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Constructing Meaning About Violence, School, and Community: Participatory Action Research with Urban Youth

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In this paper, I describe how a group of young adolescents negotiate their daily lives within the seeming permanence of a toxic environment, limited social services, poverty, crime, drugs, and inadequate educational resources. The world that the young people described in this paper inhabit is a world of despair and hope, chaos and silence, violence and peace, struggle and possibility—a world in which they spend a good deal of time surviving violence while negotiating the psychosocial, economic, raced, gendered, classed, and sociocultural borders that inform and influence their lives.

Through the use of participatory action research and community photography, we are problematizing those borders and creating spaces for young urban youth to engage in processes that position them as agents of inquiry and as "experts" about their own lives. As the data reveal, by listening to young people's stories, by giving them the opportunity to speak about their lives, and by collaborating with them in designing plans of action to address their concerns, we can more effectively frame research questions and teaching pedagogies around *their* understandings of violence and urban life. As important, by examining their lives via participatory action research, young people are provided with opportunities to take deliberate action to enhance community well-being.

KEY WORDS: participatory action research; urban youth; violence.

Many researchers and scholars have documented the quality of life available to children and families who live in violent, low-income urban communities (see, e.g., Barrett, 1993; Bell and Jenkins, 1991; Black and Krishnakumar, 1998; Garbarino, 1995a; Ladd and Cairns, 1996; Prothrow-Stith, 1991; Limber and Nation, 1998; Wandersman and Nation, 1998; Wang and Gordon, 1994). These researchers identify multiple factors that contribute to and/or inhibit healthy individual and community development and suggest that violence can have a negative impact on, among other things, a child's education, health,

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emotional well-being, sense of self, and ability to communicate effectively with others. Other researchers suggest that the stressors associated with urban violence (e.g., poverty, racism, single-parent families, drug abuse, and availability of guns and other firearms) have contributed to high incidents of posttraumatic stress syndrome (PTSD) among youth and local residents (see, e.g., Berman, Kurtines, Silverman, and Serafina, 1996; Garbarino, 1993a; Osofsky, Wewers, Hann, and Fick, 1993; Pynoos et al., 1987; Werner and Weist, 1996). Many of the studies investigating PTSD examine the kinds of symptoms children and youth present following violent events in familial or community life. These studies suggest that people growing up in environments where they are repeatedly exposed to, or are victims of, violence results in many of the same symptoms that characterize soldiers returning from war, for example, traumatic dreams, aggressive behavior, restlessness, heightened sense of fear, and phobic behavior. These researchers posit that viewing the effects of chronic violence from this perspective is "helpful in attempting to understand reactions and outcome for children living in situations of chronic violence" (Osofsky et al., 1993, p. 37).

The literature on resiliency also contributes to understanding the impact of violence on inner-city youth by studying how individual students develop strategies for achieving academic success (see, e.g., Rutter, 1983; Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, and Darling, 1992; Werner, 1992), how families and communities contribute to resiliency in and among youth (see, e.g., Garbarino, 1995b; Hetherington and Blechman, 1996; Rak and Patterson, 1996), and how both internal and external factors within different populations in particular contexts mediate stress, coping, and resiliency (see, e.g., Black and Krishnakumar, 1998; Garmezy, 1991, 1993; Masten and Coatsworth, 1998).

The insights gleaned from research on violence have contributed to the development of various intervention and prevention programs, particularly aimed at inner-city students, teachers, and other school personnel, about the effects of violence on youth, families, schools, and communities. Many of these programs are attempts to effectively bridge the gap between urban students' daily lives and experiences and what is happening in their classrooms and schools (see, e.g., Bigelow, Christensen, Karp, Miner, and Peterson, 1994; Garbarino, 1993b; Kivel and Creighton, 1997; NASBE, 1994; *Teaching Tolerance*). Although many of these programs have potential to alter our understandings of violence and its effects on young people, a recent report suggests that most of the nation's schools do not utilize violence prevention programs, and the ones that do are by and large ineffective (Drug Strategies, 1998). The report posits that the majority of programs are not integrated into the curriculum but are used episodically throughout various grade levels. In addition, schools tend to address issues of violence only *after* a crisis has occurred.

What concerns me about much of the psychological research on violence,

and its contribution to strategies for violence prevention, is that many of the predominantly white middle- and upper-middle-class students I teach tend to accept the research findings about urban youth violence unproblematically. Rather than question assumptions about objectivity, causality, methodology, and data analysis, which underlie traditional Western psychological research, the students I teach embrace research that has a history of being ahistorical and acultural (or unicultural) and that often fails to take into account the interconnections and relationships that exist between the individual and her or his embeddedness in social contexts. The students I teach are prospective teachers who are concerned about the effects of violence on students, schools, and the teaching-learning process. Yet, rather than developing a kaleidoscopic view of young people, which includes addressing the multiple contexts in which they live, the students often conceptualize violence as being intrinsic in the individual. Thus, they focus their attention on "fixing" individual students. In so doing, they fail to examine the multiple cultural, societal, and ecological factors that mediate the various forms of violence that exist in urban communities.

M. Brinton Lykes (1994, 1997) and Ignacio Martín-Baró[1] (1988, 1994) are two psychologists who offer a different perspective concerning the multidimensionality of violence. Their work, particularly in Guatemala and El Salvador, focuses on the effects of state-sponsored violence and war on native communities. They argue that the kind of Western psychological theories that views violence and accompanying trauma as intrapsychic phenomena "shares the problem inherent in the medical model, of abstracting sociohistorical realities and insisting on locating disorders in the individual" (Martín-Baró, 1994, p. 124). Thus, they speak of psychosocial trauma: trauma that is dialectical, socially produced, and "chronic when the factors bring it about remain intact" (p. 125). Even though Martín-Baró was referring to communities of people living within the context of state-sponsored violence, his words ring true for many people in this country who live in environments characterized by types of violence that are chronic, pervasive, and allowed to remain intact.

As the data in this article reveal, the participants of this project recognize that violence is pervasive in their community. By engaging in a participatory action research (PAR) process, the participants have been able to articulate how that violence is produced, reproduced, and experienced on a daily basis. Together, the participants and the team members cocreated spaces and places where the participants—a group that is particularly hard-hit by "violences"—could speak about their daily lives and use that speech to initiate proactive strategies for promoting and sustaining nonviolence in their school and community. Similarly, the participants' discourse on violence ruptures the belief that the violence that exists in urban communities can be eliminated by focusing solely on the victims and/or perpetrators of violence. Rather, the participants' stories challenge us to redefine the parameters of how we think about and make meaning of violence.

