curious about possible ways in which faith-based organizations that work in affordable housing, community and economic development can involve urban youth in the earlier decision-making phases of their development projects. Hart (1997) and Mullahey (et al 1999) advance the conjecture that young people possess tremendous competencies to be integral partners in the decision-making of community affairs. And with more urban youth

demanding greater inclusion in decision-making processes that affect environments in which they live, faith-based organizations have the opportunity to become effective channels through which they develop their leadership capacities.

This thesis is primarily reflective and draws upon my experience working with youth, but also may be useful to staff of faith-based organizations interested in working with young people in innovative capacities. Also, this thesis may be of use to readers looking to acquire a general understanding of several challenges between today's urban youth culture and local black churches and affiliated community organizations. Because of its reflective nature and high level of subjectivity, findings from literature and interviews will be used primarily to inform and support my opinions.

There are two persistent themes that cut across the various institutional and relational challenges in bring youth participation in toe community development planning. The first centers on innovative youth participation approaches utilized by many public and nonprofit secular institutions and lessons that faith-based community organizations can take from them. In exploring this theme, readers may be better informed to answer questions such as, (1) how can faith-based institutions organize and progressively involve youth in community development? And (2) what are some aspects of youth participation work by secular institutions that can be of value to faith-based institutions that also work with youth?

The second theme centers on institutional and relational challenges between adult staff of faith-based organizations and urban youth, and particularly urban youth not currently affiliated with church ministries in their local communities. These institutional and relational challenges will be discussed further in Chapter 3, but one obvious

challenge noted from interviews and observation, is based on *intergenerational issues* between youth and older adults. This type of challenge, in general, is no new phenomenon. But the specific issue is best summed up by what one staff person at a youth-serving organization in Boston, MA referred to as the “church’s overall inability to cultivate young adults for leadership positions within”. This theme will highlight other obstacles and potentially charge some leaders of faith-based organizations to think introspectively about programs and ministries meant to serve youth in their communities.

Taken together, these two themes act as a framework for understanding some of the important issues that faith-based organizations interested in youth participation need to address. On one hand, attempts to initiate new ministries or programs will be difficult for leaders of faith-based institutions who are not keenly aware of issues relevant to today’s urban youth. Correspondingly, having a sensitive understanding of today’s urban youth and embracing their communication channels are vital to mitigating some institutional and relational challenges that now exist. Chapter Three devotes attention to several of these challenges. On the other hand, there are numerous examples of various skills and competencies that young people have to offer as well as on innovative participation approaches that faith organizations can draw upon. Chapter Four is devoted to two examples of youth participation approaches, taken from my personal work experience. Other examples are from literature.

Objectives/Aims

Previously the aims of this thesis are (1) to identify the various institutional and relational challenges that impede meaningful collaborations between faith-based

institutions and urban youth; and (2) to inform the reader of new and innovative approaches to youth involvement in community development. Tantamount to these aims is a personal objective to inform, through reflection, my future practice in community and youth development.

Along with several colleagues, I am in the preliminary stages of developing a unique urban planning and development program within The Joshua Generation, a nonprofit faith-based community organization in south Los Angeles. I am serving as primary agent for assisting members of The Joshua Generation in the strategic planning and programming of what possibly will be a concrete example of progressive youth participation which other faith-based organizations can learn from. However, I am cautious in proceeding without taking an opportunity to reflect on previous experiences and observations with youth participation in community planning which may better inform recommendations to The Joshua Generation.

Methodology

With the paucity of literature directly documenting youth participation in community planning through faith-based organizations, this thesis draws mostly from the literature on the works of public and secular nonprofit institutions and programs that involve youth in community planning as well as that of faith-based institutions currently working with youth in various outreach and development capacities.

In addition to the literature reviews, field interviews inform a great deal of the information presented in this thesis. The primary informants are young people, clergy members, and other community leaders working with young people in Boston, Los Angeles and Paterson, New Jersey. Most of the initial questions asked surrounded the prospects for collaboration in community planning and development. However, most of the interviews eventually led to discussions about institutional and relational issues. I interpreted these responses as suggesting that while there are considerable interests from both sides on collaborations in community development, there are several issues that will make such a collaboration extremely challenging. All interviews conducted were at the interviewee's place of work. Some were conducted one on one, and others in small groups. Names will be kept anonymous. A listing of interviewees and the types of organizations are included in the appendix.

What follows?

