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## Community Arts in the Lives of Disadvantaged African American Youth: Educating for Wellness and Cultural Praxis

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Community Arts in the Lives of Disadvantaged African American Youth:  
Educating for Wellness and Cultural Praxis

by

Mabel Sabogal

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology  
Department of Anthropology  
College of Arts and Sciences  
University of South Florida

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, who has given me the strength necessary to accomplish this and all other major dreams and objectives in my life. Without her example, support, love, and encouragement, I could have never made it this far. I love her beyond words!

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## **Abstract**

The main purpose of this study was to analyze the role and potential of community arts programs and organizations in improving the lives of disadvantaged African American youth, through the creation of a participatory video project and the internal evaluation of the same; using applied anthropological methods, and cultural praxis (an innovative educational design), and following the recommendations of expert community arts programs evaluators. The study responds to the need identified in the community arts literature to offer robust program evaluations that explain the benefits of such programs. The lack of evidence seems to derive not only from the difficulties of measuring creative practices and other desired outcomes related to quality of life, but also from inadequate research design and implementation (Matarasso 1996; Putland 2008).

Although the evaluation instruments can use some refinement, the resulting ethnography brings about the complexity of the lives of disadvantaged African American youth and the difficulty in making generalizations about their needs. It also highlights the need for community organizations to understand the context in which their programs are offered, and of using a holistic/integral and long-term approach in the design and implementation of programs, which can potentially enhance the growth and development of participants. This study speaks to the fundamental need for community arts organizations to train personnel adequately and offer the necessary infrastructure and tools to instructors in order to accomplish the objectives of the organization. Community

arts program and their outcomes depend on a clear understanding of the population's needs, adequate design and implementation of programs with capable instructors, and an internal organization that is sustainable and that can ensure the safety and wellbeing of all those involved.

## **Chapter 1:**

### **Introduction**

Community art is defined as an intelligible, inclusive, collaborative, and experiential art practice (Lowe 2000:364), which arose in the 1960s and 1970s, as a social movement that sought to democratize the arts (Knight 2008:111), and address the issues of disadvantaged populations. The main purpose of this study was to analyze the role and potential of community arts programs and organizations in improving the lives of disadvantaged African American youth, through the creation of a participatory video project and the internal evaluation of the same, using applied anthropological methods.

The lives of disadvantaged African Americans are misunderstood, misrepresented, and highly affected by processes of oppression and injustice. For African American youth, specifically, this translates into constraints to their creative capacities, diminished cultural values and self-esteem, disregard and elimination of their voices from the public sphere, and enclosure in prisons, or prison-like environments (Anderson 2008; Rios-Moore 2004). This societal neglect not only prevents the youths' multidimensional development, but it also promotes their unwanted behaviors. There is little or no incentive for many Black youth to engage in positive and productive activities and to direct the course of their lives in non-destructive ways, thus creating a cycle of social rejection. According to a Children's Defense Fund report, "Black children are over three times as likely as White children to be born into poverty and to be poor, and over four

times as likely to live in extreme poverty” (16) These children account for 16% percent of the general population, but are 32% of the foster care population, and are “less likely to graduate from high school or college... They experience more serious mental health problems... than children generally; are less likely to receive adequate health and mental health care; more likely to experience homelessness; and to be involved in the criminal justice system” (16). Half of Black youth graduate from high school on time, and they are more likely to be unemployed and less likely to go “directly to full-time college than White high school graduates” (16). Black males are over fourteen times more likely to end up in prison than to graduate from college each year. The rate of incarceration for Black juveniles is four times larger than that of their White peers, and “Homicide is the leading cause of death among Black males 15–34” (17) (see also Santrock 2011).

If our intentions are to live democratically, and to promote safe and healthy environments for all citizens, then currently disengaged people must be allowed the appropriate resources and conditions to participate productively and positively in society, and to pursue their life objectives with autonomy. We must attempt to find ways to counterweight the processes of marginalization and injustice, and impede their further spread. In this sense, my study sought to promote and provide opportunities for disadvantaged African American youth to grow and develop with a sense of belonging in their society, participating in the processes that affect their lives directly, imagining and shaping their futures.

My guiding hypothesis derived from some of the benefits ascribed to participation in community arts, which correspond with the general needs of disadvantaged African American youth. This hypothesis states that a community arts program, within an

organization, will help to offset the subjection of African American youth to marginality, and improve their lives, by providing the space, freedom, and resources necessary for them to think, imagine, and create. This will allow them to learn about themselves and appreciate their individual and cultural identities and values, and to communicate and work with others in processes that will contribute to changing the realities that negatively affect them. According to the World Health Organization, these developments can have tremendous impact on the overall wellbeing of youth (World Health Organization 2011).

### **The Need for Evaluation**

Although community arts programs are thought to offer a variety of benefits to participants, including those above, one area of research that appears to be particularly necessary in the field is program evaluation (internal and external). Even though this body of literature has been growing, recent analyses still report the scarcity of strong evidence about the benefits of participation in community arts, and this seems to be particularly true for small programs. This lack derives not only from the difficulties of measuring creative practices and other desired outcomes related to quality of life, but also from inadequate research design and implementation (Matarasso 1996; Putland 2008). Thus, ethnographic research that follows acceptable procedures for an evaluation, as defined by experts in the area (including transparency of outcomes sought, tracking of inputs and outputs, and participatory methodologies) could provide some of the necessary evidence, as well as test the effectiveness of the proposed evaluation methods. This process also requires the creation of the program to be evaluated, guided by the possible outcomes of community arts that potentially address some of the most pressing issues of

disadvantaged African American youth. Thus, I proposed a combination of strict program planning, implementation, and an integrated evaluation, comprising an innovative methodology (cultural praxis), with an explicit anthropological perspective, and the use of a variety of evaluation instruments. The results of this evaluation may provide community artists and organizations, especially those with scarce resources, with important information to guide their future programs.

My research questions were: 1) How do disadvantaged African American youth define their place in society, their present contributions, and future possibilities? What do they want to change? What do they want to maintain? 2) How do these youth define and experience the role of community arts, and community arts organizations, in their lives and their neighborhood? 3) To what extent can a community arts project's assumed benefits affect these notions (answers to first two questions), and influence social change? 4) How can the effects of such a project be evaluated?

In order to answer these questions, a variety of ethnographic methods were utilized. In addition, two short community (participatory) videos were created with children, and the process was simultaneously evaluated using several methods. Participatory video, a collaborative approach to making videos with traditionally disenfranchised populations, about topics that involve their lives, needs, assets, goals, as well as their aesthetic preferences (Chalfen 2011), was used as an ethnographic research and educational tool. Based on my experience and background making videos and teaching video production, I argue that through this medium many of the objectives of community arts could be achieved, including the promotion of democratic practices, collaboration, and the development of creativity. Video also offers a more complete

sensorial experience than other artistic media, stimulating a variety of responses, and can potentially act as a critical mirror for participant producers and their communities, thus enhancing the educational experience.

In this sense, the videos described herein were created with the kids, according to our resources and the youth's self-identified needs. They represent aspects of the youths' lives that were important to them (community drugs and fighting in the neighborhood). The final products have been presented in different venues (community organizations, friends, university classrooms, online audiences). The hope is that these videos can influence not only other children, but also a more general public in the understanding and treatment of the youth and the neighborhood. Primarily, however, the video productions acted as educational tools to engage the kids in important research and dialogue about crucial aspects of their lives, to invite them to participate in improving their community and lives by allowing them to think of and propose possible solutions to processes that affect them regularly. In this way, they were immersed in cultural praxis, imagining a different reality and acting to recreate it (Chapter 5 describes the project in detail).

This project was created within the context of a grassroots community arts organization, Moses House (MH), located in Sulphur Springs, a disadvantaged neighborhood of Tampa, Florida, which operates as a "cultural center for social justice" (Arney 2012). The history and work of the MH will be described in detail in Chapter 4. Extensive ethnographic data were collected at MH for almost two years, from the fall of 2010 to the spring of 2012, while I was working at the organization in various capacities on a full time and voluntary basis. During this time, many projects were created with the MH kids, but the video productions evaluated here occurred in the summer of 2011, with



follow up experiences until the spring of 2012, and then again in the fall of 2012. The data collected were comprehensive and triangulated for maximum validity. Although I am confident about the quality of my results, I am also aware that it is necessary to improve some of the data collection instruments and analytical methods in order to evaluate subsequent projects more accurately and efficiently. This will be further discussed in the next chapters.

The results of this work confirm the idea that community arts program evaluations and their outcomes depend not only on the evaluation design and implementation, but also on the conditions under which programs are created and offered. Community arts organizations and programs such as MH, working as educational institutions and advocacy centers, require good administration, the program managers' clear understandings of the population's needs, as well as a profound understanding of the contexts in which their programs exist. They require appropriate design and implementation of programs, with clarity in the goals and strategies. In addition, personnel (instructors, administrators, volunteers) need to be adequately trained and offered a suitable infrastructure and the necessary tools in order to accomplish the objectives of the organization and of its programs. This work also demands an internal structure that ensures the safety and wellbeing of all those involved, as well as the continuity of the programs. In this sense, my work reveals the complexities of community arts programs, and the multiple factors that must be taken into consideration at the time of their design, in order to maximize their potential effects on the youth or other participants.

Moses House operated as an educational institution primarily, but also as an advocacy and social justice center interested in exerting pressure on the societal structure that relegates African Americans to the margins of society. As an educational institution, MH, like many community development organizations, worked on changing the behaviors of the population it served. This work brings about a number of ethical issues which MH attempted to minimize with the use of an anthropological and participatory perspective, taking into consideration the needs and assets of the population, and not imposing a vision of wellbeing or of progress on them.

Cultural praxis responded directly to the demands of the MH framework. It was an educational strategy that followed a constructivist approach (more on this in Chapter 3), in order to provide resources and skills to the children that allowed them to participate in the envisioning and creation of different realities, within their and our constraints at MH. This type of opportunity did not seem to be available to the kids at school, or in any of the other places they inhabited, given the effectiveness of social exclusion. This was not a project of cultural or behavioral change as a self-help strategy (Goldstein 2012), however, but an educational exercise of conscientization (*conscientização* - Freire 2000 [1970]:54), and praxis, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, which does not disregard the importance of political understanding and action.

Conscientization and praxis require cognitive and behavioral adjustments. But within a coherent and participatory educational framework, such as cultural praxis, in the attempt to counteract processes of marginalization, these development strategies may help children to understand their larger society; they may also teach them to protect their physical and mental integrities, and give them fundamental tools to increase their survival

opportunities in the future. It may prepare them to confront eventually the social structure that relegates them to the margins of society.

Nonetheless, although effective in some ways, my work demonstrates that a single project approach is not likely to have a lasting effect and impact on people's lives. It might provide diversion for the time being, relaxation perhaps, and it might teach important skills, but behavioral and cultural change, and conscientization require time and sustained work. Children, in particular, are in a constant state of precontemplation, a state of unawareness, or denial, of the need to engage in more productive behaviors (Prochaska 1994); developmentally, they are also not always cognitively ready to make important decisions about their lives (Santrock 2011), and their environment influences them greatly. The MH kids had important gains at the organization, but they needed a sustainable environment and strategy to address their needs.

Moses House is an interesting experiment in community development, but not foreign to the difficulties of development organizations (or non-profit organizations, also known as Non-Governmental Organizations, NGOs), whether international or local. Its vision and mission were idealistic and virtuous, but unfortunately lacked sustainability. Its work demanded profound understanding and sustained work with the community, in addition to human and material resources, which are not always readily available to community organizations. This type of work requires understanding of, involvement in, and ability to maneuver bureaucratic and other political processes, as well as adaptability to the demands of foundations and other types of funders; or else, managers and organizers need to find creative ways to fund their projects, through business enterprises, like-minded and generous individuals, or partnerships (INCITE! 2007).

Although during the time of my research it exhibited great potential to make a difference in the kids' lives, Moses House, depending on external funding and required to constantly adapt to the demands of funders, suffered from *projectism*, a common issue in development work. This is the tendency of development programs to focus on short-term projects with the purpose of effecting change, without really being able to accomplish much (Eversole 2003). The results may be inefficient and sterile in the long-run (Grugel 2003; Keese 2003). In order to avoid the pitfalls of *projectism*, some NGOs focus their strategies on advocacy work (Grugel 2003:29) exclusively. They seek to exert pressure on the larger structures responsible for unjust human conditions through communication strategies.