As important, the participants' stories invite us to enter into their world—a world that is diametrically opposite the one that many of us are familiar with. The world that the young people described in this book inhabit is a world of despair and hope, chaos and silence, violence and peace, struggle and possibility—a world in which they expend a great deal of energy surviving violence while simultaneously negotiating the psychosocial, economic, raced, gendered, classed, and sociocultural borders that inform and influence their lives.[2]

Through the use of PAR, we problematized those borders and created spaces for young urban youth to "give testimony" and bear witness to the experiences of what Ignacio Martín-Baró (1994) called "normal abnormality" (p. 125)—a state of being/living where people come to anticipate living with multiple forms of sanctioned and unsanctioned violence, marginalization, and oppression, all of which inform and shape their daily lives. The "normal abnormality" of violence in this particular community results in young girls like Melinda, a 12-year-old Jamaican girl, matter-of-factly stating: "I have friends in the neighborhood, but I can't go out with them because of crime and stuff. It doesn't bother me that much. It really doesn't. It doesn't bother me much at all. I'm used to it."

One way that educators and researchers can work together to ensure that young people do not have to live in a world where they get "used to" living in contexts of violence is by engaging in processes that position youth as agents of inquiry and as "experts" about their own lives. As the data reveal, by listening to young people's stories, by giving them the opportunity to speak about their lives, and by collaborating with them in designing plans of action to address their concerns, we can more effectively frame research questions and teaching pedagogies around *their* understanding of violence and urban life. As important, by examining their lives, via the research process described below, we provide young people with opportunities to be agents of change in their communities, taking deliberate action to enhance community well-being.

McQuillan (1998) reports that "by the year 2000, over one-third of all school children in the U.S. will be from lower-income groups or will be ethnic, racial, or linguistic minorities—the vast majority segregated in urban neighborhoods" (p. 17). Given that reality, how can educators and researchers "come together to explore the applicability and relevance to schools and learning of a variety of models, frames of reference, ideas, and theories" (Davidson and Phelan, 1993, p. 2) about youth and violence? How can we develop collaborative projects and ways of working in schools and communities that contribute to making connections between students' lives, their schooling, and the creation of healthy communities?

In this paper, I present the experiences of a group of young people who live in contexts of violence and marginalization in hopes that educators will pause, listen, and allow the young people's stories to generate new ideas for connecting schools and communities, for evoking critical conversations among educa-

tors about how we can better understand the multidimensionality of violence and its impact on young people, and for building bridges to schools and communities that enable urban youth to succeed and thrive.

PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH WITHIN AN URBAN COMMUNITY

I was introduced to the principal of the Blair Elementary and Middle School[3] in September 1997, by a community activist who encouraged me to pursue my ideas for a university-school-community project aimed at better understanding how young people and local residents negotiate their lives within an urban community. Mrs. Lawton, an energetic African-American principal, was receptive to the idea and, within minutes, introduced me to Mrs. Leslie, who teaches science at the Blair School. She is also the homeroom teacher for the students in Room 211, whom she refers to as "her babies." Like Mrs. Lawton, Susan (Mrs. Leslie) was very interested in a collaborative project and invited me to come outside and meet "her babies." We were standing outside in the school garden—a contained space of soil and seed that is cared for by the sixth-grade students. Susan spearheaded the creation of the garden many years ago, and each year there is a new group of sixth-graders who rake, plant, weed, and learn the dos and don'ts about growing vegetables, flowers, and other mysterious living matter that appears every season. As we stood near the garden, Susan invited the students to listen to my proposal about collaborating in a project aimed at better understanding how the students make meaning of their community, and how living in an urban area and attending an inner-city public school inform and influence their lives. She reminded me that the decision was up to the students—if they wanted to participate, she and they would commit to every facet of the project. But if they decided not to participate, she would respect their decision and I would need to investigate other possibilities.

My "pitch" was successful, and so began our collaboration. Using a participatory methodology, creative techniques (e.g., collage making, storytelling, symbolic art), community resource inventories,[4] and community photography, we began a process of participation and collaboration with the ultimate aim of better understanding the individual and collective nature of young people's experiences living in an urban setting and, in response to those experiences, developing action programs that would support and foster youth-initiated strategies for community well-being.

Although there are various ways in which participatory action research projects are designed and developed (see, e.g., Brydon-Miller, 1997; Fals-Borda and Rahman, 1991; Forester, Pitt, and Welsh, 1993; Lykes, 1997; Maguire, 1987; McIntyre, 1997; Park, Brydon-Miller, Hall, and Jackson, 1993; and Selener, 1997, for further discussion of PAR) and multiple ways in which they are

carried out, the following three principles guide most PAR projects: (1) the collective investigation of a problem, (2) the reliance on indigenous knowledge to better understand that problem, and (3) the desire to take individual and/or collective action to deal with the stated problem. These aims are achieved through collective investigation, education, and action throughout the research process.

My choice to conduct a participatory action research project is guided by the writings of Paulo Freire (1970, 1973, 1994) and numbers of feminist researchers who combine research, education, and action in the hopes of generating individual and social change (see, e.g, Fine, 1992, 1998; Lykes, 1989, 1994, 1997; Maguire, 1987, 1993; Reinharz and Davidman, 1992). The participants become researchers about their daily lives in hopes of developing realistic solutions for dealing with the problems that they believe need to be addressed. There is an intentionality in the PAR process about cocreating collaborative spaces to examine and discuss individual, school, and community concerns, and also to foreground indigenous knowledge and tap into individual and community assets, gifts, and talents. By "assum[ing] active and full participation" (Selener, 1997, p. 38) in the research process, people themselves have the opportunity to mobilize, organize, and implement individual and/or collective action.

Developing a predetermined program for working with participants within a PAR project runs the risk of constraining the emergence of the participants' experiences. Nonetheless, at the outset of the project, I felt a need to develop a preliminary framework from which to proceed in my efforts to begin a process of dialogue with and among the teachers, participants, community members, and colleagues about how we might engage community issues. I briefly describe that draft framework below. First, I introduce the research team.

The Research Team

Originally, there were five graduate students from Fairfield University who were members of the research team. Three of them, Colleen, Lara, and Mary, are prospective teachers enrolled in the graduate program in elementary education. They identify as white middle-class. Adrian also identifies as white middle-class and is a student in the counseling psychology program. Maria is a Puerto Rican student who is enrolled in the school psychology program. All five students decided to participate in the project due to their interest in participatory action research and their desire to work in an inner-city school and community.[5]

As a research team, we meet regularly not only to review the research project, but also to discuss our own personal responses to the multiple experiences we encounter in the project, both individually and as a group. These meetings are essential for us as we continue to build trust with each other. Similarly, the

team meetings provide a space for us to ask questions, clarify ideas, and work out some of complicated issues that arise in the research experience.