Chapter Two is a literature review meant primarily to inform the reader of positive findings from research on the effectiveness of faith-based institutions at serving greater segments of young people. Chapter Three features a summary of findings from literature and the field interviews on current challenges and issues as viewed through the framework noted above. Particular emphasis is on the latter theme which focuses on institutional and relational challenges to collaboration.

Chapter Four follows with examples of youth participation approaches taken from a condensed journal of activities and processes on works of The Joshua Generation and the New American School Design Project (also referred to as the “Paterson Project”). Emphasis is on what faith-based organizations can take and possibly build upon from these unique examples. Concluding the study in Chapter Five will be a brief assessment of main points and final analysis. In this analysis recommendations for next steps will be offered from my perspective.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter begins with a review of youth-serving secular community organizations. The chapter also provides supporting information of positive findings on some of the highly effective works faith-based institutions do with urban youth today. Though findings suggest faith-based institutions are highly effective in reaching urban youth, they are not meant to serve as arguments against public and secular nonprofit organizations. Many youth-serving public and secular nonprofit organizations, like schools and YMCA's are very effective in adopting new approaches for youth development and participation in decision-making. To be clear, one of two central themes focuses on the innovative participation approaches incorporated by public and nonprofit secular organizations that faith-based organizations can learn from.

A study done by Public/Private Ventures (2001) on community change for youth development in Kansas City, MO showed how a traditional youth-serving organization (YMCA) became a community builder. Because of their organizational capacity, the YMCA was successful in operating the Community Change for Youth Development Initiative (CCYD), a national demonstration project. The CCYD Initiative, designed by P/PV in the early 1990's, endeavors to draw together local institutional, human and financial resources to enhance the capacity of urban communities to support the successful growth and development of young people aged 12 to 20. In providing the Kansas City YMCA and other sites with a framework around which to organize CCYD activities, P/PV identified five youth development principles that research and common sense indicate are essential for the healthy growth and development of young people. These core principles reflect normal adolescent developmental opportunities that, when

absent from a young person's life inhibit their efforts to become vital, productive adults.

The core principles are as follows:

- **Adult support and guidance** -- opportunities for youth to receive support and guidance from caring adults;
- **Gap activities** -- opportunities for youth to engage in constructive activities in the non-school hour, such as after school and during the summer'
- **Work as a development tool (or "work-learning")** -- opportunities for youth to engage in work activities that promote learning, progressive skill development and career exploration;
- **Involvement in decision-making** -- opportunities for youth to be actively involved in decisions that affect the and to interact positively with peers in making such decisions; and
- **Support through critical transitions** -- opportunities for youth to receive support as they move through critical transition periods, such from middle school to high school and from school to work.

The five principles were supposed to represent a middle ground that would provide sites with a way to prioritize and make choices about their overall youth development goals. At the same time it would allow them the latitude to develop strategies and programs to meet their local needs and conditions.

For the YMCA, like many traditional youth-serving faith-based organizations, two of the principles, *gap-programming* and *adult support and guidance* were pre-existing strengths. The latter remaining three principles were areas in which the YMCA had not traditionally offered programming, and thus found most challenging. Still, regarding youth involvement on decision-making, the YMCA worked to integrate this concept into its programming. While the YMCA's traditional resident involvement approach emphasized adult participation, the CCYD coordinators linked them with already established "youth councils" as a major vehicles through which to implementing this core concept. Councils meet weekly to develop suggestions for new core concept activities

that would involve other youth in the community. Youth generally facilitate their own meetings, develop and present activity proposals to CCYD coordinators and other YMCA staff members, and work with staff to develop and implement the activities that everyone agrees should go forward.

While this example reflects aspects of the CCYD initiative that are common to all sites they worked with, each site unfolded differently as the framework adapted to fit local realities. Schorr (1997) argues that the adaptability of successful initiatives is an important question often overlooked by public policy. Initiatives that are successful in one context often fail when an attempt is made to replicate those in other settings. Critical to the initiative's success was YMCA's physical infrastructure and experience in youth development, and credibility at the neighborhood level and in the broader community. Challenges notwithstanding, faith-based community organizations can look to the approach taken by the YMCA as one progressive participation approach to explore in their localities. They can also be encouraged in knowing that vital resources like those offered by P/PV's initiative as well as foundation help are available.

While the work by the Kansas City YMCA and other secular community organizations is important, churches and other faith-based organizations remain the strongest institution in the black community (Mukenge 1993). And there is growing awareness from public and private sectors, including foundations, on works that faith-based organizations in low-income areas are successfully doing with urban youth (Johnson 2001). Research below addresses the root of some of those successes and impacts that faith-based institutions have had working in urban youth, and particularly "high-risk" youth.