Still, whether using advocacy/political or other strategies, organizational sustainability and coherence are fundamental for community arts organizations, and are not necessarily easy to achieve without great knowledge of and skill in political relations and processes, in addition to administrative and personal skills. An educational institution, or community organization, with certain level of financial independence and solvency might be able to bring about important change by use of long-term strategies, and even in the form of a series of short projects that respond to the larger organizational goals. But an appropriate infrastructure, with clear and coherent objectives and outcomes is necessary. Instructors and administrators also need training, generous and compassionate hearts, and virtuous lifestyles and demeanor in order to serve as positive role models and have a positive influence on the populations they serve, especially children. This type of work makes tremendous demands from instructors particularly, who require emotional stability and strength, resilience, and the capacity to make healthy

connections with program participants. They alone cannot bring about the benefits sought in community arts programs.

Furthermore, another huge task is to ensure that the desire for personal gains, not only economic but also of recognition, among community organizations (or more generally NGOs - (Meyer 2000:85)) managers, does not become an impediment in their work, by closing off the possibilities of collaboration and disregarding each other's initiatives (aspects quite evident among organizations operating in Sulphur Springs) (INCITE! 2007). Collaborations, in particular, may reduce redundancy in programming, increase funding opportunities, and serve populations better, by making better use of the resources available.

In this sense, it is clear to me that community arts programs housed within an organization are inextricably tied to the organization's objectives, resources, and managerial strategies. It is also clear to me that all kids deserve and need to be loved and respected; they require stability and tools to maintain wellness, in order to be able to not only understand but also to participate in larger societal processes. Thus, although a community arts organization working with and for disadvantaged African American children has the potential to counter some of the effects of marginalization, many factors need to be taken into consideration in order to achieve the desirable results, as will be further elucidated in the subsequent chapters. Moreover, even though community arts organizations can contribute to the improvement of disadvantaged children's lives, this job is huge and should not be left to community organizations or NGOs alone.

It is a social responsibility to provide our children with the necessary environments and resources to grow as valuable members of society. The growth and

development of children are a public good, and as such cannot be left to independent, private, or underfunded, organizations to fulfill (INCITE! 2007; Meyer 2000). Contrary to the initial assumption, as will be detailed later, the kids in my project did not have low levels of self-esteem, for the most part; they seemed to be proud of their lives and were mostly happy. They were also perfectly capable of producing creative and important work, and it is my view that this is not only the case with the MH kids, but with all kids. What they really need are opportunities to develop their innate aptitudes, and positive mentors who challenge them to utilize all of their potential, and develop their capacities and abilities to create productive lives and to contribute positively to their societies.

In sum, my work provides a great deal of information about community arts practices, their potentials and challenges. It makes evident the complexity of community arts, but also of the lives of disadvantaged youth in Sulphur Springs, and the difficulty in making generalizations about some of their needs. It calls for the use of a holistic and multidisciplinary approach in the design and implementation of programs with similar objectives, which can potentially contribute to the multidimensional development of the populations they serve. An interdisciplinary team is ideal in these settings, and an integral (or holistic) pedagogical approach emphasizing techniques to address the stresses that children live under in marginalized conditions is crucial as well. Play, relaxation, as well as intellectual challenges that increase self-knowledge and awareness, and political consciousness, are all desirable.

The interdisciplinarity of my research contributes to the existing literature in anthropology but also in other areas of research, namely community arts program evaluation, arts education, community development, non-traditional pedagogy, and

wellness. It highlights the need to define the mechanisms by which social and personal change can occur, why they are necessary and for whom, in any enterprise geared towards development and change. It demonstrates the need for the anthropological perspective in community arts evaluation research, and more generally in community development. It calls for triangulation of data in research involving children. It offers a variety of measurement and analysis methods of ethnographic data. Theoretically, as well as practically, two concepts offered here are valuable, that of cultural praxis and what I have termed elsewhere “ecology of freedom” (Sabogal nd). Such concepts help to understand how community arts, and more broadly, community organizations, are potential sites for the advancement of holistic or integral education (Ferrer 2005; Forbes 1996; Gidley 2008; Hutchison 2000; London 2006; Murray 2009; Taggart 2001), can be of benefit to disadvantaged communities, in this case African American youth and their families.

In the next chapter, I offer a theoretical framework to help understand the historical roles of community arts organizations, and the different approaches they use to accomplish their work. I describe the specific realities that African American families and their children have to confront as a disenfranchised group in our society. I explain the need for community arts evaluation research, its importance and constraints, and how an anthropological framework can move this field forward. In Chapter 3, I explain the methodological approach utilized in this research, and in Chapter 4 the setting in which the project took place. Chapter 5 introduces the participants in the project, and the context in which they lived. Chapter 6 explains why an anthropological approach was effective as a research and educational strategy at MH. Chapters 7-10 provide the answers to my

research questions more specifically, describing the life objectives of the participants in my study, as well as their resources and difficulties, from their and their mothers' perspectives. I discuss the relationships of MH children with community arts and other organizations in their neighborhood, and the potential of such organizations and programs in influencing the kids' growth and development. I describe the project in which I engaged with the kids and how the specific outcomes were achieved or not, the positive experiences and the more challenging ones. Subsequently, in Chapter 11, I provide an analysis of the most salient issues and assets of my project and research. Finally, Chapter 12 offers a synthesis of my work with recommendations for future programs, whether at MH or for other community organizations with similar goals.

My experience at MH was immensely transformative, at personal, academic, and professional levels. My life was touched at every level; sometimes the experiences were delightful, others painful, but every single one of them was worth it for the amount of growth they infused into my life. I know the MH kids also grew tremendously during our work together, and their reactions will be examined in the following chapters. It is hoped that this comprehensive study and the more ample understanding of the beneficial outcomes of community arts programs, offered here, will help to extend their applications, and contribute to the positive development of vulnerable populations. I hope my work will help community arts practitioners and scholars to make more informed decisions in their work, at least by bringing to light the enormous responsibility that it is to enter a community with the intention to "help" in its development through the arts and media. No one should take this job lightly, and the practitioners' motivations, ethical



frameworks, objectives, resources, and preparedness to assume such a responsibility must be examined with the utmost care and consideration.

## **Chapter 2:**

### **Literature Review**

#### **The Community Arts Literature**

Lowe (2000) noted a decade ago that empirical research on community arts was not extensive (359); however, my (non-exhaustive) literature review reveals that this research has grown in the last decade, at least in the English-speaking world, where nearly all the articles on the subject referred to in this paper have been published. My research also shows that the provenance and areas of inquiry of the research are quite diverse.

The disciplines that pay most attention to community arts appear to be art education, community development and regeneration, mental health, cultural policy, and the arts (anthropology, as I will discuss shortly, is barely represented). And this body of work takes various forms, including discussions about socially aware or politically engaged art<sup>1</sup>, reports on community arts projects by community artists/scholars<sup>2</sup>, art education analyses and discussions<sup>3</sup>, descriptions of community arts, or reports on projects by scholars in various other fields of study<sup>4</sup>, evaluations of community arts projects<sup>5</sup>, reviews of project evaluations and the evaluation process<sup>6</sup>, and community arts organizations<sup>7</sup>. I only review one paper related to the arts in mental health because it deals with important evaluation concerns<sup>8</sup>.

In the sample reviewed here, the majority of articles are descriptions of community arts or project reports, by artist/scholars or scholars in other fields, formal evaluations, and reviews of program evaluations; there are very few articles in the other types of literature. In this sense, it is important to note that the literature on community arts *organizations*, specifically, is extremely poorly represented in my sample, and perhaps in general, for wide searches located only a few articles and books. However, the benefits and problems attributed to particular community arts programs, as well as community organizations in general, can certainly inform a discussion about the work of community arts organizations and their impacts on individuals and societies. Finally, although several evaluations and two project reports in the sample were conducted using ethnographic methods<sup>9</sup>, only one scholar is an anthropologist<sup>10</sup>. And, in the other areas of inquiry, only one more professional identifies herself as anthropologist<sup>11</sup>. With this, I now turn to a conceptual definition of community arts and organizations.

### **Community Arts**

New genre art, or community arts, is carried out in grassroots settings, and, as a form of public art, it serves the public interest (Lowe 2000:364). Although there is great variety in the offerings and organizational structures of community arts, as will be shown in a later section, the kind of community arts described in the literature corresponds, for the most part, to the founding principles of the field.

Community arts arose from the need to resist the institutionalization of conventional art forms. In its roots, it is aligned with the social processes that occurred in the 1960s, including heightened Marxism, feminism, and ecological awareness. Art, in

this form of social criticism, as a creative and critical tool (Clover 2000), aims to change reality based on social justice and communal principles (Miles 1997:205). As Mitchell (1992) points out, Utopia and contradiction are central to the idea of public art (4), and particularly of community arts.

Community arts, in this sense, is an intelligible (Maksymowitz 1992:157), inclusive, collaborative, and experiential form of doing art (Lowe 2000:364). Although virtually any kind of artistic activity could be used in a community setting, some of the activities mentioned in the literature include: storytelling, video production, theater, dance, poetry, photography, t-shirt printing, ceramics, music, murals, building or area restoration, oral history, grassroots movements media campaigns, festivals, weaving, drawing, and role-playing.

According to Hamilton et al. (2003), community arts are used to provide commonly excluded populations access to the arts, in schools, prisons, the workplace, the streets, and housing projects; they encourage participation, and deal with issues of class, gender, race, health, and housing, as well as environmental concerns (4). They constitute a way for the marginalized to reach large audiences with their work (Mattingly 2001:445), to become artists (Knight 2008:115).

Community artists, in the traditional sense, advocate for social change; they share power with the members of the communities (Knight 2008:111), are activists, and perform outside of the establishment of the academy and the conventional art world (115). Different from other public artists, community artists stimulate other people's creativity and political thought (Miles 1997:8). They constitute a form of community organizing. According to Lowe (2000), community arts represent a "sociological

phenomenon that influences the development of community,” and has the potential to impact policy decisions that address social issues (361). Since community arts programs often function within the context of community organizations, in the next paragraphs, I define the role of such organizations, and their relationship with community arts.

### **Community Arts Organizations**

Few authors in my sample (e.g., Changfoot 2005; Heath et al. 1998) explicitly discuss community arts within the context of community arts organizations. However, this is an important exercise, as many of the problems, but also the benefits, attributed to participation in community arts derive from their existence in these settings.

**Community organizations.** A community organization today is what Smith (2002) calls a community center (in the U.S.) or a voluntary association (in the U.K.). He roots community centers in the settlement houses (see also Orr 2007) and the “activities of priests and church workers; of mutual aid and friendly societies... of early social work organizations... and in the development of adult education,” found in the late 1800s and early 1900s. According to Gittell (1980), however, Anderson (1971) traced voluntary associations to as far back as 8000 BC (21), and given our human need for collectivity, such associations are likely to have appeared well before that time in human history.

In the United States, at the beginning of the twentieth century, these centers were used for recreation. The organizations spread rapidly in the United States, and began to work to address local communities’ social and political needs (Smith 2002). Today, these voluntary community organizations still exist; sometimes free of charge, other times fee-based, and they can serve a variety of purposes: recreational, educational, social,

political, or cultural, and others. In addition, as will be discussed below, not all organizations are rooted in the localities, but function as branches of larger national or international organizations.

According to Orr (2007), the impact of globalization and changing economic structures is reframing the work of community organizations, which increasingly focus on providing basic social services to individual residents but limit their political, or social restructuring involvement (16). These organizations are increasingly financed by the private sector and wealthy philanthropists, who, as Hyatt (nd-a) explains, are able to bypass public institutions, avoiding accountability and engineering social policy, and in that way determine their own agendas and further their economic interests.

Neoliberal economics, in general, impede community political mobilizations due to lack of local capital (money) (Lyon-Callo 2003); nonetheless, it is important to note that some community organizations still attempt to work with the objective to restructure societies, or to exert some kind of political change, via “community organizing,” and for the benefit of the communities in which they operate.

The earlier objectives of community organizing, as Williams (1985) explained were “...not to create social cohesion but to gain power for the neighborhood: to establish economic reciprocity between citizens and institutions, efficiency and responsiveness in government services, and broaden participation in urban policies” (34). Similarly, and more recently, for Orr (Orr 2007), “the central feature of community organizing is that it is a process and strategy designed to build political power” (2). This kind of political involvement through formal community organizing has been, and still is, crucial in improving the living conditions of various social groups in Western societies, as

exemplified in Lyon-Callo and Hyatt (2003). In the U.S., it is based on the work of Saul Alinsky (4), who, for most of the twentieth century, brought “communities of interest” together with the objective to pursue and gain political power (16). Political community organizing, is, for many, fundamental to effect societal change (Hyatt 2008), specifically in relation to issues of *social justice*. It drives the project of changing, or eliminating, unjust situations, in terms of the fair distribution of goods, individual and social wellbeing, and the satisfaction of human needs.