We also keep detailed field notes, as well as a personal journals, to record our observations and our personal reactions to the various aspects of the research process. These documents assist us in reflecting upon our own experiences that occur during the project. The field notes and the personal journals also guide us in the process of remembering events and experiences; describing and interpreting situations; developing (and redeveloping) ideas, questions, and goals; and reminding us that our own subjectivity—and positions within this research—are important factors in the research process/product.[6]

Within this self-reflective paradigm (Hurd and McIntyre, 1996; McIntyre, 1997; Morawski, 1994), I, as initiator of the project, self-consciously attend to the similarities and differences that exist between me and the multiple participants of this project.[7] I am also aware of how my history, life experiences, and hyphenated role as a participant-researcher influence the choices I make regarding the multiple dimensions of the research experience. I consciously entered the process with one question: "How does this group of young people make meaning of their community?" I had some control over what activities we would use to engage that question and little control over how the participants would respond. After a very short period of time it became clear to me (and later to them) that violence was a key issue that was directly linked to how they experienced their community. We jointly decided to focus on the various aspects of violence that characterize their community in the action projects that are currently under way and described later in this paper (see, also, McIntyre, 2000).

Design of Project

The are four specific objectives of the PAR project: (1) gathering information about the community, (2) engaging with young people in creative and interactive activities that contribute to our further understanding of how they make meaning of community, (3) collaborating in the development of a community photography project in order for young people to represent their perceptions of community via "visual stories," and (4) cocreating student-initiated intervention or action programs that promote community well-being.

During the first few months of the project, the research team established relationships among multiple participants of the project: business people, churches, local residents, teachers, parents, other school personnel, and university-based participants. While the team has been establishing these various relationships, we have remained focused on one group of sixth-grade students (now seventh-graders) for two reasons: (1) early adolescence is a formative period in human development when young people are "in transition," making crucial choices in academic and personal lives, and (2) young people in urban areas are

often marginalized from larger societal discussions and from public policy decisions that deeply affect their lives.

Colleen, Lara, and I "hung out" in the sixth grade from October 1997 until June 1998, visiting the classroom on a weekly basis, observing participants, participating in class activities, and engaging in the important work of developing levels of trust and communication. We participated in their Thanksgiving feast and accompanied them on field trips to a science museum, a newly opened local community center, and the movies. We also invited the participants to the university, where they "buddied up" with a group of undergraduate students who escorted them around the campus showing them what "a day in the life of a college student" is like. In addition, as part of the community photography aspect of the research project, they attended a photography class on campus and were instructed in how to develop and enlarge photographs.

During the first few months of the project, we also conducted community resource inventories with the participants and engaged them in activities aimed at examining their ideas and feelings about the meaning of community (e.g., collages, storytelling, and photography). Through large and small group discussions,[8] visual representations of the community via the collages, hours of participant-observation and one-to-one conversations, and the hundreds of photographs they took of their community, the participants reflected upon, and continue to reflect upon, the most significant problems associated with living in an urban community (e.g., violence, the environment, the importance of education and "becoming somebody"). By engaging in these activities the participants are exploring and tapping into their skills so that they can think about what their responsibilities are for enhancing community life.

The Participants

When we first began the research process in early October 1997, there were 17 students in Homeroom 211. Due to overcrowded classrooms in nearby schools, there were 26 students by November 1997. Three new students arrived in late December and early January 1998, and two more arrived in February and March. By the end of the school year (June 1998) there were 24 students in the class: 12 girls and 12 boys. The majority of the participants live within walking distance of the school. The remaining participants are bused to the school from other nearby neighborhoods.[9] The participants range in age from 11 to 13. Eleven participants identify as African-American (six females, five males). Four participants identify as Puerto Rican (one female and three males). Two females identify as Haitian. One male and one female identify as Jamaican. One male identifies as Dominican, and one as Columbian. One male and one female identify as biracial (their fathers are both Puerto Ricans and their mothers are white European-Americans).

Eleven participants live with their biological mother and all but one of those participants also live with siblings. One student lives with her biological father and grandmother; her siblings live elsewhere in the city. Two of the participants who live with their biological mother also live with their mother's boyfriend or husband. Eight participants live with both biological parents as well as with siblings. The remaining four participants live with relatives (brother, cousin, great grandmother, and grandmother) and two of the three also live with siblings. English is the primary language spoken in the homes of 18 of the participants. Although all the participants speak English in school, 6 of the participants speak Spanish, Jamaican, or French Creole at home.

The School

Unlike other major cities in the Northeast, the city where the project I describe is taking place experienced a 6% increase in serious crime during 1996. Statistics showed increases in larceny/theft, burglary, aggravated assault, robbery, forcible rape, and murder (Cisazk, 1996). Yet, those increases were contained within specific low-income areas.

The Blair Elementary and Middle School is a vital part of one of those low-income areas, serving an average of 600 PK–8 students: 400 black, 200 Latina/o, and very few whites and/or Asian-Americans. The school also provides after-school, weekend, and summer programs for children, parents, and other local residents. There is a staff of 50 (38 teachers and 12 additional staff members), 46% of the faculty being faculty of Color. All scores for the state mastery tests in reading, writing, and mathematics, which are taken in Grades 4, 6, and 8 every year, are consistently below the state averages. Yet, in the past few years students have been demonstrating positive gains, although small, in reading, writing, and mathematics. Seventy-six percent of the students received free/reduced-price meals the 1997–1998 academic year.

In 1992, two students were gunned down outside the Blair School—"one in full view of fellow students and teachers" (Toch, 1993, p. 34). Mrs. Lawton explained to me that when she arrived at the school 8 years ago, it was the

> worst school in [the city]. . . . I said I wouldn't come here unless they put bullet-proof glass in the kindergarten rooms as the windows had bullet holes in them. See, those kindergarten rooms faced [a building], which has since been torn down, where all the drug dealing took place, normally between 11 A.M. and 1 P.M. (Field notes, November 3, 1997)

She went on to tell me that the kindergarten students were taught how to get down and crawl out of the room when they heard the gun shots. She told me things have "gotten better" since then. There are still violence, guns, drug dealing, and "too many issues for these kids to deal with, but in the midst of

everything that they deal with in their lives, they *still* want to learn. I always say to people, 'Can you imagine if they lived in another environment what they could do' "

THE MULTIDIMENSIONALITY OF VIOLENCE IN AN URBAN SCHOOL COMMUNITY

The bullet-proof glass in the kindergarten symbolizes one aspect of the violence that exists in the school community. Yet, as the data reveal, the violence in the community goes beyond the more generally accepted definition of violence as "rough or injurious physical force, action, or treatment" (*Webster's College Dictionary*, 1996). There is also a preponderance of environmental violence, which is characterized by trash, pollution, graffiti, abandoned houses, and drug paraphernalia in the streets. When we asked the participants in one-to-one conversations what their greatest concerns were about the community, all of them mentioned drugs, crime, violence, and guns. Similarly, they have spoken to us throughout the research process about the "trashy way this community looks" (Collin). Their descriptions of trash, pollution, and abandoned houses and their feelings of disappointment, frustration, and resignation over the inability to clean up their neighborhood challenge us—and them—to broaden our conceptualization of violence to include violations of the environment, which, as the participants suggest, have powerful implications in their community. Rethinking violence to include environmental violence, which directly and indirectly violates the self and the collective, challenges educators and researchers to reexamine the social, economic, and political conditions that sustain the multiple of forms of violence that exist in many low-income urban communities.