Research on the role of faith-based organizations in addressing poverty related issues began with a 1985 study by Harvard economist Richard Freeman (NBER 1986). Freeman's research runs through the work of Larson ((Brookings Review 1999), and continues through the community development, mentoring, and faith factor research of analyst at Public/Private Ventures. In 1985, Freeman reported that church-going, independent of other factors, made young black males from high-poverty neighborhoods substantially more likely to "escape" poverty, crime, and other social ills.

Urban criminologist Byron Johnson and medical research scientist David Larson reviewed some 400 juvenile delinquency studies published between 1990 and 1997 (Brookings Review article 1999). Johnson and Larson found that the more scientific the study, the more optimistic findings are about the extent to which "religion reduces deviance". In a re-analysis and extension of Freeman's work published by the Manhattan Institute, Larson and Johnson mine national time - series data on urban black youth. Using a more multidimensional measure of religious commitment than church-going, religion is indeed a powerful predictor of escaping poverty, crime, and other social ills, more powerful than even such variables as peer influences. Like Freeman, Larson and Johnson conjecture that the potential of church going and other religious influences improve the life prospects of poor black urban youth. This potential is in part a function of how church-going and other faith factors influence how young people spend their time, the extent of their engagement in positive structured activities, and the degree in which they are supported by responsible adults.

The above conjecture is borne out in part by a 1998 Public/Private Ventures study of how predominantly minority low-income youth spend their time in the "moderately

poor” neighborhoods of Austin, TX; Savanna, GA; and St. Petersburg, FL. Across all age groups and cities, most youth who received adult support and guidance (whether at home, in school, or in community organizations) and participated in positive structured activities were significantly more likely than their “disconnected” peers to succeed. The P/PV Study had expected to find that public schools and programs like Boys Club and Girls Clubs, Police Athletic Leagues, Y’s and Big Brothers/Big Sisters provided substantial support for children in these communities. Those expectations were not entirely disappointed. But what the study also revealed was that churches and faith-based programs played a major “support for youth” role in providing after-school “safe havens”, recreations, mentoring, childcare, meals and more.

Even more remarkable is what the study showed in Savannah, GA. Fifty-two churches dwarfed schools both in sheer numbers and in the number of outreach programs and activities for neighborhood youth. To be clear, these findings make no case for religion being the primary channel for urban community development. The focus here is on institutions whose well-documented works in low-income urban communities are informed by their faith. I would surmise that such statistics are similar in many urban centers across America.

The unavoidable conclusion, notes P/PV ‘s Gary Walker, a 25-year old veteran in the field, is that “most private, nonprofit mentoring programs, like most social policy-driven youth development programs, simply do not reach or support the most severely at-risk inner city youth.” Where secular mentoring and conventional social service programs for poor urban youth typically end, churches and religious outreach ministries often begin (P/PV 2000).

The function of adult authoritative presence in reducing deviant behavior among urban youth is definitely within the scope of community and youth development work and these findings offer some degree of hope that faith-based organizations can reach urban youth in greater proportions. However, the research findings are relatively silent on a number of institutional and relational challenges that were identified through field interviews. From interviews conducted with adult leaders of faith-based organizations, it was found that many who work in neighborhood revitalization would genuinely like to engage young people in community and youth development projects. However, they are keenly aware of the much needed communicating and cross learning between them and urban youth, that in many cases, are long overdue.

CHAPTER THREE: INSITUTIONAL AND RELATIONAL CHALLENGES

As mentioned in Chapter One, there are two central themes that act as a framework for understanding some of the important issues that faith-based organizations concerned about youth participation need to address. One theme focuses on innovative youth participation approaches utilized by many public and nonprofit secular institutions and lessons that faith-based community organizations can take from them. The other focus is on the institutional and relational challenges between adult staff of faith-based organizations and urban youth. This chapter is devoted primarily to the institutional and relational challenges. Challenges highlighted are from literature and field interviews of young people, leaders of faith organizations and young adults who work with young people. The first section, taken primarily from literature, is devoted to challenges related to internal obstacles within churches and church-affiliated community organizations. These challenges surround leadership, strategic planning and programming. The last section, taken mostly from field interviews, is devoted primarily to relational challenges between urban youth, local churches and church-affiliated community organizations. These particular challenges focus on intergenerational obstacles, vernacular differences, and issues over which to organize.