Social justice does not mean, however, that all human beings are the same, that they have the same objectives, or that they define wellbeing in the same way. Therefore, from an anthropological perspective, justice should also contain reference to other important notions such as equal opportunity, dignity, autonomy, and self-determination. This implies not only access to resources for the supply of needs common to all human beings, but also the need of all people to decide for themselves, or with their social groups, and according to their cultural values, how to run their lives, for their wellbeing (as defined by them), within a frame of respect for their and others’ choices.

The role of the community organizer, or activist, as described in the literature, is important in the pursuit of social justice. In essence, the activist is a leader who works to address specific social problems derived from injustices exerted on disadvantaged populations, such as poverty, racism, lack of good public services, schools, parks, and security (Orr 2007:10). Several decades ago, Warren and Warren (1977) expressed that the organizer must also work to “educate the power elite” about the predicaments their actions cause to communities on the margins (81).

These scholars explain that neighborhoods differ in their structures and leaderships, and the role of the organizer varies accordingly (Warren 1977:125). For them, the “professional” activist, however, must learn about every aspect of the community through research, and understand its issues, how the populations usually resolve them, and the resources at hand (174). For Orr (2007), the main functions assumed by the professional organizers include identifying community residents, bringing them together for specific collective actions, and teaching them effective methods of community “empowerment” and “improvement” (2). But there are less hierarchical, and more participatory and collaborative approaches to community organizing whereby community members as well as external collaborators bring together their ideas and resources in order to facilitate change (Hyatt 2008). Mandelbaum (2006) states that mobilization of this kind is fundamental, because, in its absence, citizens work individually in an “attenuated kind of citizenship,” where they can feel good about their good deeds helping needy people, but this does not translate into “political mobilization for collective ends” (228).

Although the political functions of community organizations and organizers vary according to their resources and the political climate in which they are immersed, it is clear that they are crucial for poor populations to gain participation in democratic processes, and, as Williams (1985) has stated, they “represent a... form of organization through which the disenfranchised of the city can gain access to the megastructures” (259). But community organizations are also important for many authors for their “community building” function (Procter 2005:136). According to Hyland and Bennett (2005), based on the community building discussions and work of various scholars,



“attending to existing community relationships, revitalizing or creating community identity and meaning, and encouraging participation and partnerships are integral, cohesive components of community building” (13). Community organizations involve participant interaction, communication, the celebration of commonalities, cooperation, the creation of a “cultural presence” (Procter 2005:146; also in Williams 1985:35), and the resolution of internal conflicts. Warren and Warren (1977) explained in the past that voluntary neighborhood associations could fulfill integrative or socialization functions in the lives of individuals, creating cohesion. They could also help in career advancement, teaching problem-solving and expressive skills; and offer recreation, tension-release, and socializing activities (54). Many of these activities can potentially contribute to strengthening what Putnam (2000) defined as *social capital*, or the “social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (19).

Social capital, according to Hyland and Bennett (2005) is central to [relational] community building (7), but these types of communities can transform into, or develop concurrently, as communities of [political] interest. Changfoot (2005), for example, states that “the organizations that provide for social and cultural needs of a community... also provide an existing infrastructure for organizing at a community level for political ends where direct action emerges” (4). They are often started by marginalized groups, who identify common needs and discover the potential of organization to provide human and material resources necessary for political resistance and other social objectives (3).

These, and other, attributes are often assigned to community arts organizations.

**Community arts organizations.** Many, but not all, community arts organizations and programs make community building their objective. This was, in fact, an essential

component of these organizations at the time of their inception. Lowe (2000) explains that, for Erich Fromm (writing in 1955), ritual was the link “between community art and community” (382), in the sense that “collective art” is a ritual; it is “shared” and, therefore, fundamental in establishing the social relationships that create or maintain a community (360). However, community arts organizations also constituted communities of interest, and were strictly territorial. The 1960s and 1970s, when community arts appeared as a form of public art, signified a turning point in the way art was practiced in the United States and Britain. The crucial change was the move of many artists from individualized work to a more collaborative and participatory form of creating art, which had democratic and social justice goals. Nonetheless, according to Matarasso (2001), community arts organizations today present great variation in their theoretical and practical approaches, even though they are generally small, and embedded in the localities.

Some organizations, for example, are more specialized than others, and artists can utilize a wide range of styles, techniques, and technologies, in their activities (7). In this sense, organizations that work to eliminate social problems may prioritize the process of art making over the products created. Other organizations may focus on particular issues and/or populations whose needs are neglected (e.g., Black groups, prisoners, youth, homeless people). Moreover, some organizations, which he labels “mainstream,” are dedicated to what could be considered elitist, or “high” art education (e.g., opera houses), and they require more resources than other kinds of organizations. They are different from another group Matarasso calls “voluntary,” where the focus is on the production of art by volunteer members (9). At the same time, he explains that not all community arts

work is initiated by organizations, but it can also be promoted by individual artists who are independent, or associated with other organizations (10).

Community arts organizations, like community organizations in general, can be formed as grassroots groups (created by members of the community, within, and strictly for, the community); but community arts programs may be present also within national organizations that have branches in many localities around the country, and even around the world (e.g., the YMCA); they typically offer different programs, not just arts. These are usually nonprofit organizations with interest in the “development” (the systematic pursuit of “progress,” based on particular goals and objectives) of the populations that inhabit marginalized sectors; they are in general formed outside of the community, by professional developers, although grassroots groups can also have development missions (more on this below). Hence, as we can see, the tasks and purposes, as well as the organizational and operational strategies, including financing, of community arts organizations can differ significantly, and they also change continuously along with sociocultural processes.

However, the original objective of social change and the alternative notion of social transformation, for social justice and to benefit marginalized populations, are still central themes in community arts, as reflected in the literature.<sup>12</sup> In the next section, I offer insights into some concepts and theories that help explain the work of community arts organizations and programs striving for social change, as well as important criticisms of their practices.

## **Theoretical Framework and Critique**

As observed earlier, community arts organizations and programs are quite diverse in their objectives and practices. However, it is noticeable that many seem to be concerned with the populations commonly described as the marginalized, the oppressed, or the dominated Others, responding to the objectives of community arts, as defined during the inception of the field in the sixties and seventies.

According to Frye (2001), the root of the word oppression is to press, and pressing molds, flattens, reduces, and squeezes out (139). Thus, the oppressed can be seen as people who are manipulated and reduced to a narrow space, on the margins of society, without the possibility to act, or even think freely; they are confined (141), and barred out of social decision-making processes, which greatly affect their lives. As Miller (2001) puts it, the dominant, the oppressors, control and block the freedom of expression and action of the oppressed; they impose their culture, and all its constituting elements, philosophy, morality, science, etc., on them; and increasingly dispossess them from all possibilities, even their humanity (Collins 2008; Harvey 1989). Hegemony is created—in the Gramscian sense, hegemony is defined as “a moral, intellectual and cultural leadership directed by political and cultural agents” (Kurtz 1996:127). In this sense, the values and practices of the dominant reign over all others in society, and they are reinforced through social institutions, controlled by them.

Domination (control over the oppressed) takes the form of economic exploitation, and dispossession (as Marx explained—See Tucker 1978), but it also conceptualizes life in a way that enhances the value of those in control, as well as their cultural practices, while diminishing the value of the dominated others. The devaluation of the oppressed can be

based on one or several characteristics that distinguish them somehow from the dominant, including, but not limited to, gender, age, economic position, ethnicity, and other markers of identity. The kind of value assignation, within specific sociocultural contexts, will determine the particular issues oppressed populations will have to deal with, their struggles to gain control over their lives, and the power to determine their life paths.

Power is an important concept to understand because combating dominant powers, and claiming or reclaiming power, constitute some of the main objectives of community organizations, as the language of scholars, activists, and others reflect. In the case of the developmentalists, the rhetoric is usually about “empowerment.”

Holloway (2005) describes two kinds of power, “power-to” (*potentia*) and “power-over” (*potestast*). Power-to is the capacity of doing, of working, of creating (28; 152), whereas power-over refers to the domination of people as doers/workers/creators. Power-over is the alienation of “power-to,” its co-optation by those who exert power-over, the dominant ones. The condition of “powerlessness,” then, is the inability of people to do their own projects, to exercise their power-to-do, to create freely. They are obligated, either through physical force, or through hegemonic forces, to work for others, those who dominate through power-over (Holloway 2005:29). The powerless are trapped, reduced, and pushed to the margins, without a place or resources to create, and with a devalued identity.

In the United States, and many other parts of the world, the most dominant group for a long time have been White men; thus, each oppressed group, at least in this country, in Hurtado’s (2001) words, “is positioned in a particular and distinct relationship to white

men, and each form of subordination is shaped by this relational position” (152). The dominant White males have historically defined the notions of normality, and of worthiness; and continuously adjust them to decide who fits and who does not fit in their world (89); they have power-over, and power-to. As Foucault (1977) expressed, “power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth” (194). Those who do not fit into this world, this reality, have little or no value (identity value), no capital (of any kind, in Bourdieu’s (1977) terms); and the most devalued become part of the “underclass” (Gans 2001:80).

Domestically, the most oppressed populations (who have been historically given pejorative titles such as the “underclass” (Gans 2010)), are non-White minorities, including immigrants and Native Americans, but particularly African Americans, and, within this group, males are in the most precarious situation (West 2008:ix). In other regions of the world, Afro-descendants, indigenous groups, and women, are among the most disadvantaged people. But, as we have seen, value is not only given by race, ethnicity, or gender; it is also defined by age, and other physical and mental characteristics. In fact, there exist “underclass” Whites in this country, referred to by the dominant also as “white trash.” Nevertheless, one of the commonalities among the “underclass” groups is poverty; they have been described in the past also as the unemployed, underemployed, or unemployable. They are the victims of poverty, the poor (Gans 2001:80; Gans 2010), and every day their lives are further devaluated, even suppressed (by hunger, violence, or illness).

Some of the poorest people in the U.S., for instance, live in the inner cities. Macek (2006) describes the manner in which demeaning discourses about, and

definitions of, these populations and spaces have been historically created and perpetuated mainly by White male intellectuals and politicians. Their demonizing and victim-blaming opinions and conclusions have shaped the public's perceptions of and attitudes toward poor minority groups, as well as the policies that affect their lives directly, especially the increase in punitive practices and the governmental cutbacks on public service spending that had been set up to protect them in the past.

Similarly, Piven (2001) explains that the old rhetoric of the poor as a “dependent animal creature” has intensified, and the increased punitive practices against the dispossessed continue to reinforce such detrimental discourses and images (142-143). As this scholar puts it, the poor have become “public pariahs” (147). In addition, Maskovsky (2001) states that although the “war on the poor” has been fought for a long time, more recently, in the neoliberal age of free market economics, the strategies have become attenuated and sensitive to diversity. The attacks, previously focused on aspects of race and gender, are now reframed in terms of an individual and common goal of prosperity, where everyone, regardless of social status or identity, is responsible for achieving it (471). According to Maskovsky, this rhetoric has contributed to masking the roots of inequality, and the reduction of political action to address it (472).

Miller (2001) identifies two forms of the notion of inequality, one permanent and the other temporary. The first implies that it is not possible for disadvantaged groups to achieve parity with the dominant one, because the characteristics that make a group “better” or “superior” are fixed; they are ascribed at birth, including race, sex, and nationality (88). The assumption of permanent inequality is that held by White supremacists. Temporary inequality, on the other hand, assumes that those who are at

disadvantage, who have no power-to, could eventually level their position with those who have an advantage, and there are different ways in which scholars, practitioners, and people, in general, deal with this issue.

One way is to pursue power by finding ways to catch up with the dominant sectors, usually with the “help” of those who are in advantageous positions; the goal is then to “progress” according to the definitions of the powerful. Traditional development practices have been defined in this way, and Matarasso (2001) describes a type of community arts activity that resembles this *modus operandi*, where participants have the choice only to decide whether to participate or not in the project, but no control over any other aspect of it (including the objectives). The goal of this kind of development, in general, is to change the individuals and the communities’ cultures (Keese 2003:22), who are blamed and made responsible for their problems.

This type of activity is usually promoted by outside professionals in poor communities, and has been widely criticized because it does not account for the actual needs of the populations it “serves.” It also disregards people’s innate, albeit co-opted, “power-to,” and their capacities to resist, fight back domination, and run their own lives, to be autonomous, and self-determinant, to create their own world, recognized by many scholars (Prakash and Esteva 1998; Escobar 1991; Li 2007; Scott 1985). In addition, the concepts and practices of development are often unclear, for developers and the communities where they work. In public and community arts, this includes obscured notions of development and regeneration (Miles 1997:112), community, and the specific roles of community artists (Becker 1994:xvii).