In the remainder of the paper, I present four exemples that explicate various dimensions of how the participants make meaning of violence. The young people's conversations, their written words and symbolic art, and the photographs they took during the community photography project reveal (1) the normality of violence in the participants' lives; (2) the sense of impending doom experienced by these young people; (3) the extent to which the participants themselves become both victims and perpetrators of violence; and (4) the ways in which the community is perceived by those who live outside it. Following the exemples, I present "the next steps" of the project—the action plans that are being developed by the participants as a result of their participation in the project.

"It's A Shame I Gotta Carry A Knife"

During our first brainstorming activity, I asked the participants to tell me what they think about when they think of community. Some of the participants said, "Where you live," "Family," "School," and "Neighborhood." Many others

said, "Where you clean," "Where you throw away guns and get like $100 for your gun," "Drugs," "Drug cars," and "Violence." Thus, from the outset of the research process, there has been a focus on the multiple forms of violence that exist in the community.

Following the brainstorming activity, we organized the participants into small groups of four and five and, using magazines that the research team, Susan, and the participants brought to class, invited them to create group collages that represented their community. The participants presented their various creations, interpreted each other's collages, and engaged in a number of discussions that emerged from the images presented on the collages. There were numbers of images that spoke to the participants' representations of their community: sports, guns, drugs, material things, career possibilities, music, education, and the environment. The ensuing discussions ranged from the community being "full of drugs, guns, and violence," to the "community is a junkyard and should be cleaned up," to the "community is a place where there are friendships, where we play sports, and where there are nice people." Yet, for the most part, the focus of the discussions remained on the subject of violence.

During the course of a large group discussion following the collage presentations, Puffy mentioned the word *kidnapping*. When I asked him to elaborate, he told us a story about a girl who was in his class last year. (At the time, Puffy was attending a nearby school.)

> Puffy: . . . She like never came back. 'Cause she died. Because somebody kidnapped her 'cause her mother owed them money.
> Monique: That's her cousin [pointing to Tonesha].
> Tonesha: That's my cousin.
> Monique: And you got the story wrong.
> Tonesha: Can I tell you what happened? You, you on the right track but you a little bit off. This is what happened. Her mother was out, she [the mother, Tonsesha's aunt] was working 'cause she had a part-time job at night. She had a boyfriend . . . and he said that, um, he'd be right back 'cause he was going to the store to get some groceries and stuff. So um, Evelyn was left in the house to watch her sisters and brothers. So then, James came to the door and said, "Come here, Evelyn. We gonna go get some toys." James was mad 'cause something just happened to him. He took her, um, next door, well he took her somewhere out on the street and stuff. And he, he stabbed her up in her neck and stuff and he threw her in the yard. And he cut off her fingers. And then, um, the neighbors they saw him. And then, um, they found her on top of the gate. They knew it was him 'cause he threw his clothes in the pantry, I mean in the, um, in the dirty clothes. And they had blood and all this stuff on it. (November 10, 1997)

Immediately following Tonesha's story, other participants rushed to tell their own stories of violence and horror: a baby who died because her mother left her alone in the carriage and the baby choked on her own blood; a 7-month-old baby who drowned in a bathtub while the mother was on the phone: "She went to jail and the little brother, um, went to foster care" (Monique); and the little girl who found a gun under the couch and shot her little sister by mistake. There was no pausing between stories, no questioning of the storyteller, and no visible emotions expressed by the participants. As soon as one person would finish a story, another student would follow up with another. It was as if there was one continuous story that had numerous character changes but the plot remained somewhat the same. At one point, Tonesha reentered the discussion, continuing with her earlier narrative:

> Tonesha: Hello. Can I talk? We was like talking about violence. Like four or five years ago my uncle, he um, he picked up a gun and didn't know if it was loaded or not and he was just playing with it and shot himself in the head. But he didn't, he didn't die. He had to go to the hospital and get treatment and stuff. But like a year after that he came out and, um, his friend shot him in the head. The same spot. (November 10, 1997)

There was an urgency about the participants' storytelling that was also marked by a sense of normality. Although the participants sat quietly, somewhat in suspense, as Tonesha told the story of her cousin (who was 10 years old at the time of her murder), they quickly moved out of that space when she had finished her story. Like many adolescents who are in the midst of multiple transitions—some occurring almost simultaneously—these participants quickly gained control of the discourse and began a kind of tit-for-tat storytelling which consisted of telling violent vignettes filled with killings, kidnappings, motherless children, and murder. My experience working with and teaching adolescents suggests that asking particular questions of the storyteller can uncover exaggerations and clarify incidents that may have been distorted as the story travels from one source to the next and back again. Some of the stories the participants tell me have been garnered from television, movies, street corner gossip, and a desire to capture my—and other people's—attention. On the other hand, way too many of their stories are based in reality. Tonesha's cousin *was* murdered. A little girl *did* shoot her sister by mistake. A mother of one of the third-graders *was* stabbed to death by her boyfriend a few months ago—in front of her children. The participants who live in the Courts, a housing project behind the school where many of the students from the Blair School live, *did* see a "crackhead" shot to death last year (and others before him). Thus, there is always a violent story/event that is placed alongside and compared to another

violent story/event. The recurrence of violent acts becomes habitual, and what appear as matter-of-fact, unaffected responses by participants become normal.

A few weeks after the collage exercise, I was sitting talking with Tonesha, and she said, "Sure is a shame I gotta carry a knife." There was a lot of noise in the background, so I was not sure I heard her correctly. What I thought she said was "Sure is a shame I can't go out at night." That would make sense to me as many of the participants can't go out at night. Their parents and caregivers are frightened for them and do not want them getting into trouble. I turned to her and said, "What did you say, Tonesha?" And she replied, "It's a shame I gotta carry a knife." She went on to tell me that after her cousin was murdered, her mother gave her and her sister pocket knives which they were to carry with them at all times.

> See, there's crazy people in the world. They kill you. And so you have to protect yourself. My mother told us that if you see someone walkin' towards you, or if they're grabbin' you, stab him and run. Or he'll rape you and kill you. Psychos out there. But my neighborhood's pretty good. There are drugs and used crack pipes on the ground and that drives me nuts. It's a shame, but that's the way it is. (Field notes, November 24, 1998)

Tonesha is smart, motivated, and engaged in her academic work and, as she told me once, wants "to grow up and go to college and get a degree and be like a lawyer because I would like to, for all the violence and stuff out there, I'd like to help the innocent people." Throughout the year, she has repeatedly mentioned that "kids have to get good grades and help the community." She thinks it's a "disgrace the way teenagers have babies" and is appalled that young teenage girls "wear shorts up their butts. . . . That's nasty. I wear shorts down to my knees. It's a disgrace those poom-poom shorts and coochie-cutters."