Institutional challenges

Challenges of strategic planning and programming

Faith-based community organizations currently provide many opportunities for adults to participate in decision-making for neighborhood revitalization. But Hart (1997) points out that the extent to which community organizations may involve young people in

their projects begins and finishes often times during the physical phase. He states that even when young people may be carrying out a substantial part of the work at the physical phase, there are few examples of their participation in the research, planning, or decision-making that precedes that phase. Hart believes it will be difficult for adult staff leaders of faith-based community organizations to trust youth with such decision-making responsibilities, especially with no strong and well-documented precedents. He continues by suggesting that community-based organizations (secular and non-secular) need much help in recognizing the participation capacities of youth and how to involve them.

The lack of understanding of adult staff leaders on how young people process information during their different stages of development, contributes to their expectations that young people do not have the same competence in communicating with adults, and therefore may be ignored, directed or controlled. This same lack of understanding was found in many youth-serving faith-based organizations (from interviews). As mentioned in the previous chapter, most approaches utilized by youth serving faith-based organizations center on advocacy, outreach, and mentoring. While many leaders and directors of these organizations continue to stress academic excellence, it is just as important to empower youth to be active decision-makers not only for themselves, but also for their communities in which they live.

Need for focused and progressive leadership

Leaders must have a focused and sustained commitment to a democratic partnership with the young people with whom they work. In the P/PV study (2000), researchers identified challenges related to capacity building for program implementation

by faith-based organizations. Many churches and faith organizations either working with youth or involved with community development vary in size and style.

Smaller organizations have limited volunteer staffs, little if any budgeted resources for their work and, sometimes, no formal incorporated or legal status as a religious nonprofit organization. Without many organizational infrastructures the work emphasizes building relationships and time spent on the streets. P/PV researchers suggest that these organizations persist in doing this work because of a strong sense of mission, and they place little, if any, emphasis on strategic planning.

Traditional-oriented organizations are more comprehensive in their work. These types of organizations find it difficult to change methods and focus on a particular population or issue at the expense of a more inclusive vision. Leaders in these types of organizations will have difficulty involving youth or other groups. But, as mentioned earlier, these organizations can try to focus on a particular program to involve them. For example, an organization working in affordable housing, community and economic development can perhaps bring young people into their affordable housing work.

The “personality driven” organizations are referred to by P/PV as those with strong individuals whose personal motivation would serve to sustain an initiative in the early stages. The ministry and leadership of Rev. Eugene Rivers of the Azusa Christian Community and his Ella J. Baker House are a prime example of a personality driven organization. This type of organization can be very effective in attracting youth, especially when a leader such as Rev. Rivers commits himself to believing in the human and social capital that youth bring to the organization. The personality-driven leader then can better impress upon other staff members the need to bring youth into their work.

Relational challenges

These challenges surround intergenerational obstacles, vernacular differences, and the divergence between urban youth and adult leaders over central issues to address.

Intergenerational obstacles

Conflict of interests among youth and adults is not necessarily a new phenomenon, but the specific point to note is that black churches and affiliated community organizations are not cultivating enough young adults for leadership roles within. Consequently, some congregations and organizations feature leadership that is growing more and more disconnected from urban youth culture.

A leader of a youth-serving community organization in Dorchester, MA feels that, overwhelmingly, black clergy leaders are an old cadre and not always willing to cultivate young leaders for reasons mostly related to their own job security (many are career pastors without many options after stepping down). He goes on to say that among other challenges remains the church institution's inability to keep pace with youth culture and change in greater society. "Modernity is hurting us", he says. He finds that twenty and thirty year-olds are more attuned to today's urban youth culture than most senior clergy members who are sometimes too averse to change. This lack of leadership development of those best connected to youth and the church presents a major stopgap for the church as an institution to attract youth not affiliated with a local church body. With no charismatic agents or a process for understanding today's urban youth culture, churches and urban youth continue to alienate themselves from one another and thus make difficult any collaboration for the sake of community and youth development.

Vernacular differences

Most adults in churches and black church-affiliated community organizations do not understand youth culture. They not only fail to speak the language of urban youth, but often discount their communication channels. As a result, many urban youth today that are not affiliated with a local church body have chosen to look to other institutions for “religion”. These youth are not necessarily questioning their spirituality or rejecting relationships with God, but they look to messages from hip-hop artists primarily because these artists are reaching them through relevant shared experiences in their environments. The adult leader views this “religion” as powerful because “hip-hop offers urban youth a sense of direction and ethic on how to navigate one’s self through a society that largely neglects and oppresses the poor and working class”. While interviewees from another youth-serving organization in Boston, believe that churches represent mostly middle-class issues and values, many of which today’s urban youth in low-income communities do not identify with.