The lack of clarity of concepts and the discriminatory practices of traditional development have affected the field in general, making its work of limited value in the claimed objective to “help” marginal populations. In fact, in many cases, such attempts have resulted in further aggravation of the populations’ problems (Prakash and Esteva 1998; Escobar 1991; Li 2007), and this is evidenced in public and community arts as well. For example, by giving advantage to market economics over the needs of the populations (Miles 1997:131), public art development projects can contribute to gentrification, socioeconomic inequities, and homelessness (Knight 2008:132-133). As Stanziola (1999) puts it:

...Arts organizations and festivals only create low-paid and low-skilled temporary jobs that do not alleviate the structural unemployment that plagues most cities in the world... cultural strategies are about making cities less democratic and less diverse by appealing to more affluent people and displacing social and ethnic minorities (2).

Mattingly (2001) also notes that even though public arts are important, contributing to the construction of new, interesting, and attractive places with new meanings, they can actually cause gentrification in the long-run (453). Gentrification occurs when land value increases due in part to the implementation of cultural strategies in urban development, as advocated by Florida (2002). As a result, the original residents, usually disadvantaged minorities and immigrants, who cannot afford the new prices, are forced to move out (Stanziola 1999:6). Other scholars pose similar critiques (Hyatt et al. nd-b:4-5), and Mattingly (2001) also describes other development discourses such as multiculturalism, which may misrepresent the realities of communities (453).

Cleveland (2002), however, discusses the changing dynamics of the development field in community arts, where public participation and artistic creation are now more mutually interdependent (9). According to this author, today, the ideal is a “cross-sector,” and sustained, collaborative, and holistic development, which brings together education, public safety, human services, the arts, as well as sustainability (7). Meade and Shaw (2007) also define community development in good terms, as concerned with the relationship between government and its citizens, and its aims to extend, strengthen, or cultivate democracy (413). In this sense, scholars and practitioners<sup>13</sup>, are attempting to give locals the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process of development at every stage of the process (Matarasso 2001:22). Cleveland (2002) and his colleagues, for example, define their community-based activities as those created and produced by and with community members, and this includes elements of community access, ownership, authorship, participation, and accountability.

The new strategies of development are said to “empower” participants, by teaching them to be independent and manage their own lives individually and in the community (Matarasso 2001:28), although, nowadays, according to Matarasso (2007), emphasis is more often given to individual, and not collective, development (451), which correspond to the aforementioned neoliberal practices. Empowerment, in this sense, is associated with agency, self-awareness, confidence, and self-esteem, the capacity to plan, organize, control, and sustain community projects.

This form of addressing issues of power is quite common in community arts<sup>14</sup>, but poverty scholars criticize it because it does not necessarily translate into political power or action. According to Maskovsky (2001), instead of including disadvantaged people in

political and decision-making processes, these activities pacify them, thus inhibiting their potential for activism (478-480). However, for Matarasso (2007), community arts programs with empowerment as ultimate objective still "...have the potential to define and symbolize alternative realities, while working through them can build people's capacity for and interest in shared enterprise. They can form a nucleus of self-determination, even of resistance" (457).

Thus, it seems that the more radical forms of dealing with power and inequality are not part of the community arts repertoire, including supporting attempts to invert the positions of power (to take power, or "give power to the people") by revolutionary struggle, or to forget about power altogether, and create a different, and separate, structure where self-determination and autonomy reign. The latter is what Holloway (2005) calls the "anti-power," in the way movements like the Zapatista, in Mexico, or the, MST (Landless Workers Movement), in Brazil, among others, are attempting to do (Burrowes 2007; de Almeida 2007; Rojas 2007). These groups assume their differences in relation to the powerful, and decide not to live within the "mainstream" society, or do as the "first world" does. They do not want to catch up (Prakash 1998), nor do they want to "take" power (Holloway 2005:20), but simply exert their power-to, freely. Sociocultural, historical, and politico-economic factors appear to impede these kinds of responses to inequality in our current social structure, but even policy reform seems to be an elusive goal in most community arts programs nowadays.

Instead, it is assumed that changes in the individual affect society (Matarasso 2001:12 ; also Holloway 2001:355), and that the formation of relational communities in the programs, which transform into communities of interest, can produce some changes

in the immediate surroundings of the population. Eventually, the idea is, in some cases, that these groups will organize to demand policy reform, and a few do (e.g., Clover 2000), but community arts programs and organizations do not ensure this type of mobilization, nor its success. In practice, they seem to be constrained by hegemonic forces, even though the language that is used to describe them is generally progressive.

Critical theory, for instance, is recurrent in the literature, taking shape in notions such as “critical thinking,” “critical evaluation,” “critical consciousness,” or “critical pedagogy<sup>15</sup>.” This theory, also known as political economy, is concerned specifically with the roots and the dynamics of inequality, and scholars and practitioners within this paradigm engage directly with the problems caused by the capitalist system to the populations with whom they work. In contemporary critical social theory, the goal is to change these negative circumstances through “research, dialogue, intervention, political action, or policy” (LeCompte 1999:45).

Critical theory has roots in the works of Karl Marx, who used critique as his analytical device to describe how human productive activity had developed throughout history (Tucker 1978:xxvii). To critique all things meant to take a real phenomenon and dissect it, break it apart, understand its components, and then put them back together with a new sense of their identity, of their meaning and object, to get through the appearances to the essence of reality. But Marx worked not only to understand the socioeconomic system and its problems; he also acted to correct them, and his goal was to organize the workers for an eventual revolution.

In this view, social change requires reconceptualization of the world, but also other types of productive human activity. As O’Laughlin (1975) states, “since structures

are not simply the product of Mind, then critical theory and demystification are not enough to change the world” (342); this requires praxis. Praxis is “the creative and self-creative activity by which human beings shape their world and themselves; it involves work, the mastering of nature, and formation of the human as a subject and human being” (Kosík 1963/1976:133-7; Petrović 1991, cited in Patterson 2009:40). Praxis involves human activity and production, but also consciousness of self and other (57), and this is an important notion for some community arts scholars<sup>16</sup>.

Similarly, community arts scholars speak of activism<sup>17</sup>. Although perhaps not in the same exact sense as praxis, the goal is to act, to engage with social problems, and to effect change. In the community arts literature, action is suggested in different forms: as social or collective organized action<sup>18</sup>, which is traditionally represented in the form of protest or opposing groups (Lauer 2004:11); cultural action (Matarasso 2007), a form of social action focused on assets, not on problems (457)-For an anthropological critique of assets based community development see Hyatt (2008). And, finally, symbolic action<sup>19</sup>.

Another common concept in community arts, which sometimes appears in conjunction with critique, is that of construction or reconstruction<sup>20</sup> of social reality. LeCompte and Schensul (1999) explain, based on the work of various theorists, that the constructivist paradigm is common among educators, who believe that reality is not fixed, or unchangeable, and that the way people define the world can be changed discursively or over time, producing mental and behavioral transformations. Here it is important to mention that community arts programs are in great measure, if not always, educational programs. They typically involve one or several artists teaching their skills to members of the community, sometimes also acting as, or engaging other, activists and/or

organizers, to promote the processes of individual and/or social transformation. Hence, community arts programs that attempt to improve people's lives often rely on progressive, non-traditional, pedagogical approaches that are said to transform reality. In this sense, two education philosophers often make it into the literature: John Dewey and Paulo Freire.

Art, for Dewey, challenged the routines of our daily lives (Mattern 1999:64; Kinloch 2007:38), making us more conscious of them. Consciousness of lived experience, according to him, required the expansion of meanings and understanding of concrete human situations by way of engagement with the possibility of the products of the imagination, through art (Greene 1988:125). For Dewey, art was also fundamental in human communication if allowed to be a significant part of people's lives. It facilitated understanding among people, which resulted in the formation of community (Mattern 1999:54), potentially contributing to the resolution of shared problems (67). Thus, Krensky (2001) explains, Dewey saw arts education as a fundamental element in the development of young people's imagination, their civic commitments, desires, abilities to project optimistically toward the future, and emotions. The arts, for him, were an "incomparable organ of instruction" (431); they promoted personal and social transformations (Holloway 2001a:356).

The other education philosophy on which some community arts programs partly rely<sup>21</sup> is that formulated by Paulo Freire, who developed a pedagogical model for the liberation of the oppressed. His method is a form of social organizing for revolution, where the educator acts as a community organizer (even as a revolutionary leader), and which constitutes a two-stage process. The first stage is *conscientização*, or the

understanding of the individual's own oppression (Freire 2000 [1970]:54); the increasing and simultaneous reflection on the self and other, in relation to the whole, and the subsequent expansion of perception and awareness. This process takes the person to new realms of knowledge and eventually to the second stage of the program, which is collective action for liberation (54).

This model utilizes a problem-posing and dialogical approach (critical thinking with others), which allows people to project to the future, as a group, and in their own terms (Freire 2000 [1970]:83-84). It is clearly a Marxist project for it relies on praxis, as defined before, and praxis deepens *conscientização* by engaging people in projects against the dehumanization to which they are subjected by the oppressors (119).

In sum, contemporary community arts programs and organizations emerge in my literature sample as top-down or other more “participatory” development projects to promote “progress” (defined by the dominant culture, and sometimes recognized by communities themselves), which seek to transform individuals and their communities’ cultures through art education projects. But they also appear as social justice endeavors, more aligned with the original mission of community arts. These are pursued through progressive educational models that not only attempt to transform the individual, but also encourage dynamic political action (albeit not necessarily of the most radical form). In the next section, I will detail the beneficial effects of community arts programs, how they can have bearing on the lives of disadvantaged youth in particular, and how their work can be evaluated.

## **The Case of "Disadvantaged" Youth**

Youth are not a homogeneous mass, across time or space (Bluebond-Langner 2007). Hence, although I will describe how some policies are directed to disadvantaged youth in general, and other specific issues present in community arts organizations working with young people, I will also provide specific information about existing challenges in the lives of African American youth in particular, who constitute the focus population in my study. Keeping in mind that there is great internal diversity within this ethnic group (McLoyd 2005:5), some broad issues described in the literature will help to inform my work. The hope is to define the paths that a community arts organization working with disadvantaged African American youth could take in order to help them achieve their goals, and those of their families and communities.

As we will see, in the United States and other countries (e.g., Australia), policies that affect disadvantaged youth (defined here as a low income and marginal group, lacking access to even basic services such as adequate education, health care, and recreation due to their social exclusion), are designed based on stereotypical and denigrating images of them and their communities, perpetuating the devaluation of their identities, their oppression and marginality, and tremendously affecting their lives in multiple ways.

McLaughlin and Heath (1993), for example, explain that policies and programs for inner-city (some of the poorest) youth usually misunderstand their lives and circumstances. Schools do not concentrate on teaching skills that are useful to these youth; instead, they are "college-bound," when college may not even be a realistic option for them. Policy-makers and researchers have little information about the inner cities;



they do not know that kids may have impediments to arrive to school in many occasions (e.g., gang border-crossing, lack of transportation or of daycare services); and racist stereotypes reduce their access even to the low wage jobs, leaving the kids with few options and suffering from low self-esteem and lack of direction for the future. They are often unprotected and frightened, which leads them to joining gangs for security and assistance; in many cases, kids are essentially raised by their gang peers (Anderson 2008:22). The approaches of policy-makers and researchers are usually decontextualized; they base their analyses on information provided by the media, or statistical reports, which are “removed from reality” (McLaughlin 1993:214; see also ).

In the same vein, Mattingly (2001) explains that young people are often defined based on information about the places where they live; thus, assumptions about their needs are in many cases incorrect. She calls this an “ecological fallacy,” because, of course, not all kids in poor neighborhoods, for instance, are in trouble or need reformation (455), which is what is usually prescribed for them. This is in line with Gans’ (2010) critique of the notion of “concentrated poverty,” where the assumption that “the level of concentration of poor people in a particular neighborhood causes their poverty-related problems and the behavior patterns that upset the larger community” is refuted. In addition, Mattingly points out that, although in these neighborhoods the young view the street as a place of freedom and independence from adults, their presence in the public space is seen as threatening, especially if they are youth of color. However, in her analysis of a theater project whose object was to help change the image of a particular neighborhood and to promote its redevelopment, this scholar discovered a great contradiction. The youth were defined at the same time as “at risk,” and as “the risk”

itself; they were harmless and malleable on the one hand and dangerous on the other . This was also the case in the representation of the neighborhood.