Tonesha also has strong views about what young people need to do in order to stay out of trouble—"stay in school and don't be stupid"—and appears to want very much to contribute to creating a healthier and cleaner environment. She is not alone in her zeal to "make life better around here." Yet, most of the participants have a sense of impending doom which has a tendency to consume their energies, distracting them from engaging in other aspects of their lives.

"Suppose I'm Waiting at the Bus": Anticipating the Worst

A recurrent theme in the participants' narratives is the anticipation of violence—the "what if this happens? What if that happens? What would I do?" questions that become a familiar refrain as they negotiate their daily lives. This way of being in the world resonates with Martín-Baró's (1994) description of

"normal abnormality" (p. 125) and results from engaging in daily life but with "a sixth sense" that one is never really completely safe and that violence is the organizing principle in one's life. Monique, who lives in the Courts, told me one day that she would only feel safe "if we put a fence around [the Courts] and you can only get in if you have an ID. It's a bad place."

The following conversation is representative of many others we had over the year and highlights how the participants negotiate their day-to-day activities, all the while cognizant of the dangers that are ever-present in their environment:

Veronica: You can't go on [the main] street like by yourself because you never know what happens 'cause there's two bars over there and they got go-go dances there, strippers. And, um, every Friday like at least somethin' happens there.

Jeter: And every night you go out or come back from a place you see like, how do you call it? Um, drug dealers. Um, not go-gos, um, prostitutes. You see prostitutes lookin' for men and you see men lookin' for prostitutes lookin' in the cars for where they at.

Tina: Around where I live, it's like dangerous. You have to keep your doors locked at all times because like at my house when the doors weren't locked, criminals came in my house and the police came in and got them and some of them had guns and stuff.

Alice: So what do the people in your neighborhood do to

Tina: Um, we have like a neighborhood watch . . . and when people see someone doing something bad they call the office and the office calls the police so they can do something about it.

Alice: Does that make you feel safer?

Tina: Yeah, but I don't go out at night 'cause in the summer time like if I went out at night, like they start shooting and stuff outside so I have to go in and I can't go back out.

Veronica: I don't go out ever in my neighborhood. I go out around my aunt's neighborhood 'cause I go to her house 'cause she babysits me when my Mom go to work. Like you cannot go outside and expect not to see no cops ride by or cops goin' with sirens. You expect and sometimes, it be so much, it just be so much noise that you just wanna go in your house and not come back out because what's the use? 'Cause like one day I saw these men runnin' from some cops. And it was three men and one hopped the fence and he was goin' in a house, well, he wasn't goin' in the house. He was goin' in the yard and these kids have to run in the house because they didn't know if he was gonna hit them or not 'cause he was just runnin'.

Jeter: The only two bad things that happened, no, three bad things. They broke into my house when my mother was in the hospital when she had

my little baby brother. And, um, when this guy with a stolen car, he came and broke our fence. And they stole in another house in front of my house, this other house.

Tina: Like one time criminals ran through where I live, and like I got scared because the police was pointing guns and then they tell us that these people have guns on them so they could do all this violence in my neighborhood. Everything that's bad is violence and drugs. (November 17, 1997)

Mariah: I'm scared. Um, suppose I'm waiting on the bus to go to school and like, I hear gunshots and I don't know what I'd do. I would just stand there . . . because I would panic. (November 11, 1997).

Immediately following Mariah's reference to her panic, the conversation quickly moved to a conversation about violence in Jamaica (where one of the participants is from), which then turned into a conversation about swimming in the ocean, doing cannonballs in a swimming pool, sports, Michael Jordan, and rap singers.

The bell rang to change classes, and on that particular day, we never did return to Mariah's panic. Nonetheless, a low-level sense of panic—one that is somewhat quiet and controlled among some of the participants, loud and explosive in others—is an ever-present, palpable factor in their lives.

"Every Day I Walk Home from School, I Throw a Rock at Him"

Adolescents living in urban areas are not only victims of violence, but perpetrators as well (see, e.g., Fine and Weis, 1998; MacLeod, 1995; Sullivan, 1989). If we conceptualize violence as including such overlooked violations as littering, stealing, graffiti, physical assault (ranging from intentionally pushing and shoving each other inside and outside school to serious infliction of physical injury), then most of the participants in this research have been perpetrators. It has only been recently that the participants have been reconceptualizing violence as involving more than *serious* physical harm, which is how they appeared to understand it at the beginning of the project. Since then, many of the participants have been able to make connections between the "more serious" types of violence that occur in their community (e.g., murders, armed robbery, physical assaults requiring hospitalization) and the "less serious," though no less disruptive and alienating to the community, types of violence (e.g., trash, graffiti, pollution, and verbal assaults). The physical violence—both the serious and "not so serious" (the not so serious being characterized by fist fights and "givin' each other a beatin'")—that occurs in the community is most often perpetrated by males. Although I have seen the girls push and shove some of the boys, and vice versa, these incidents are not seen by the participants as

violent, but more as jostling for position. The physicality is usually accompanied by sarcasm and verbal taunts aimed at getting a laugh and/or forcing the other to "shut up" and "get out of my face."

Adolescents as initiators, accomplices, and/or perpetrators of violent acts aimed at physically harming another person were the theme of a discussion I had with a group of four boys one day in late November. This conversation is representative of many of the narratives about violence that are commonplace among young males in this community and foregrounds the normality of violence in the everyday lives of these young men, and in their everyday adolescent banter. It begins as Boo makes reference to an announcement that Mrs. Lawton made over the loudspeaker the day before about a 14-year-old male who attended another school in the neighborhood. He left school the previous day, walked into a neighborhood store, and tried to rob the owner. In a scuffle that ensued, the owner shot and killed the young man. Many of the participants knew the student.

Boo: Mrs. Lawton announced over the loudspeaker that some kid got killed 'cause he was skipping school, and then he went to some store and he tried to steal and then a man shot him up. That was messed up.

Mikey: I saw the one on Good Friday this year, ya know. I didn't see when the guy got capped but I was passing by on my church bus. I saw the dude laying down there and the cops picking him up.

Senor: Also, I saw some dude in back of the Courts, out laying there four days. This guy, this bum laying there for four days. Every day I walk home from school I throw a rock at him, me and Donny and them, and he wouldn't get up.

Alice: Why did you throw a rock at him?

Boo: Because he be bothering people.

Senor: And late at night he be pacing.

Boo: Be quiet, be quiet. He be jumping in people's houses robbing people.

Senor: I saw that, too, one night, 'cause he said, um, one time he asked me for a dollar, and I ran and he started chasing after me.

(*Laughter*)

Blood: There's a lot of bums be in the Courts. Then there be a lot of crackheads.

Mikey: They sometimes, ya know, I don't wanna dis' no one up in the Courts because I don't wanna lose my life or nothin', but ya' know what I'm sayin'? A lot of people be coming up there for crack, ya' know? They be just standing up in the middle of the road just crackin'.