A staff member of The Joshua Generation in Los Angeles notes that one of the strengths of their organization is the way in which staff members place themselves in the same generation of the Student-leaders. The way in which they do this is best summed up as listening. Staff persons listen to their metaphysical and practical concerns and meet them where they are, as opposed to judging or looking down on them for where they are not. Upon listening to young people, TJG staff gets a better sense of how to make Christ’s message more applicable to each individual according to their current personal and environmental state. By doing so, the staff members show the Student-leaders that they are trying to understand and see the environment through their eyes.

Central issues

Many urban youth are suspicious of the church and perceive them as indifferent to their concerns. To youth, local churches represent mostly middle-class issues and values, many of which today's urban youth in low-income communities do not identify with. For example, young people at a youth organization in Boston suggested that local churches are quite vocal about homosexuality and affirmative action, but relatively silent on the environment, the high incarceration rates of urban youth, and even terrorism. This dichotomy of concerns may, in fact, speak to a larger issue surrounding commuter churches whose members live outside of the church's neighborhood, and arguably have a lower level of connection to that local jurisdiction. The point is that churches and faith-based organizations must show concerns for issues relevant to today's urban youth, beyond just housing and economic development. This is especially the case for organizations that want to involve youth in their work.

Recent activity in Cincinnati surrounding the murder of a young black male at the hands of a police officer, and the subsequent rioting by young people is anecdotal, but do reflect several of these findings. Derrick Blassingame spoke for an entire generation of black youth when he said that the established black leadership does not speak to and for him. "Our black leaders are not leading us" said Blassingame, 14. "Some of our black leaders just want their faces on TV. They are in this for four things only; reputation, power, politics and money." This obvious skepticism towards the intentions of black leaders has not gone totally unnoticed by Cincinnati's local leadership. "We fumbled the ball and we need to listen to our young people." Said the Rev. N.L. Harvey, Jr., pastor of the New Friendship Baptist Church. He said black leaders in the area should have paid

more attention to the issues that black youth raised.

CHAPTER FOUR: EXAMPLES OF APPROACHES TO PROGRESSIVE YOUTH

PARTICIPATION

As noted earlier, the barriers to youth partnership in black church-affiliated community organizations are numerous. Many faith-based organizations need help in recognizing the capacities of young people and how to involve them. In this section I give examples on ways that faith-based organizations can engage youth in community development.

The clergy member from a local church in Roxbury, MA is very much concerned about reaching out to young people in innovative ways. The church has a youth ministry, but he wonders how it can reach more youth. Currently, the church has a program called “A Culture of Brilliance”. He argues that “today’s youth aren’t seeing excellence as a good thing” and see their attitudes running opposite to what his own youth culture thought about excellence. To combat such erroneous ideas of many urban youth that academic and personal excellence is not something worthy of being sought after, the church ministry (through its nonprofit arm) partnered with the public school district. With help from the district, the church is building a three-story high school academy a few blocks away.

Many faith-based community organizations have similar ministries and nonprofit arms that cater specifically to urban youth. And while the clergy member has expressed interests in engaging young people in the planning process for the high school academy, he realizes that with no proven models for this type of youth participation at his disposal, it is easier said than done. Still, some community organizations with the good infrastructures can learn from secular approaches to youth participation in community

planning, as well as one example of a faith-based organization that is attempting to work with young people in such capacities.

The Joshua Generation

The Joshua Generation (TJG) is a nonprofit, faith-based community organization, located in south Los Angeles. TJG is a program where youth in high school commit to being mentored and led through service projects, leadership development, academic accountability and spiritual curriculum. Besides meeting weekly with their mentors, the students are also expected to meet monthly with the entire group of mentors and students to engage in one of four different activities: service projects, college visits, fundraisers, and cultural/educational field trips.

TJG is designed for urban high school students who are willing to commit to the program throughout their high school experience. Each year culminates in a summer trip that includes a wide range of activities and objectives. The curriculum and summer trips each year are designed around that year's theme. Year four is somewhat unique from other years because it does not involve trips outside of the Los Angeles area. Instead, it serves as a time for the students to use the skills, knowledge, and experience they have obtained throughout the program to intern at a local community development corporation.

Young people join TJG through several channels. Staff persons who may have had relationships with them in school and recreational settings approached the initial core group of student-leaders (as the high school students are known). Some student-leaders approached TJG staff persons on their own upon either hearing about TJG or from observing the way staff persons carried themselves. From that core group, more young

people have come to the organization through referrals by peers, teachers or other adults who may be working with them in various capacities.