In another study, on the impact of art programs on youth in Australia, De Roeper and Savelsberg (2009) also challenge the objectives and presumptions of policies for disadvantaged young people based on faulty conceptualizations (this case may apply in the U.S. setting as well). These scholars find that young people are constructed discursively; the media, politicians, and moralists continuously redefine the concept of youth to advance particular social agendas. Today, for instance, young people are regarded as “the future;” a “work in progress.” But interventions for them are segregated in an elitist way. Only a few youth constitute future leaders and deserve advancement, leading positions, and the acquisition of creative skills (221). These are “high-functioning” youth, and policies for them promote leadership and creativity through the arts (209). In contrast, “at risk” youth receive repression and punishment through remedial policies (221); they deserve programs that get them “on track,” which ignore their developmental needs, and they are not considered ready or worthy of “high-level” cultural programs (209), even though the arts themselves may be used for remedial purposes. The educational system reinforces these distinctions, which has serious consequences for the disadvantaged youth who may eventually perceive themselves in diminished ways (212).

The disregard and devaluation of minority youth appear to have continuously increased in the age of neoliberalism, or free market economics focused on reducing government and public service spending. In this sense, Giroux (2001) depicts the devastating consequences of “zero tolerance” policies in the U.S. public school system,

increased militarization, and the reduction of democracy in this society. Specifically, he focuses on the existing and increasing perception of young people (more directly Black (his term) youth) as “a threat to public life,” which reduces them to suspects that must be contained, controlled, and even eliminated from the public sphere.

Similarly, Hirschfield (2008) defines and describes criminalization of discipline in the context of schools. He discusses the emphasis of criminal policies on inner-city populations, as a direct result of politico-economic neoliberal practices that have boosted the “prison-industrial complex” at the expense of the freedom and development of these oppressed populations. The increasing treatment of minority youth as a “disposable” population, calls for their control and containment, in a school system (and society in general) that resembles a prison (79).

Likewise, Ríos (2006) explains how the “youth control complex” has been created to manage, control, and incapacitate Black and Latino youth through their hyper-criminalization, or the over-expansion of the criminal justice system to all aspects of their lives, including schools, families, and community centers, which are supposed to be the most protective and nurturing institutions (51). In this context, minority youth are basically strangled and left without any support in their search for guidance and understanding in an extremely complex world. These youth grow stigmatized and without the opportunity to construct or even envision their future.

Additionally, neoliberal practices are being reflected in the cutting and elimination of art programs in schools, as well as community programs in general. Without the option of low-cost or free quality cultural and other community programs, which constitute the few opportunities and places available for disadvantaged youth to

enjoy some freedom of expression and socialization, and where they are able to create and learn various skills (more on this below), kids are likely to seek out opportunities and outlets elsewhere (especially the streets), increasing their exposure to police repression, and to illegal activities.

According to de Roeper and Savelsberg (2009), cultural programs (including the arts), for “at risk” youth are viewed as a waste of resources, because, for policymakers, these youth are developmentally unready to utilize those resources effectively (223). In addition, Kinder and Harland (2004) explain that the low status of the arts themselves also affects the level of their provision (54). In the context of schools, Holloway and Krensky (2001a) point out that this neglect is particularly true in poorer urban areas, where high-stake accountability policies have been incrementally imposed in the last few decades, at the expense of good art curricula instruction (354). Although community arts organizations and programs have the potential of filling the void left by schools, providing extracurricular artistic and other cultural activities to the children and families who cannot afford them on their own, these programs and organizations are also affected by funding concerns, as well as other problems.

Matarasso (2001), in this sense, recognizes that many community arts organizations generally do not require a lot of resources (see also Heath 1998:15; U.S. Department of Justice 2000:2), and can subsist independently from government funding, as well as the support from foundations and the commercial sector. However, this is not necessarily the case with organizations based in marginalized areas, where participants are unable to support the organizations. Even if the activities are not expensive, the programs need a space, for example, which can be costly, unless administrators and

practitioners are able to secure a free-rent location, or establish partnerships with larger organizations. But funding is not the only problem.

Heath et al. (1998) point out that not everyone feels comfortable working with young people, and artists might also refuse to teach due to unfamiliarity working with nonprofits (Heath 1998:16). In addition, Lowe (2000) points out that it is not always easy to get teenagers involved in community arts programs (373). The older youth may be more interested in finding jobs and doing adult-like activities; they often have busy lives, and great responsibilities (Mattingly 2001:455). Furthermore, detrimental exclusionary and development mentalities might also have an effect on the way the kids feel about community programs.

As explained above, the youth are usually defined as needing care and control, and this can be reflected in paternalistic relationships with administrators (Mattingly 2001:455), which reduce the authority of the youth. The treatment of young people as vulnerable and dependent obscures the fact that, as Heath et al. (1998) state, youth engaged in community arts are resources themselves, and that organizations and managers depend on them to achieve institutional and professional goals (Mattingly 2001:455).

Nonetheless, many of these problems, as will be shown below, can be solved with well-conceived missions, and appropriate methodologies to approach the objectives of communities and the youth. Community arts programs and organizations still have the potential to preserve and promote the positive growth of disadvantaged youth, and also to strengthen their communities and cultures (Heath 1998:16). This is especially important for African American young people, given the maltreatment they suffer in our society.

## **The Case of “Disadvantaged” African American Youth and Their Families**

Numerous problems affect the lives, families, and communities of African American youth. But, as we have seen, especially problematic appear to be the scores of stereotypes to which they are subjected. Rios-Moore et al. (2004) list several other characterizations specifically related to young women, many of which affect their entire ethnic group. These stereotypes are typically related to their sexuality and body type, but also to their perceived intelligence, class level, behavior, and relationships, and such notions therefore disregard the struggles of Black people. These stereotypes are emphasized and reinforced everywhere, but particularly in the media, and of course have multiple negative effects. Eventually, the stereotypical images become expectations about Black people, who are left without control over the definitions about them, and are blamed for their precarious conditions (as expected from the processes of oppression described before). Their importance is diminished; they are seen as self-destructive and not worthy of support; investment in their lives is considered a waste (Rios-Moore 2004:6).

Some stereotypes about African American women, for example, according to Rios-Moore et al. (2004), are that they are promiscuous, that they are “oversexed at young age,” and likely to become pregnant (2004). However, their struggles as women, compounded by their cultural devaluation and marginalization, are unacknowledged in these characterizations. According to Holloway and LeCompte (2001b), women are still required to maintain traditional gender roles, as sexual objects, helpmates, caretakers, or decorations (392), and their low status is reinforced through education and socialization practices. These expectations, of course, are in conflict with the realities of most women,

but particularly of African American women, whose living arrangements and family gender roles are not only diverse within their ethnic group, but also significantly distinct from those of other groups, including the “ideal” nuclear family imposed as a model in our society (Tucker 2005:87).

Thus, scholars point out that African American girls decide to have babies to demonstrate that they are women, and to feel loved by someone (McLaughlin 1993:214), in the absence of men. Anderson (2008) also explains that these young women strongly embrace motherhood and babies, and that new babies often represent “a form of social capital and bonding” (23). These are strong claims about young African American women, which my study cannot confirm. In any case, their decisions would be clearly marked not only by cultural particularities, but also by politico-economic processes, such as those described above, and they have bearing on, and are a reflection of, the general functioning of their families.

Furthermore, according to McLoyd (McLoyd 2005:5), African American children tend to live with their mothers while fathers are commonly absent, and, due to a variety of other factors, they are also more likely to end up living without their biological parents than any other ethnic group (Pinderhughes 2005:286). When the mother is present, her close and extended relatives are usually active in helping to raise the children, especially grandmothers (Tucker 2005:99). However, these networks and arrangements appear to be suffering from the increasing necessities of all family members (Dilworth-Anderson 2005:212), with great consequences for children.

Although, according to Barbarin et al. (2005), the lack of economic resources is crucial in the deterioration of a family’s wellbeing and of children’s development, there

are other important elements that need to be considered (e.g., unstable family relations, life loss, hostilities, unsafe environments). At the same time, for these scholars, some of the ill effects caused by poverty, and other disturbing situations, can be alleviated in some measure when the children experience strong relationships, “high expectations,” and discipline as well as the development of a positive ethnic identity. Barbarin et al. explain that these protective devices are conditioned by the relationships and communication between parents and their kids, as well as the quality of the home environment; and they constitute some of the most important factors in the positive development of children.

Unfortunately, such relationships and home environments can also be absent, or destroyed, due to marginalization itself, hence, creating a situation of extreme vulnerability for African American children and their families, immersed in a vicious cycle of abjection. Community poverty and its resulting unemployment, menial jobs, single-parent households, lack of services, and disinvestment (Tucker 2005:114), as well as real estate discrimination and recent economic decline (Greenbaum 2008; Lyon-Callo 2003) can produce residential instability, for example. And residential instability can in turn affect the “homeplace;” that place where, according to Burton and Clark (2005), African American families can feel safe and “empowered,” and where culture and identity are formed and sustained (166). Other place-based support systems that could contribute to the reduction of negative outcomes derived from systems of oppression, reinforcing the protecting values and practices described above, may also be damaged by residential instability. For instance the “church-home,” where African Americans (in many cases going back several generations of families) worship (Mattis 2005:198); or the community itself, which, as hooks (1993) explains, can be experienced as a “healing



place” by African Americans, and central to their wellbeing (152). Thus, even if the children’s parents have the best intentions, and provide them with strong relationships and values, it is quite possible that their lives and growth will be greatly disrupted by their marginal condition in multiple ways.

As we can see, there is a long list of problems that affect the lives of African Americans, in general, and children and youth, in particular, and that are derived from the systems of domination in our society, which places them at the bottom of the power scale. To conclude, Rios-Moore et al. (2004) summarize many of these issues. Black youth live in material scarcity and surrounded by discrimination and abuse, which are internalized, promoting self-blame and further eroding their autonomy. Black youth need better schools, more income housing, community programs, and a healthy living environment. There are no work opportunities for them, and hardly any constructive and legal activities in which to engage; the few available legal jobs are usually underpaid. Black children often live in crowded apartments, which are not ideal for them to study. There is no investment in their communities; their families cannot get loans, they do not receive financial training, and so forth, and so on.

Perhaps community arts programs and organizations can offer some relief and hope to these children and youth? In the subsequent sections, I describe some of the benefits that have been ascribed to participation in community arts programs, how those programs can be evaluated, and the ways they could contribute to the improvement of African American youths’ lives.

## **Benefits of Community Arts Programs**

The literature reveals great variation in community arts practices, as well as lack of robust research<sup>22</sup> about them (with some improvement in the last decade), which prevents comparison and generalizations (Matarasso 2001:25; Newman 2003:312; Ramsey-White 2005:7). This may correspond in some ways to the complexity of art itself, and it is reflected in the distinct locations, purposes, methods, media, publics, participants, and disciplinary interests encountered in the field.

In this sense, it is difficult to describe community arts within the strict theoretical frameworks that explain the arts, for example. Using Osborne's (1970) terms, they are, by nature, instrumental, transformational (Holloway 2001a; Pacific 1999), oppositional (Pacific 1999), and educational (Holloway 2001a), but this need not reduce the importance of the collective expression of experiences, real or imagined (the naturalist character); nor does it take away the emphasis some practitioners might put on the acquisition and application of technical skills that produce aesthetic results, and products that stand on their own (the formalist approach). Some programs seem to be able to capture several of these experiences concurrently, in one way or another (Coggan 2008; Krensky 2001).

Moreover, although it is difficult to determine the precise provenience of the programs' effects (especially the individual effects), scholars and practitioners report some beneficial attributes more frequently than others. This gives important clues to the possibilities of community arts, and helps to set achievable goals for varying programs, which include the concerns of African American young people. In this regard, some of the effects of participation in community arts, which could potentially help to counteract the

marginalization of these youth are: the capacity of community arts to transform people into politically conscious<sup>23</sup> and active citizens<sup>24</sup>, their ability to stimulate their imagination and creative powers<sup>25</sup>, to increase or reinforce self-awareness<sup>26</sup> and self-esteem<sup>27</sup>, and to improve communication skills<sup>28</sup>. Furthermore, community arts programs constitute a space of freedom for the youth to envision new possibilities, and generate a sense of place<sup>29</sup>.

Political and civic consciousness and active citizenship are understood primarily in terms of social responsibility. That is, the interest and enthusiasm for learning about and participating in the improvement of one's community and society in general; the ability to follow rules and guidelines of behavior, in consideration not only to personal needs, but those of a larger social sphere. This also refers to the quality and quantity of interactions with others, regard and compassion for others' needs, and respect for different points of view. As Taggart (2001) puts it, "civic consciousness is... the recognition of one's interdependence within community and the bioregion it occupies" (333), and this is expanded to include engagement in and care for the affairs of the community.