Senor: And sometime they say people in the Courts get so high they steal they own furniture out their own house and go sell it.

(*Laughter*)

Mikey: I live in the Courts, too! Last year, they shot at the windows in the [school] lunchroom [from the Courts]. But it's lucky that the, um, windows was bullet-proof. Because you could still see the bullet prints in there. . . . But the part where I live. It's not so bad. I go out freely. I don't go down to where it's, ya' know, where they're dealing the drugs and killing people. 'Cause trust me, they got this one spot . . . they be killing people there in that same spot like nothin'. One time they had killed somebody there and put a box where the dude had got shot.

Blood: Um, with some candles. And then the box, where the box was there was a big heart and a lot of tags in the floor. 'Cause this is my building [where the killing took place]. Sometimes I be hanging with my friends, but sometimes my mother doesn't let me go outside 'cause she scared, like there be a lot of shooting. She scared I get shot or something, but I still go outside. I jump out the window.

Mikey: What's the dilly with that? Ya' know what I'm sayin'? You could get capped like that.

Senor: See, these little boys right, we, they be going to go steal cars. And they be thinking it's funny and stuff. And they be crashing and cops be taking their sneaks and throwing them in the water and everything. They be throwing them in the car and beatin' them up. One time, we was in a stolen car, we was going real fast, real fast. And they stopped, and I bust my head open because my head hit on the windshield. That's when we ran out and the cops chased me. That's when they threw my friend in the back of the car and they took his sneakers off.

Alice: Is that what you said, you were hanging out with kids from the Courts and then you stole the car?

Senor: I didn't steal no car! They stole it. I was gonna go get gas and, um . . .

Alice: Did you know it was stolen?

Senor: Nope. I thought it was their uncle's car 'cause their uncle got one just like that.

Boo: Man, no, you didn't.

A long conversation ensued about how Mikey and Senor used to live in Philadelphia together and the kinds of trouble they used to get into together. Boo was feeling upstaged, and after interrupting them repeatedly, managed to get their attention.

Boo: I was with my friends and I wasn't throwing eggs. I ain't getting shot. I was just minding my business. I was just talking to a few girls. My big brother's friends, girls. And the, and then, um, they, um, they

threw some eggs out the window. And you know spark plugs, like the little pieces that heat up?

Blood: Yeah, I done that.

Boo: They threw it and the whole window shattered. It was like, a whole bunch of cracks in it. The dude came out, he opened the door, he had this like

Blood: Nine millimeter?

Mikey: A 45?

Boo: No. Millimeter.

Blood: A 9 millimeter?

Boo: Shut up. God. You know that movie with the big gun?

Senor: A Tommy?

Boo: Shut up!

Mikey: Like the old cowboys one?

Boo: Yo' man, I ain't playin'. I'm about to smack one of y'all. Um, and then he came out with one of those guns, you know like on HBO, one of those guns, they all black? They ain't no Tommy guns, they ain't no western guns. It had like a little, like a big, long thing, with like a big barrel. And then he started shooting and he shot my friend.

Alice: And what did you do?

Boo: Like everybody would do, I ran. My friend wasn't dead. He got shot in the arm. (November 24, 1997)

The conversation turned to a discussion of the mob, the Mafia, and how they all have to be careful about what they say because they never know who might be listening to them. They also began to talk about what they think the community could do to rid itself of guns. They started talking about buy-back programs that the community could organize, but that discussion was aborted when Senor started laughing at Mikey about a fight that Mikey had had earlier that month with someone who called him "bubba lips."

Although this bantering among the participants is commonplace and this excerpt representative of numerous conversations, it would be misleading to suggest that this is the *only* conversation happening among young males (or females). There are other conversations that revolve around sports, school, trips down south or to their native countries, parties, families, sex, teachers, clothes, music, television, movies, amusement parks, and other topics particular to young adolescents. What is disturbing to me is that the conversations about both the violence they experience via the media and the violence that they experience in their own communities do not appear to evoke emotions that are all that different from the emotions elicited when the boys and/or girls are discussing the newest dance or the latest CD or the basketball game they watched last night. These young adolescents discuss types of guns, seeing

someone arrested the previous night, and a shooting in the projects in the middle of conversations about what they are having for lunch, someone's new dirt bike, and what topics they will study for their science projects. There is a seamless thread that connects these disparate topics normalizing violence and desensitizing the participants (and us) to the power of violence to disrupt, organize, and structure people's lives.

Many scholars would interpret the participants' responses to violence as survival strategies that are developed in order to stabilize one's sense of self and gain a sense of control over one's environment. That may be a realistic assessment, yet, labeling young people's responses to violence, trauma, and ongoing oppression as "survival strategies" does more to assist us in "treating" the individual than it does to alter the social conditions that contribute to the development of behaviors necessary to live and function in one's environment. I report the participants' conversations not to reify stereotypes about young urban youth of color but to suggest that when we individualize the effects of violence and see "the effects of [violence] as primarily or exclusively residing in the individual" (Lykes, 1994, p. 546), we run the risk of minimizing and/or failing to take into account the "social roots, in other words, the traumatogenic structures or social conditions" (Martín-Baró, 1994, p. 125) that contribute to sustained violence in urban areas. The participants' narratives challenge us to look at the effects of violence on youth living in urban areas as a *psychosocial* phenomenon. If educators and researchers focus the problem of violence within a system of social relations and institutional and societal infrastructures rather than strictly within individual students, that has implications for how we design curriculum and for how we interact with and "treat" students and communities.

"They Think We're Disgusting Crackheads and Stuff Like That"

In late March 1998, we decided to implement community photography, the second phase of the PAR project. Community photography is a methodology that (1) enables people to record aspects of their daily lives from their own perspectives, (2) provides opportunities for people to increase their knowledge about the issues most affecting their community, and (3) gives people a way to inform policymakers, and other people who control resources, about "community issues that are of greatest concern and pride" (Wang, 1995, p. 1). The use of photography as a methodology for studying social issues and for understanding people's lives has been developed in the context of ongoing efforts to develop collaborative experiences with homeless children (Hubbard, 1996), children living in the Guatemala City garbage dump (Franklin and McGirr, 1995), children of Appalachia and India (Ewald, 1985, 1996), children of poverty and affluence in Mexico (Ziller, Vern, and de Santoya, 1988), women in rural China (Wang and Burris, 1994), and the Kayapo in Brazil (Ruby, 1991) so as to

facilitate social change. By putting cameras in the hands of young people, we hoped to enrich our understanding of how they perceive their lives within the community. As important, the camera provides resources for enabling young people to tell "visual stories" about themselves and their communities, thus creating opportunities for them to express themselves in their own images, words, and reflections. In turn, these images, along with other activities the participants engage in, become points of entry into exploring solutions for community development purposes. The participants' multiple photographic stories are powerful tools for illuminating the lives of young people who do not always have a forum with which to express themselves.