Recently, The Joshua Generation staff and student-leaders diverted from their original internship model. Rather than only look to internships within existing CDC that work in various communities, they made a group decision to create opportunities in their own neighborhoods to involve them in community development. To that end, they started an urban planning and development program component to the organization. One TJG staff person interviewed felt this was a more effective youth involvement method to follow than approaching other church-affiliated CDC's for internships. He felt that, "the larger faith organizations in south Los Angeles have the infrastructures and resources, but have no real interests to follow our leadership model." The leadership model he speaks of is a more democratic and inclusive approach to decision-making between youth and adults over issues that affect them both. A major impetus driving The Joshua Generation and the urban development program stems from their belief that young people possess tremendous social capital and competencies to be integral partners with older decision makers in meeting civic duties within their communities.

The second and third year student-leaders will each be responsible for shepherding a group of TJG students in service to a particular community. This will be done by identifying a key community where one student-leader lives, surveying residents about the current conditions of their neighborhood, forming a focus group made up of key representatives from that community, and formulating practical suggestions that would better the neighborhood. With help from government and other sectors, the next steps would be actively implementing those suggestions, and then following up with the

residents after a year to gauge the success of the endeavors.

Many older student-leaders have already proven that they can handle high levels of responsibility in shepherding a particular neighborhood. One high school junior thought it would be great to work with a local rescue mission, and the staff at The Joshua Generation gave her responsibility of coordinating the entire project from beginning to end. She did background work on the rescue mission, introduced the project to the rest of the group, coordinated the entire planning process, represented TJG at all rescue mission organizational meetings and supervised all TJG volunteers accordingly.

The strategic planning and programming of The Joshua Generation's urban development program is still being designed. Still, steps have been taken so far to engage student-leaders in neighborhood improvement. So far student-leaders have identified a specific neighborhood which one of the student-leaders currently lives. This year, they have chosen a 3-block area in south central Los Angeles bounded by Broadway Blvd and Main Street, and 42nd and 43rd Places. Under the guidance of staff leaders, student-leaders have conducted conditions analyses, taken land use inventories and photos, surveyed residents and formed focus groups inclusive of peers and other community members. In the focus groups, student-leaders facilitate discussions on what they saw while canvassing, reflecting on problems they saw, how people were using space and how spaces could be more responsibly planned and programmed.

The Joshua Generation has fared well in overcoming some of the challenges outlined in the previous chapter. The level of inclusiveness in decision-making is evident from their leadership orientation and joint resolution to begin an urban planning and development program. The director of the small organization is also the founder and

conceived the current program from his own vision. That vision is best explained by the organization's name, The Joshua Generation. The organization is properly named by its mission to shepherd a generation of young people for courageous leadership in like fashion to how Joshua was mentored by Moses.

As mentioned, staff persons make it a point to listen attentively to both metaphysical and practical concerns of the young people they work with. All of the staff persons are in their twenties or thirties and connected with a larger church body. The young staff persons act as a proper bridge between youth and older adult leaders by helping one another understand each other's issues, concerns and needs.

MPACT Academy

Another example of progressive youth involvement comes from work in the summer of 2001, as a student member of the New American School Design Project (then at MIT, now at the University of Michigan). Led by Professor Roy Strickland, the New American School Design Project is an architecture, design and planning project that specializes in linking K-12 educational facilities construction and neighborhood revitalization. From work in Paterson, NJ (commonly called the "Paterson Project"), I discovered firsthand that young people understand a great deal, and often times more than adults, about the environments in which they live. In a six-member team, consisting of two fifteen-year old students from MPACT Academy (Metro Paterson Academy for Communication and Technology) in Paterson, NJ, we suggested socially responsible land use for properties surrounding potential school developments. Ramona Mullahey, Yve Susskind and Barry Checkoway (1999) believe that this type of participation is very

effective for both youth and the community. “Participation should not only give young people more control over their own lives and experiences but should also grant them real influence over issues that are crucial for the quality of life and justice in their communities.”

To engage our two high school students, I helped design community participation workshops that they coordinated on their own. The specific purpose of the workshop was for the two students to get input from their peers, younger siblings and other young people on what vacant, abandoned and underutilized spaces and properties could be used for. Personal experiences, observations and their considerable understanding of planning and design principles informed their recommendations, and those of peers whom they interviewed.