Self-awareness can be understood as consciousness of the self. This includes a combination of the following aspects: the recognition of personal traits, challenges and assets, tastes, positionality in relation to others, motives, needs, wants, cognitive ability and emotional states, and other aspects that define our identity.

Self-esteem is "the global evaluative dimension of the self. Self-esteem is also referred to as self-worth or self-image" (Santrock 2011:G-8). A high level of self-esteem is defined by the acceptance, and consideration of one's life, as well as the valuation of

the same in positive terms, as worthwhile not only to the self, but also to others, including one's family, peers and society. It is the belief in one's capacity to influence the social environment, the sense of autonomy and competence, the trust in one's ability to perform at certain levels of performance (Rosenberg 1995:144). High self-esteem is associated with feelings of pride and confidence; whereas low self-esteem is related to feelings of shame or stupidity (Heatherton 1991:896).

Communication skills are those that allow us to interact with others with empathy, understanding them while making ourselves understood. As Scott (nd) summarizes, communication involves creating and sharing meanings. It is interactive and requires sending and receiving information meaningfully. Positive and effective communication involves good non-verbal cues, tone of voice, trust, openness, listening skills, and feedback. It must be "direct, clear and specific." Effective communication should enable dialogue, not simply the transferring of information from the producer of messages to the receiver. In a dialogical communication process, it is fundamental to acknowledge, respect, and understand the differences and commonalities of those involved; this promotes a collaborative transformation of the content of the discussion, but also of the structure of production and distribution of messages.

A sense of place refers to "a multidimensional construct comprising: (1) beliefs about the relationship between self and place; (2) feelings toward the place; and (3) the behavioral exclusivity of the place in relation to alternatives" (Jorgensen 2001:233). It is assumed that feelings of sense of place will entail identification with the place, freedom to express in such a place, attachment to the place, feelings of happiness and wellbeing at the place, preference of the place over others, and longing for such a place (241).

Imagination is the ability to germinate and represent in one's mind new ideas about life and aspects of the world in general. This ability is a fundamental part of creativity. Creativity, as Runco (2004) has described it, is a human activity that "drives innovation and evolution;" it is reactive but also proactive, emerging from the challenges of life, serving to solve, find, and avoid problems, developing original ideas and courses of action (679). Creativity is the ability not only to imagine, but to concretize the imaginative acts in reality, for practical but sometimes also non-practical reasons (Hope 2010:41). One practical form of creativity is praxis, as defined earlier. This form of creativity is political; it requires human activity and production, but also consciousness of self and other (Patterson 2009:57); it could serve the general welfare of society. However, as seen previously, access to creative practices, in general, is highly restricted for marginalized populations, the "powerless." The condition of "powerlessness" is the inability of people to do their own projects, to exercise their "power-to," to create, in Holloway's (28; 152) words. Their capacity of doing, of working, of creating freely, is alienated or co-opted by dominant groups, who exert "power-over" them (Holloway 2005:29). This does not mean that marginal populations lack creativity, because there are many examples of their creative accomplishments. However, their creative expressions are often disregarded in the elite arts circles, and they do not have as much support in the dissemination of their work; they lack access to materials, space, and even the time necessary to produce. Their aesthetics are reduced in value. In terms of praxis, the more political form of creativity, marginal populations' ways of life and visions of the future are again diminished in value and placated by the dominant political forces.

The aspect of stimulating the creative capacity is especially important, and worth emphasizing, for it appears to be intrinsically linked to the other benefits of community arts identified above. Creativity requires technical and conceptual knowledge (not necessarily of the traditional and established forms) and resources, opportunities (including time and space) to imagine and think freely, awareness and recognition of the self, and concrete production and expression of new ideas (Runco 2004). In this sense, it can be assumed that community arts could support, or help to restore, at least in part, the power-to of marginal populations (in this case of African American youth), the ability of praxis, in particular, by providing the necessary conditions for them to begin to create and recreate their lives and societies with autonomy.

The achievement of community arts program outcomes such as creative development, in the form of praxis, and all other related aspects, nonetheless, depends on coherent and participatory organizational and managerial procedures (Matarasso 1996), as well as the incorporation of appropriate monitoring and evaluation processes into the program, which increase the possibility of success (Matarasso 2001; U.S. Department of Justice 2000). These are areas where anthropological research could be useful.

### **Community Arts Programs Evaluations**

My (non-exhaustive) literature review shows that some of the disciplines that pay most attention to the subject of community arts are art education, community development and regeneration, mental health, cultural policy, and the arts. Anthropologists have studied the arts to some extent, especially non-Western arts (Firth 1992:34), but they appear to be almost completely absent from the research on

community arts. Although some evaluations and two project reports in my sample were conducted using ethnographic methods<sup>30</sup>, only one scholar is an anthropologist (Bird 2005), and, in the other areas of inquiry, only one more professional has an anthropology degree (Heath 1998). It is my view that there is great potential for anthropological research in this field.

Even though the body of community arts literature has grown in the past decade, one area of research that still appears to be necessary is that of program evaluation. Some scholars have taken on this task, and have suggested ways to plan, implement, and evaluate programs, which can be helpful to all organizations working on new projects. However, as discussed before, the objectives and practices of community art programs are extremely diverse, which makes it difficult, if not impossible, to make comparisons among, and generalize about, the projects described in the literature. This is evident in my sample, and it has been pointed out by other scholars as well (Matarasso 2001:25; Newman 2003:312; Ramsey-White 2005:7). This does not mean that programs cannot be evaluated and that their procedures cannot be clarified to make them more efficient and amenable for scholarly and practical analyses. Evaluations are not only possible, but also important on many fronts.

According to Matarasso (2001), perhaps the most influential scholar in this aspect of community arts, evaluations are imperative in community arts programs because they make clear the objectives and “validate” the ideas of all the stakeholders in a project, which can be quite distinct. Evaluations also help to set the goals of a program and determine when/if they have been met. They provide “reliable and consistent information,” central in decision-making processes about programs; they help to improve

the performance of organizations by making them aware of their practices, their challenges and assets, and facilitating the understanding of failures; they help to ensure accountability, and explain the specific contributions of programs to all the stakeholders and the communities where the work is carried out (19).

Evaluation is about values, Matarasso (1996) states, and values provide benchmarks against which to compare results (2). The idea is to calculate the worth of a program; the problem is that worth is relative (3). Hence, organizations must attempt to achieve balance among the values of all the stakeholders (4), which is not an easy task; and this is especially important today given that community programs and organizations can easily lose control of their missions and visions in the attempt to satisfy the neoliberal agendas of funders (Pérez 2007:93; also Gilmore 2007:47). But the difficulties of achieving this balance are great also because of the general conceptual and methodological discrepancies between the arts and other fields of study.

Putland (2008), for example, looking at the evidence provided in various reports about projects linking the arts with health promotion, explores the problems of communication between artists and health practitioners who regard the necessity of evaluation in significantly different ways. Difficulties appear in defining community arts and their worth in general, and in ensuring that all stakeholders agree on such concepts and values.

In addition to the conceptual issues, in her analysis, Putland (2008) discovers problems of methodological and practical nature, such as lack of resources of short-term projects, as well as limited or inexistent research skills and confidence to evaluate programs among some practitioners. Methodologically, she finds a lack of indicators,



inappropriate use of instruments, selective case studies, small sample sizes, and unclear aims, in addition to the limitations of narrative descriptions of projects. Many of these issues are also evidenced in my study, and claims about benefits are only sometimes made based on sound research and evaluation procedures.

As explained earlier, the sample reviewed here constituted discussions about socially aware or politically engaged art<sup>31</sup>, reports on community arts projects by community artists/scholars<sup>32</sup>, art education analyses and discussions<sup>33</sup>, descriptions of community arts, or reports on projects by scholars in various other fields of study<sup>34</sup>, evaluations of community arts projects<sup>35</sup>, reviews of project evaluations and the evaluation process<sup>36</sup>, community arts organizations<sup>37</sup>, and one paper related to the arts in mental health.<sup>38</sup> Many, if not most, of these papers make claims about the benefits of participation in arts, but it is primarily within the evaluation group that successful attempts to demonstrate the claimed benefits are found. These evaluations, however, are not many, and are for the most part external, not internal evaluations (more on this below - Matarasso 2001:21), and thus conducted by external agents hired to audit the projects. They are mostly large enterprises backed up by important community, governmental and/or educational institutions, with resources, and thus able to afford the evaluators' fees; and funders themselves may demand and pay for the evaluations. On the other hand, it is within the artists or practitioners' reports that internal assessments of projects are found, and these are scant. While many of the evaluations contain discussions of methodologies, samples, theoretical frameworks, and data collection techniques, the reports, as well as the other project descriptions found in the literature, only describe

what went on, without much attention to the evidence necessary to back up the claims about the benefits of participation in the arts.

According to Putland (2008), the practical problems are clear, but they can be worked out by providing the field with the necessary resources for training and support of evaluations. The needs seem to be even more problematic for smaller organizations and individual artists working with few resources in their projects. Granted, many of the problems appear to be resolvable in great measure by ensuring good organization and management of projects. These practices can assist in the conciliation of values, by requiring the recognition and clarification of needs and objectives. They call for the formulation and implementation of plans of action, the identification and administration of resources, and the incorporation of monitoring and assessment systems (U.S. Department of Justice 2000:5). In this sense, Matarasso's (1996) suggested five-step program process is logical and helpful; it comprises: planning, setting indicators, execution of the project, assessment, and reporting. With a clear process like this in place, the evaluation can be efficient and fruitful; that is, if the evaluation itself is well planned and managed, and integrated into the project (Matarasso 2001:5).

At the same time, Kay (2000) states that the evaluation should not be completely dependent on an external auditor; instead, programs should be self-assessed first, and then audited by an outsider (420). Matarasso (2001) makes a similar point (21). He also adds that internal evaluations are the most common approach (although this is not reflected in my sample), that they are usually not expensive, or complicated; but they require time and discipline, and may not be as valid as an independent assessment. They must be simple and realistic, within the limits of the program; the purpose is to learn what

happened and plan for the future, if necessary. These evaluations require methodological rigor, and consistency, and must be linked to the objectives of the project. They must be useful, honest, and critical.

Although external evaluations are somewhat similar to the internal evaluations, according to Matarasso (2001), a professional and independent auditor, who has time, experience, and the necessary skills, must be hired. He observes that it may not be easy to locate an independent evaluator with the appropriate background and experience, and that the external evaluation will always depend on the demands and circumstances of each project, including financial resources, and aims of the evaluation.

In any case, for Matarasso (1996), it is necessary to identify the problems to be tackled, and design the action plan in collaboration with all the stakeholders. The planning process of the evaluation should lead to determining the expected outcomes of the project, and the creation of a scale of measurement, or indicators, to measure results. The indicators, then, correspond to the objectives of the projects; they measure the achievement of particular goals for specific outcomes. Indicators help to decide when goals are met, but the information about such goals must be collected being mindful of the possibility of unforeseen outcomes.

Thus, evaluators must know exactly what needs to be evaluated; they also need to know what would be the use of the evaluation, whether it is to continue a program, to extend it, to modify it, or to end it. Evaluators must examine the audience's response to the program, analyze costs, long-term impacts, levels of participation and support, as well as the resources used in the project (U.S. Department of Justice 2000:5).

During the execution, or implementation, stage of the evaluation process, everyone involved must know what is going on, why and how the project is being assessed, and agree on the process (Matarasso 1996:25). This has to be carried out and monitored with appropriate methods. There are, however, many issues that need to be sorted out in order to be able to determine the quality of program outcomes through evaluation.

Matarasso (1996) explains, and my study confirms, that even though the arts may contribute to measurable outcomes such as economic growth, they are perhaps more influential in the wellbeing, health, stability, development, and happiness of people (among other processes), and it is much more difficult to express those values (1). This explains why the most common issue described in community arts programs evaluations is the lack of robust evidence to support claims about the many effects of the arts (Hamilton 2003; Newman et al, 2003; Putland 2008; Hawkes 2002; Ramsey-White and Rentschler 2005).

The lack of quantitative evidence, especially, appears to be particularly problematic in the context of grant writing, and in the evaluation reports required by program funders who expect quantifiable results. Newman et al. (2003) believe that it is a necessity to provide such data, but they are also aware of the methodological difficulties of acquiring them, and pose important questions about the appropriateness of managing and controlling creative processes (310). For Putland (2008) and Hamilton (2003:5), however, the extent to which evaluations can actually influence policy or bring support is questionable. In any case, if funders require this type of data it is imperative for organizations to provide it if they want to continue receiving support.