The participants learned the basic, mechanical aspects of using a camera: the various parts of the camera, how to take care of it, how to focus, what kind of film to use, how to insert and rewind the film, and so on. In addition, we took the participants to a photography class at Fairfield University, where the participants were given the opportunity to see how film is developed, enlarged, and later made into prints.

We also discussed the ethical issues involved in community photography developing a shared understanding of when picture taking is appropriate, respecting people's choices about their inclusion in a photograph, and clarifying the reasons for taking particular photographs. Together we generated a number of "rules" which guided the photography project and assisted us in better understanding what we wanted to explore about our communities.

The participants were given the cameras and two rolls of film (one color and one black-and-white) for a 5-day period, Wednesday through Sunday, which enabled them to take pictures in school and/or at home on the weekend. Once the pictures were taken and developed, the participants chose three photographs they felt best represented their understanding of the issues we were addressing in the project. Of the three photos, the participants then chose one that was enlarged (to 8 $\times$ 10 inches) and, along with the two other photographs, became the centerpiece for a school-community exhibit. In addition, the participants provided a title for each photograph and wrote an accompanying text to describe their pictures. The participants took over 650 photographs. The majority of the photographs the participants chose to include in the exhibit reflected their concerns about the environment (see Photos 1 and 2). Yet, there were also photographs of friends, families, pets, and schoolmates (see Photos 3 and 4).

In June, the participants held their first community photography exhibit at the Blair School. From there, the exhibit moved to the new local community center and later to the university where I teach. The participants' photographs are powerful statements to the rest of the community—and those outside it—that there is much to be done to enhance community life.

The photography project was a point in the research project that crystallized many of the activities and discussions we have been having all year. The partic-

PHOTO 1

PHOTO 2

PHOTO 3

PHOTO 4

ipants began to "see" differently. Their visual images were reflected back at them, and they began to understand the concreteness of some of their concerns. They were struck by their own representations, thinking it highly relevant that most of them chose photographs of pollution and trash as being the most representative images of their community.

We had some of our most poignant conversations following the photography project. These conversations helped link what hitherto had been thought about as unrelated aspects of their community into a more cohesive understanding of the multiple factors that contribute to or inhibit community life. They began to speak about the interconnections of violence, drugs, guns, and the environment. They began to reflect on how the outside community perceives them ("People think we're lazy and dirty"), recognizing that "some of the people here are and some aren't" (Rebecca). Similarly, the participants spoke to the reality that if their community is seen as a "junkyard," then people do not want to live there, visit the neighborhood, and/or teach at their school.

Janine, Flanago, Risha, Melinda, and Rebecca were discussing their photographs with me in late April. Their conversation illustrates the complexities of addressing urban "violences" and the linkages of racism, classism, poverty, and individual agency.

Melinda: [The pictures] show that trash is a really big problem, but every time we even go out there and clean, it just gets dirtier. So we're like, every time we clean up people get more careless. And they just keep on doing it. We go out, the garden club, and we clean up the whole school, in the back and the front, the courtyard, and every time we go out there it just gets worse.

Rebecca: They think that we're gonna keep cleaning up after them and we're not. Because after the garden club is over the school is gonna get even dirtier because we won't be cleaning up after them anymore.

Janine: Another problem is drug needles on the ground.

Melinda: It's dangerous. It shows that people are lazy and they don't want to wait 'til they see a garbage can; they just throw anything they like.

Flanago: It makes good people seem like they're bad or something.

The conversation turned to the question of judging people by their "outsides." The girls talked about how people from outside the community perceive people who live in trashy communities as "bad people":

Flanago: That's why they don't want to live here.

Melinda: Well, they just don't want to come.

(*Crosstalk*)

Melinda: We went on a trip before I came to this school, and we went to [wealthy suburban town] and the teacher told us to behave ourselves because the people of [that town] think that we're disgusting crackheads and stuff like that, and she was saying all this garbage (*laugh*) and she was saying that everyone thinks that [this city] is a bad place to live and blah, blah, blah, because all the drugs and violence.
Alice: Do you believe that?
Melinda: Not necessarily.
Flanago: In some parts.
Alice: Do you believe that people think that?
All: Yeah.
Janine: Yeah, because every time we try to get a substitute nobody will want to come to [this city].
(*Crosstalk*)
Melinda: Because our behavior and they just found knives and stuff and crack upstairs.
Janine: Three bags of drugs in the bathroom.
Melinda: So, see, that just adds onto what they think. Now they're just gonna think even worse and they won't come. So, [I feel] really bad because we didn't do nothing.

Again, the conversation continued to focus on how people judge each other. The girls had a lively discussion about parental responsibility, some of the girls thinking that it is entirely up to parents to keep their kids polite and out of trouble and the rest of the girls suggesting that parents can only do so much to keep their kids on the right path.

Melinda: Getting back to the garbage thing. I think why it becomes a big problem is that if they see one person do it, then they feel, "Well, I can do that, too."
Alice: And how do you think people would think about you or your school if the community was clean?
Melinda: Well, probably we could get a substitute (*Laughter*).
Rebecca: They would think that we are clean people. Like Melinda said we will be able to get a substitute once in a while.
Flanago: It's not only the trash, though, that stops substitutes from coming here.
Rebecca: It's the kids.
Flanago: Like it's not just because they see trash and that stops them from coming here. It's part of it.
Alice: What else is it?
Flanago: I don't know. Drugs, how some kids act in the school.

Melinda: Our reputation.

Rebecca: They know that there is drugs in here and there's lethal weapons in here, so why would they want to come? . . . I mean why would they want to come to a school like that when they can go to a school the kids can walk in a single line, their behavior is excellent, school is clean.

Melinda: So it's like they're judging us by what they heard but they haven't actually come here to see. (April 27, 1998)

This same message is heard from another group of participants, who struggle with living in a community that they perceive as being discarded:

Mase: It makes us feel bad and people see it is dirty they say, "Let's get out of here and go to another one." Suppose Bill Clinton comes driving through our neighborhood and he sees all this trash. He gonna blast out. He is *not* going to stay here for a long time.

Chesterfield: It makes me feel like we have less opportunities than other states. Because Bill Clinton, well, I never heard of him staying here.

William: Yeah, and nobody, almost nobody, ever comes here. It's like a city that nobody cares about. It's just like a city in Connecticut that is like apart. And then there is New York City and all the big cities that he [Clinton] has to take care of more than here. He doesn't really care about [us].

Mase: That's why many people don't live around {here]; they don't move around here.

Chesterfield: A lot of people make comments about [the city], like "I don't want to go here. The school is bad and then inside looks like a mess." I'm disappointed that people dissin' us and they don't believe that our community is good, and . . . it's like saying that we don't have a chance to prove ourselves. (April 27, 1998)

As Fine and Weis (1998) suggest, the participants' "discourse of violence . . . sits within a powerful, incisive, and painful social critique" (p. 447). They have inherited "systems of social class and racial organization [that] are significant impediments" (Anyon, 1997, p. 13) in the efforts to restructure urban environments. The participants' stories of violence suggest that educators, psychologists, and researchers engage in critical conversations about how we can better understand the impact of violence on young people. With that understanding, we have a better chance of developing realistic strategies for ensuring that urban youth will live in a safe environment, will succeed in life, and will thrive as creative, productive human beings.