One objective of the Paterson Project was to program a local park for wider community use among local residents. At the time, the historic park for was overrun with drug sales, drug abuse, crime and violence so much so that parents would not let their children play there. While assessing the park and its potential, we planning students deliberated over a week’s time on what amenities would best suit the park for community enjoyment of all local residents. One of the more interesting moments of one workshop focused primarily on park programming happened when the interns interviewed elementary school students. A first grader quickly raised his hand and took it upon him to program the entire park for use beneficial to his peer group and others. The planner-in-the-making single-handedly (in less than a minute!) suggested all of the amenities that we team members spent days drawing up, in addition to several that we overlooked.

These examples are meant to motivate community leaders in faith based

organizations to draw on the full potential of young people and involve them in their work, rather than looking at youth only as a group to work for. The responses from the six year old planner can give increased validation to the need for greater inclusiveness in planning, decision-making and programming.

CONCLUSION

In “Youth Participation in Community Planning” Ramona Mullaney, et al (1999) displays her advocacy work for involving young people in planning that has gained her national notoriety in the field. Additionally, she shows a range of approaches for developing a youth participation program that can be tailored to the needs of specific communities.

In 1990, the City of Toronto involved nearly 8,000 young people in the preparation of a new official plan for the central area. This program, known as Kidsviews or Youthviews, depending on the age group participating, formed a key component of the public participation process of Cityplan ‘91. The young planners participated in six planning-related activities designed for grades 1 to 13, as well as for Toronto’s homeless young people. These activities included:

- a student conference on urban issues;
- a two-day workshop, in which teams built a new city neighborhood;
- a survey to identify places, buildings, and neighborhoods they liked;
- an exhibition of more than 200 paintings, models, plans, essays, murals, and poems;
- a role-playing, development game in which students prepared a redevelopment proposal for waterfront lands; and
- an in-class assignment in which students prepared their own official plans.

Initiated by the City of Toronto Planning and Development Department, the program was developed in conjunction with the Toronto Board of Education, the Metropolitan

Separate School Board, Youthlink-Inner City, a street-based counseling agency, and Beat the Street, a charitable organization that promotes literacy.

In 1991, three Seattle Youth Summits were organized by Seattle KidsPlace, “a kids lobby for an effective Seattle”. More than 500 young people from Seattle schools attended the summits, but many participants expressed frustration at the one-shot appeal for their input. They did not want to just have their say and let adults do the rest; they wanted follow through and help to do it themselves. In February of 1992, the Seattle Youth Involvement Day, which involved more than 700 participants, catalyzed the development of a youth force to involve young people in a more meaningful way in their community. Later that year, a youth advocacy group, the Seattle Youth Involvement Network (SYIN), became a reality. The purpose of SIYN is to provide young people in elementary, middle, and high schools a forum for discussing education, neighborhoods, and the future of the city (pp 19-20).

Mullahey noted that adults in every youth participation initiative she’s followed were impressed by the ability of young people to grasp the essence of complex issues (no matter what age), the seriousness that they brought to their participation, the inclusiveness in their approach to community development, and the common desire to provide practical solutions (pp 22-23). Personal work experience with youth has made Mullahey’s conjecture one to echo. Young people from The Joshua Generation and Paterson were nothing short of positive complements to community planning and development projects.

While the Toronto and Seattle examples featured city departments and schools as lead agencies for programming, The Kansas City YMCA example showed how a youth-serving community organization also became a community-builder with youth. I have

used The Joshua Generation in Los Angeles as an example of how faith-based organizations can progressively involve urban youth in community development. Similarly, I have used the Paterson Project in Paterson, New Jersey as another example from work experience of progressive approaches to youth participation. Taken together, these examples were meant to impart on readers and adult leaders of faith-based organizations a new paradigm for community development; a paradigm of inclusiveness and innovation that not only contributes to progressive youth development, but also to the greater community benefiting from previously untapped human capital.

Incorporating and sustaining that paradigm will rely, in part, on a strong level of focused and progressive leadership. Indeed, every faith-based organization may not be well suited to fully engage youth in their work. Some have too comprehensive of a focus or are too regimented organizationally to include youth or other groups into the decision-making processes that guide their work. But no matter what the size and style of the organization, there are always approaches that driven leadership can identify and expound upon for reaching the innovative capacity of young people. That leadership must work to overcome several relational challenges that hinder meaningful collaborations between urban youth and the church institution. While intergenerational challenges are not necessarily a new phenomenon, the aging black leadership dominating black churches and affiliated community organizations must cultivate younger leaders within their ranks. This will help to bridge the disconnection between today's heavily hip-hop influenced urban youth culture and older community leaders. This of course does not absolve older community leaders from trying to better understand urban youth culture and the unique idioms that they use to communicate. A continuance to discount these unique idioms on

the part of community leaders only serves to perpetuate the discountenance of influence that many urban youth have for them.