At the same time, according to Matarasso (1996), although quantitative data are easier to use than qualitative data, they are limited, and the nature and context of their use may undermine the goals of certain stakeholders, or entire organizations, seeking political change. Thus, for Matarasso, it is important to balance the quantitative approach with qualitative measures. In this way, he suggests the use of statistics in conjunction with data from focus groups, interviews, participant observation, action research or other qualitative research methods. For him, in the arts, both subjective and personal responses are fundamental; therefore, none can be omitted. However, we know that the use of qualitative and quantitative data depends on the needs of the research; hence this must be taken as a suggestion for cases when both types of data are usable.

To analyze and assess outcomes, information is collected about what happened during the project (outputs) (Matarasso 2001:27). In the project evaluations Newman et al. (2003) analyzed, the “most robust and reliable” used a combination of several data collection techniques, including semi-structured interviews with various stakeholders, random surveys, informal public interviews, direct observations, monitoring local news, case studies, questionnaires, written reports, discussions or focus groups, document analyses, teacher assessments, or evaluation reports (314-317). Self-reports also appear to be relevant in some of those evaluations and these include information on positive changes in the personal, social, economic, and educational areas (318). I found that many of the aforementioned data collection techniques, plus participant observation techniques (in the ethnographies), were used in the evaluations herein reviewed.

After data collection, the data are analyzed and compared against expectations (Matarasso 2001:27). After completion and analysis, all stakeholders discuss the results

of the project and plan for the future, if necessary. This is followed by the report, which includes information about successes, failures, problems, solutions, unforeseen outcomes, and other important events. The main audience are all the stakeholders of the project, although other audiences may be targeted as well (Matarasso 2001:27). Carey and Sutton (2004) state that evaluations results need to be reported to inform policy-makers, practitioners, participants, and the general public about the assets and challenges of their efforts. Evaluations should enable communication, and they need to reflect the voices of all participants, not only those of the managers.

In this section, so far I have explained how reports on community arts projects generally present methodological problems, which result in unsupported, or ill-supported, claims about the benefits of participation in the arts. As we have seen, several of such issues could be addressed by following some basic guidelines, and by ensuring appropriate coordination and management of projects. This also requires a participatory framework, where all stakeholders are part of the planning, implementation, and evaluation, processes.

As stated previously, in my sample, anthropologists appear to be almost absent from the community arts research. However, in the area of community arts programs evaluations, scholars in the fields of sociology (Lowe 2000), art education (Krensky 2001), women studies and geography (Mattingly 2001), and communications (de Roeper 2009), have utilized ethnographic methods. These evaluations are not as technical as suggested above, lacking sometimes the definition of specific outcomes and related indicators, as well as information about inputs and outputs. However, the evaluators make their methodologies and conceptual frameworks clear, and provide descriptions and

results that seem to be valid. These evaluations are different from each other in many ways, and therefore preclude the possibility of making generalizations, but they also present some basic similarities in the methodologies that can be outlined for the sake of analysis.

For example, all evaluators introduce the community arts program (or programs), frame it theoretically, and contextualize it in some measure. They define the methodology (no one uses quantitative data), and proceed to describe their observations and experiences recorded throughout the development of the project. They focus on activities, people's responses to various events, and noteworthy situations (outputs); they report the results of data analyses, and link the outcomes back to the original objectives, and precepts. They discuss the implications of their findings, for the participant population, their community, the larger society, and even themselves. They all rely heavily on interviews, focus groups or group discussions, as well as their own observations. In general, they are well organized and their conclusions match the findings reported. Negative unintended outcomes are not expressed.

In comparison with other evaluations that do not use ethnography<sup>39</sup>, these accounts are evidently richer in the descriptions of the program events and activities, and perhaps also different in their preoccupation with linking the theoretical assumptions to the end results. There are other differences and commonalities among the ethnographies, and the other evaluations, but these brief observations suffice to establish some reasons why anthropology could be an asset in this type of work.

Although the evaluations described above present the basic ethnographic techniques, there are some anthropological methodological and ethical principles and

practices that could be added or further emphasized to enrich them. For instance, anthropologists should pay more attention to the context, and attempt to understand first hand the communities where the programs are based, in order to better comprehend processes, activities, and events, and represent the emic perspectives. In addition, anthropologists should ensure that the aims of all the stakeholders are made explicit, and determine whether they are aligned or reconciled throughout the project, this is particularly important to avoid losing the voice of the community participants, and to guarantee their wellbeing at all times.

Anthropologists should also take time to understand the internal relationships and dynamics of the groups, and report on conflicts stemmed from miscommunication and misunderstandings. Applied anthropologists especially should take the role of participant observers seriously and contribute to the best of their capacity, and according to the needs and constraints of the project, to the development of the project, and the resolution of conflicts.

Anthropologists are trained in a variety of research methods, and can collect and analyze different kinds of data. It might be possible for them to identify the clarity or obscurity of objectives, conceptual frameworks, and results, and also formulate appropriate questions for different stakeholders. They look for singularities and patterns, and make generalizations when possible. In sum, although ultimately the quality of the evaluation will depend on the quality of the evaluator, and the conditions of the project, anthropologists are trained with a good set of methodologies, theories, and ethical principles that make them, in general, good candidates to work as evaluators in community arts.



In the next section, I discuss how community arts programs could help to resolve some of the issues that affect disadvantaged youth specifically, using the definitions, theoretical and methodological insights I have provided so far.

### **Community Arts for Disadvantaged African American Youth**

Thus far, I have described a number of theories and practices with the objective to formulate a plan to address the oppression of African American youth through community arts.

I have described community arts within the context of community organizations. These organizations can serve a variety of purposes nowadays, including community-building (of the relational kind), political organizing (the formation of communities of interest), educational, and social service functions, among others, all usually based in a locality (territorial community). However, the literature reviewed here describes community arts programs as primarily concerned with the problems of marginalized communities and individuals. They focus on eliciting or influencing processes of social and cultural change to improve those people's living conditions, either through individual transformation, or also involving some form of collective action.

I have looked at the particular case of disadvantaged youth, especially of African American descent, who are especially affected by processes of oppression and societal abuse. It was established that there are many issues that constrain their integral wellbeing, and some are more salient than others. These include, practices that prohibit the youths' creative capacities (power-to), ruin their self-esteems and diminish their cultural values, disregard and eliminate their voices from the public sphere, and enclose them in prison-like spaces where they are not allowed to think or to act for themselves.

It was also determined that community arts programs can potentially offer a wide range of benefits to participants, and that the benefits identified may constitute possible objectives to guide a variety of programs, including one to address the main concerns of African American youth. However, the achievement, recognition, and improvement of program objectives will depend on logical and participatory organizational and managerial procedures, as well as the incorporation of appropriate monitoring and evaluation processes into the programs.

The findings of this academic exercise are important in the attempt to determine the way in which a community arts program, within an organization, can contribute to the resolution of some of the problems that affect African American youth. In the following chapter, I outline an anthropological methodology for the design, implementation, and evaluation of a community arts program, which aims to determine the potential of community arts in promoting the development of a group of disadvantaged African American kids, based on the information provided in this literature review.

### **Chapter 3:**

#### **Methodology**

The purpose of this project was to create and evaluate a community arts program, in the form of an anthropological participatory video. The evaluation would target and measure specific outcomes that hypothetically could help to offset the marginalization of a group of African American young people, following the recommendations of community arts experts, and thus contributing to the advancement of the field. The guiding hypothesis, derived from the bodies of literature on community arts and African American life, was that community arts programs could contribute significantly to the general wellbeing of disadvantaged African American youth. However, although African Americans are disadvantaged in many ways, little was known about the lives of this particular program's participants, and thus, a more inductive ethnographic approach was needed.

An inductive approach, in addition to the deductive approach brought by the a-priori hypothesis, helped to determine whether the needs of African American youth in Sulphur Springs, Tampa, matched those implied in the literature, and if so, whether the internal program evaluation proposed here could provide sufficient data to support the claims that a community arts program could fulfill the kids' needs. If there were discrepancies between the literature and the reality of the project participants, then the idea was to determine how a community arts program could address the fundamental

concerns of the kids and those of their families and community more generally. The program evaluation in the second case could better serve to determine a more appropriate methodology for program implementation and evaluation, according to the newly established outcomes.

The community arts/video projects that were produced and evaluated adhered to the participatory and social justice principles of the original notion of community arts, the community arts organization where it was housed, and the field of applied anthropology. In that sense, the project made use of a non-traditional pedagogical model that was participatory and that used anthropological ethnographic research. The goal was for the youth to investigate their own lives, identify the problems they wanted to tackle, and the existing resources and assets that could allow them to create a product to act upon such problem (or problems), while participating in the improvement of their lives and of their community. I termed this methodology "cultural praxis."

Cultural praxis elicited ethnographic data about the children's lives, at the same time that it generated a project to be evaluated in order to test a hypothesis. It was based on three important methodologies: First, Participatory Action Research (PAR), "...a [relatively] recent trend among some researchers to turn more of the actual process and ownership of research over to citizens' groups, local communities, and to people who have been previously neglected or perceived as merely passive beneficiaries or objects of policy research" (Ervin 2005:219). It holds the fundamental belief that problems can be better resolved by the people who are affected by them. By using PAR I recognize that children and youth have agency (Bluebond-Langner 2007), and the capacity to make important decisions and to participate constructively in their communities and societies at

large. The second influential methodology was Community-Based Participatory Research and Outreach (CBPRO), a variation of the PAR model with emphasis on “outreach,” which extends the research and action network and expands the program through other not directly involved constituencies (Diaz 2007). Finally, the third influence was Cammarota’s (2008) Cultural Organizing praxis-based pedagogy. Here, students engage in a four-step process, intervention, penetration, formalization, and recreation, in which they identify and investigate a problem that affects their lives directly through ethnography and textual research, then critically analyze the acquired data through group dialogue, and finally apply the newly acquired knowledge in the creation of a cultural product that is used to contribute to the process of generating social justice. Dialogue and reflection are important components in research with children and youth, for they allow the participants’ voices to emerge (Christensen 2004).

Cultural praxis is primarily based on *cultural organizing*, but it takes from PAR the explicit recognition of the community’s resources and assets (Ervin 2005:222), not only its needs, and openly considers the implications of the project’s process and results (Whyte 1991:20). From CBPRO, it borrows the emphasis on outreach, to acknowledge the possibilities of extending the benefits of community arts to others throughout the project, not only at the end. In addition, in contrast to Community Organizing, this project does not only focus on organizing, but uses a definition of praxis that recognizes the option of a variety of productive activities that can influence the lives of participants and the course of their society.

This was a special kind of ethnographic case study, where ethnography was used in the production of participatory videos, but also in the evaluation of the same.

Ethnography is the best form to systematically understand “how people think, believe, [and] behave” in a particular space at a particular time (LeCompte 1999:8). It can help to understand the strengths and weaknesses of a group of people, in relation with others, and inform the production of different cultural practices, mindful of the positive traditions that sustain a community, and the negative aspects that must be changed. It allows researchers to learn about others in relation to themselves, and vice-versa, and how to better communicate and live with each other. The dialogical and intensive nature of ethnography make it ideal to understand others’ points of view, and to hear their voices, especially in working with children (Christensen 2004). The primary data collection technique in ethnography is participant observation, a method in which the researcher acts as one more participant of the activity being observed, taking careful notes of the events, behaviors, and any other important situations that occur (Schensul 1999:91). But ethnographers utilize a variety of other techniques, quantitative and qualitative, including interviews, surveys, focus groups, elicitation, and social mapping.

### **Data Collection Techniques**

In order to understand the community, its needs and assets, I conducted background ethnographic research about the City of Tampa, Sulphur Springs, and the MH. This comprised the inspection of census data (e.g., social and economic indicators), scholarly readings about the neighborhood and the city (Brown 2004; Greenbaum ; Greenbaum 2008; Simpson 2000; Spillane 2007; The Institute for Community Research - The University of Tampa 1997), and analyses and visualization of resources and services in the Sulphur Springs and Tampa areas through ArcGIS, a Geographic Information

Systems software (with data from the Florida Center for Community Design and Research 2012 and; referenceUSA 2010), participant observation in the activities of the MH over the course of almost two years, formal and informal talks with the youth, their family members, and others about community arts, the neighborhood, and life in general. I recorded my observations, feelings and individual and collective reactions to everything that occurred at MH during my tenure at the organization. Thus, this evaluation incorporates a critical analysis of the MH work and structure in general, which determined to a great extent the conditions of the cultural praxis project. The data acquired before and after the cultural praxis project reflect my immersion in the relationships, the construction of the environment, the curriculum design and delivery of programs at MH.