"WE CAN'T ALWAYS WAIT FOR ADULTS TO DO IT"

Through the multiple conversations and activities we have engaged in during the project, the participants are beginning to articulate things that are "known" by the community but not usually addressed, acknowledged, and/or acted upon in their daily lives. As important, the participants are beginning to understand that they, too, have a responsibility for creating a cleaner, safer, nonviolent community. By engaging in creative activities aimed at better understanding themselves and the community, and by sharing reflections and consolidating the learning that has taken place (Brydon-Miller, 1997), the participants have taken the first step toward the actualization of youth-initiated plans that will benefit the community and contribute to building relationships within and across school-community groups (see McIntyre, 2000).

Currently, the participants are developing a school-community clean-up project that will be maintained and sustained by the community in collaboration with city officials, businesses, and other local residents. They also codeveloped a short-term career exploration program last fall which assisted them in exploring educational and occupational goals. The participants are also interested in publishing their photographs, as well as becoming teacher-photographers for other community groups in the upcoming months.

CONTRIBUTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

My experience with these young people convinces me that by creating spaces for them to narrate and renarrate their stories so as to act on them, we contribute to further understanding the impact of urban life on participants and communities and therefore can provide school personnel and other community members with much-needed information that can be used to develop appropriate and effective teaching strategies. Using creative techniques to explore knowledge and meaning-making systems provides insight into the power of creativity and personal expression.

In addition, this type of school-community research contributes to reform movements aimed at preparing prospective teachers, universities, and urban communities to work together to develop ways of teaching and learning from a perspective that takes into account the experiences of urban youth. Schools of education and universities that "train" prospective teachers appear to be doing a poor job preparing teachers to teach in schools with diverse and/or low-income populations, most of which are located in inner cities (see, e.g., Grant and Zozakiewicz, 1995; Haberman, 1995; Tellez, Hlebowitsh, Cohen, and Norwood, 1995; Tatto, 1996; Zeichner and Melnick, 1997). Redesigning programs and curricula to include the tenets of PAR is one way to address that deficiency.

Finally, conducting PAR contributes to a way of thinking about people as

researchers, as agents of change, as constructors of knowledge, actively involved in the dialectical process of action and reflection aimed at individual and collective change. Positioning the participants of this project as agents of inquiry provides opportunities for listening to their stories so as to frame research questions around their understanding of urban life. In addition, it gives the participants an opportunity to take deliberate action on issues that affect their community.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

I watch these young people engage their lives like many other adolescents in the United States, with humor, intelligence, introspection, fear, anxiety, a determination to "be somebody," and bodies and minds full of energy, creativity, and hope. I also watch them struggle with the multiple issues that are particular to youth of Color living in inner cities and attending inner-city public schools: drug use and abuse, teen pregnancy, violence, "too much trash," poor housing, lack of resources, and other interlocking systems that marginalize and isolate large segments of young people who are already "losing ground, people whose lives are being determined largely by their inherited place in [the] system" (Finnegan, 1998, p. xix). The challenges these young people face as they negotiate these systems and the juxtaposition of their hope and despair, agency and resignation, compliance and resistance make it difficult for us to dismiss their fate as a foregone conclusion. The participants' stories challenge us to "step into the complicated maze of experience that renders 'ordinary' folks so extraordinarily multifaceted, diverse, and complicated" (Kelley, 1994, p. 4).

NOTES

1. Ignacio Martín-Baró was a Salvadoran social psychologist who was assassinated in El Salvador on November 16, 1989.
2. In this article, I do not attempt an in-depth examination/analysis of the intersection of gender, ethnicity, race, social class, and the participants' understandings and experiences of violence and community. This is not to deny the relationship between these factors and the participants' narratives about their community and the multiple forms of violence in which they are shaped, situated, and constructed. Rather, I explore a related issue, the influence of violence on young people's construction of community.
3. Except for the members of the research team, all names and places have been changed. Each of the participating teachers and participants chose her or his own pseudonym, while is being used throughout the research project.
4. The community resource inventory (Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993) is a tool for gathering information about people, identifying community concerns as well as individuals' gifts and skills, and generating knowledge about how assets can be tapped and utilized within schools and communities. I developed specific community inventories tailored for the various groups we are collaborating with in the project (e.g., parents, local residents, businesses, social service agencies and churches, and young people).

5. I asked some of my colleagues to inform their students that I was looking for people who would be interested in participating in a PAR project during the 1997–1998 academic year. A number of students contacted me regarding the project but for various reasons were unable to participate. At the beginning of September 1997, the team consisted of five graduate students. Due to personal commitments, Adrian and Mary left the project after the first semester. I reissued an invitation to interested students in the fall of 1998. Thus far, 14 graduate students have participated in the project.
6. Grounded theory analysis was used to analyze the information gathered from the creative activities, students' written reflections, audiotaped and videotaped group discussions, the photographs and accompanying texts, and the community inventories (see, e.g., Charmaz, 1990; McIntyre, 1997; Strauss and Corbin, 1990).
7. Simply attending to similarities and differences between me and the participants is not enough to ensure the "trustworthiness" (Mishler, 1991) of the research. Like other researchers, I also grapple with questions of authority, control, ownership, interpretation, ethics, and responsibility, as well as the more pragmatic dilemmas of scheduling, time, and participant availability during and after the school day. In addition, within a PAR paradigm, there are questions of what constitutes participation, how one defines action, and what it means to accompany participants over time, "participating and observing while resourcing the participant and his or her community who, in turn, resource the researcher" (Lykes, 1997, p. 728). The shifting and competing agendas that coexist in the research are "normal" for many PAR projects. At the same time, they can be disquieting, resulting in moments of instability and unpredictability. Research for social change is not scripted. It is lived out/acted upon within the research process itself and requires that we struggle with uncertainty and be willing to adjust the process when necessary.
8. Throughout the research process, we have been meeting in large and small groups, sometimes in mixed-sex groups; other times, in same-sex groups. The grouping is usually based on who is available at that particular moment. Other times, it has to do with who Susan and/or I have randomly grouped together for an activity. And sometimes, the participants themselves ask if they can join a certain group. In further writings, I will explore how gender mediates the participants' narratives about education, violence, community, career goals, and other related issues as it is a significant factor in how these young people engage the world. Nonetheless, when it comes to the topic of violence, there is a shared understanding among both girls and boys that it is too prevalent in their community and that the multiple forms of violence they experience have a powerful impact on their lives.
9. Since the end of June 1998, 10 participants have moved or been transferred to other schools and classrooms.

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