How can community leaders move forward?

The clergy member from the local church in Roxbury, MA said that he was genuinely concerned with understanding how best to reach young people. He and other adult leaders of faith-based organizations in Boston recognize the need to connect with local youth in innovative ways and are rethinking their missions to figure out how. One suggestion from an interview that deserved attention was to form a clergy-led study on understanding contemporary urban youth culture. Such a study could possibly be sponsored by an existing local faith coalition (e.g. Boston's Black Ministerial Alliance) with assistance from students at local colleges and universities who study contemporary urban youth culture. Running concurrently with research would be the creation of cross-communication channels through workshops, summits, informal gatherings and even more personal encounters (one on one, for example). These would present opportunities for both groups to talk, listen, and learn from one another about their issues and concerns.

Roger Hart's work (1997) with others in the children's Environments Research Group tells us that there is a need for an ongoing non-government organization (NGO) to serve as an intermediary between these types of organizations. The clergy member suggests that such an intermediary agency would help by coordinating efforts of local churches and faith based organizations. Such an agency would provide expertise and technical assistance, while surrounding organizations around the singular issue of understanding youth culture and ways to fight disconnection between the church and

youth.

For community leaders of local churches who are perplexed over ways to attract more young people, I suggest recognizing the opportunity of using hip-hop as a hook to attract more of them. As it stands now, many adult leaders do not acknowledge hip-hop's influence on young people today. They see more reasons to reject than accept that influence, and in some cases denounce hip-hop as a genre or culture altogether. The greater problem is that, traditionally, the black church has been a strong incubator for musical talent. This was true especially for young talent who could learn, practice and develops their music skills there. Today, rather than developing talents in the church, many urban youth now practice music in computer clubhouses and studios. By rejecting hip-hop (including Christian hip-hop), churches offer few desired opportunities for youth to learn and practice music through genres most appealing to them. Luckily, some black church denominations, like the Pentecostal church, are leading the way in offering urban youth opportunities to practice and even worship through more contemporary musical genres.

For church-affiliated community development organizations, finding ways to involve young people can start from within. The host church may already have a youth ministry or just a core group of young people who might have interests in meaningful community development work. The level of inclusiveness in decision-making that goes into development projects can start small through one program or aspect of that program. The point is, however, to take an inventory of what the level of inclusiveness in participation is currently, and then ask the following question: what is the added value (or the missed opportunity) to the organization and larger community by including (or not

including) young people in the work they do? For youth-serving faith based organizations using traditional paradigms for youth development, the question could be asked differently: what is the benefit of (or the cost of not) progressively developing youth capacities and potential for leadership in decision-making as it relates to community development?

I have used literature and personal interviews to test my assumption that youth-serving faith based organizations and black church-affiliated community organizations serving low-income communities are well-positioned to incorporate the tremendous social capital that urban youth are bringing to the field of planning for community development.

There are benefits to organizations and greater community by including youth and progressively developing their leadership capacities. More schools and city agencies offer youth classroom simulations in community planning and development, exposing them to principles and concepts. This makes for a knowledgeable base of human capital to incorporate into the real world projects of community organizations. Similarly, young people are rich in social capital in that they are very much in tune with street level community needs of peers, younger siblings, parents, and other members. Their views are not traditionally incorporated into the decision-making process. Lastly, many more urban youth gain respect for the community and greater environment with the addition of responsibility in shaping them. Urban youth need the familiarity of legitimate participation and knowledge of responsibilities of real citizenship to become effectual decision-makers.

One cost of not involving youth is the possibility of a continued and growing

disconnection between urban youth and adult leaders of faith based organizations performing community work. As the challenges continue to mount, many youth will continue to feel as though they are not taken seriously by adults. While they continue to be left out of decision-making processes, youth will also continue to be left without real world opportunities to use their rich creativity and competencies to address issues pertinent to them. As Mullahey points out, “it is this deep human need to be taken seriously, to be a contributing member of the community--meaningful participation--that should motivate planners and public officials [and I would add community leaders] to create opportunities for young people to participate in community planning and problem solving, and to value that participation (Mullahey 1999).

Appendix

List of Interviewees

Director of a youth-serving, faith-based community organization (Boston)

Minister of a black church (Boston)

Youth and director of a youth-serving, faith-based community organization (Los Angeles)

Youth and staff of a youth-serving community organization (Boston)

Youth from Paterson, NJ

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