As a complex research project, the cultural praxis program and evaluation specifically required a mixed methods research approach. For this purpose, I captured qualitative and semi-quantitative data simultaneously. In addition to pre- and post-project interviews, I observed the project's processes carefully and recorded my observations in a systematic way; at the same time, the kids evaluated themselves systematically before and after the project, and engaged in specific creative activities that I observed and analyzed. Other details were captured through ethnographic notes. In this process, I was concurrently using a variety of instruments, in order to understand the perspectives of the kids from different angles, and for triangulation purposes. Since I was also participating in the activities that prompted the children's behaviors being evaluated, and I was responsible for creating the learning environment and for delivering the curriculum that would elicit the kids' responses and behaviors, in addition to capturing the evaluation

information, most of the data were not captured immediately as the observations occurred, but at the end of each day of work.

Ultimately, all the data gathered are a reflection of my interests and of my perspectives on the kids' work and behaviors, but also of life, more generally, and of my emotional, physical, and mental states at the different times in which they were captured. This is not too different from the work of other scientists, but it brings to light the process of scientific research and what it entails in a more applied setting. My observations reflect the work that I did at MH from the beginning to the end, and the children's responses to my motivations, and our actions together. Certainly, at least part of what I measured were the kids' responses to the environment and the conditions that were co-created to a great extent and available for their productions. The data help to evaluate not only the kids' behaviors stemming from their personal and social histories, but also the actual program design and delivery, and the setting in which it was immersed. In this way, etic and emic categories are all intrinsic in my work. I facilitated the conditions for our productions, as part of a larger system of relationships and resources, and the kids offered their knowledge, perceptions, and attitudes, all with the objective to eventually create better informed and more efficient and relevant programs for MH, and perhaps for other organizations that serve similar populations.

While the information collected prior to and after the cultural praxis project reflects a general perspective on what went on at MH during those periods of time, the cultural praxis project data derive from the production of videos with the kids and their behaviors during the life of the project. In the latter, the outcomes sought were specific, and elicited through the pedagogical approach. I allowed the kids' videos to emerge from



my cumulative experiences teaching video production before and my relationships with the kids, as well as from their interests, and individual and group characteristics. The data were captured as follows.

**1. How do disadvantaged African American youth define their place in society, their present contributions, and future possibilities? What do they want to change? What do they want to maintain?** To answer this question, two semistructured interviews with each participant, one at the beginning and one at the end of the project, were conducted in order to track changes in their perceptions and responses. This type of interview helps to understand or confirm a particular domain (Schensul 1999:149); in this case, the domain was the definition of the youths' lives in relation with the world around them.

In addition, two focus groups with all the participants, one at the beginning of the project and one at the end, were conducted in order to define the collective notions of the kids' lives and environment. Other activities (imagination assessment exercise, participant observation (see below) also helped to answer this question. The interviews and focus groups served to address other questions in this project, and other activities helped, in turn, to answer this first question (e.g., participant observation). Appendix 1 contains the instruments used to answer this question.

**2. How do these youth define and experience the role of community arts, and community arts organizations, in their lives and the neighborhood?** This question was answered through the aforementioned semistructured interviews and focus groups. The domain here was the youth's relationships with community arts organizations. As part of the interview, I utilized a form of visual elicitation using maps to understand the

behaviors and knowledge of the participants in relation with the organizations and the neighborhood. Specifically, I brought cartographic maps to the interviews, and used them to elicit space/place-related information from the youth. A similar combination of semistructured interview and elicitation using maps were used also with the youths' parents/guardians, in order to understand their views of community arts organizations, and their expectations from this and other community arts projects.

The focus groups were used to help define the collective uses of, and responses to, the work of community arts programs and organizations. It also helped to determine which activities the youth wanted to pursue at the MH in the future, and in our specific project. The second focus group included an elicitation exercise that illustrated the changes in the children's perceptions about the MH specifically. Appendix 2 provides the instruments for this section.

**3. To what extent can a community arts project's assumed benefits affect these notions (answers to first two questions), and influence social change?** Answers to this question derived from the participatory video projects the youth designed through Cultural praxis in order to address extant issues (related to community drugs and to violence in the neighborhood). They also derived from the analyses of data acquired to evaluate the outcomes of the program, defined based on previous community arts and African American life literature reviews. The evaluation tested the capacity of community arts to deliver their promises, and made evident the necessary conditions for a successful program evaluation, design and implementation.

Following the tenets of participatory video, whereby participants are involved in all the decision-making processes, including content and form (Chalfen 2011), for the

videos, the methods to collect information were decided upon in focus group meetings with the youth, and were also determined by the project's needs. These will be explained in detail in the project chapter. Although the idea was to create one video and evaluate it, in the initial focus group, we decided to create two videos instead, one to practice and test the skills the kids gained during the first phase of the project; and a second one to apply and refine all the knowledge gained during the previous video production. We made this decision because the kids needed to learn almost everything related to video production, and I was working under the assumption that it was important for the kids to produce a high quality product, in order for them to feel proud of the final results of our efforts (a notion that is common among community artists). Their first video was likely to be of low quality and not as sophisticated as a second one made with even more information and previous practice. Creating two shorter projects seemed like a good idea also because the kids wanted to explore several topics in video, and having two projects allowed them to explore more aspects of their lives.

**4. How can the effects of such a project be evaluated?** For this project, an internal evaluation was the preferred method. First, there were no resources, nor the need, to engage an external agent in the evaluation process, since the MH was just beginning to establish its programs and pedagogical approach, as well as its basic infrastructure (more on this in the setting chapter). In this sense, this project was a case study to help determine the feasibility of a cultural praxis approach, and also the necessary outcomes that could direct the organization towards reaching its objective of offsetting in some way the marginalization to which the kids in Sulphur Springs are subjected. This pilot project could potentially help to inform the organization about adequate design, implementation,

and evaluation methodologies to be utilized in future projects also. Since I had experience with video production and instruction, and also had the necessary information to engage in an evaluation, the project herein described met the most essential requirements for evaluation research (Matarasso 1996; Matarasso 2001), although admittedly, the multiple tasks required simultaneously by the different jobs were difficult to juggle at times, and in that sense an assistant should be sought in future evaluations of this kind.

Nonetheless, as a first step to systematically determine the needs of the participants and how they could be best addressed by the MH, this internal evaluation was adequate, albeit it could use adjustments in the future. It helped to test a new methodology and pedagogical approach, and thoroughly assessed the organization's assets and challenges. Moreover, this ethnography attempted to address some of the gaps in the current community arts program evaluation practices. Specifically, it offered a deep study of the participant community and the organization, an integrated and internal evaluation, using a mixed methods and triangulated approach, with clear definitions of outcomes, indicators, inputs, and outputs. This work can potentially help to guide other future community arts programs and projects in similar settings with few resources.

As determined in the literature review, an external evaluation is more fruitful after an internal assessment has been conducted. The next step for MH would be to make adjustments according to the findings presented in this study, and in any other subsequent internal evaluations, and then subject its programs to verification by outside "social auditors," as indicated by Kay (2000:420), that is, if the necessary resources for an external evaluation can be secured. The next paragraphs describe the specific methods used to evaluate this program.

## **Evaluating Cultural Praxis**

To monitor the progress of the cultural praxis project, the objectives, a working schedule, and responsibilities for each person in the group were determined with them. To assess the benefits of participation in the entire project, however, I monitored the changes in the individual participants and the group dynamics, in general. The assessment was based on the expected outcomes of community arts, all of which contribute to the development of the creative process (i.e., praxis). They were also based on the participants' needs, as identified in the literature review, the initial individual interviews and the focus groups. Although data were captured about many areas of development related to the expected outcomes, and questions were asked in different ways, for the final analyses, I only chose indicators that evaluated the presence or absence of positive behaviors, and discarded questions whose answers could be ambivalent or unclear, including those that evaluated negative behaviors. For example, I evaluated simultaneously whether the kids got in trouble, and whether they stayed out of trouble. I discarded the question asked in negative terms (the kids getting in trouble), and kept the positive one (the kids staying out of trouble), because the observations of the negative behaviors were confusing.

Every day, after my work with the kids, I made note of specific behaviors, which constituted the indicators or measurements for each outcome. In addition, I created simpler instruments where the kids evaluated themselves on these same aspects, and they filled out these forms at the beginning and at the end of the project. The observations to assess the promises of participation in community arts were recorded using instruments constructed based on a wide range of literature sources, and on the definitions of the

concepts and scales provided by other scientists (e.g., Arizona 2011; Diener 1999; Heatherton 1991; Jorgensen 2001; Rosenberg 1995; TINCAN N/D), as well as derived from my professional and academic experiences, all of which helped to define each domain (see appendixes 3-7). Other community arts scholars' instruments were not used because they were either unavailable or did not respond to the needs of this project, the outcomes were different, the research design different, and therefore the means to acquire data were also different. This is not rare for, as Alan Kay (2000) explains, each project is different and has distinct objectives and values (420), which amount to different evaluation needs.

The existing scales that measured some of the outcomes sought here were not enough to capture the information I needed in order to design future programs at MH. Although I integrated information, as suggestions, from those instruments and sources, the outcomes to be evaluated in this program were specific for a disadvantaged African American children and youth population; and the scales required a particular language and organization, they required unique content and form. It was important for me, for example, to record my observations as well as the kids' responses, and thus the datasets had to be aligned for comparison purposes. Also, in order to capture certain details and patterns, I had to record my observations on a daily basis. None of this was possible using other scales. Even though it is possible that my instruments might serve as the basis for other organizations' evaluations with a similar population, community organizations need to ensure that their evaluation instruments match the organizations' objectives in response to their populations' needs as well.

These instruments were being tested for the first time for their effectiveness to track down behavioral changes (a set of outcomes) in a particular population, and therefore cannot be considered entirely accurate or final. Rather, the instruments, in addition to other data collection strategies described here, help to define an effective methodology for this particular setting and population, and for the base organization. Very important information was abstracted from these exercises and methods and it can be used in the formulation of more valid and reliable research techniques in the future.

### **Recruitment of Participants**

My work with the MH gave me the necessary access to many of the neighborhood's young people and their families. The kids with whom I worked in previous projects were recruited for the research project herein described.

The initial plan was to recruit ten youth, aged 13-18 (five girls and five boys), and one or both of their parents/guardians, but I was open to changing the age range of the children if younger kids were more interested in the project. This was the case. I decided to work only with children who already attended the MH programs consistently (9-12 year olds), instead of recruiting other kids in the neighborhood. I also realized that giving the opportunity to be part of the program to kids who did not attend MH programs regularly was unfair to the organization's children. MH participants had helped me design my recruitment strategy to a great extent and helped me to determine the best way to compensate participants as well. They had learned about the program and some became very interested in participating, not necessarily because they knew there would be compensation, even though indisputably that helped them to get motivated as well.

They asked me continuously about the terms of the project, and some knew that they wanted to enroll early on in the process. I realized that because the MH was working at that point with pre-adolescents much more than with adolescents, if I were to recruit the kids from the MH, I would have to focus on this population and not the older kids. At that point, the adolescents had withdrawn from the MH little by little, as they saw younger kids join the organization's programs; there were intergenerational conflicts among these groups. The older kids did not want to engage in activities with the younger ones and vice versa. These conflicts were confirmed in my interviews with the kids later on.

Initially, I also proposed to recruit ten youth participants, and their parents/guardians. I thought this number was more than sufficient to constitute the core group for my research and the production of the community video. This number of participants would allow a margin for contingencies (e.g., in case some participants decided to drop out of the project before its completion). However, this plan also changed. During the spring semester of 2011, I worked on establishing rapport with some of the youth I identified as possible participants; yet, several children who initially said they wanted to be part of the project never attended the important meetings or canceled our interview sessions. This worked to my advantage at the end, because I knew that keeping ten children under control every session for several months would be extremely difficult, even with the help of other volunteers. It also worked out well because whenever we had to mobilize, I only had to use one vehicle, without having to rely on other MH staff. The number of participants in the project did not diminish the quality of my research; in fact, I expected some kids to withdraw at some point. My goal was to have a core group of at least five children, and I was able to accomplish that. I began with



six, and ended with five. I also recruited two other children as support staff during the video productions. They wanted to be part of the larger project, but I did not accept them because they had shown very disruptive behaviors at MH before, and required much more attention than I could give them during this project. Although at MH we tried to be inclusive, and serve any children who showed interest in our programs, it was clear that the more disruptive children needed individualized attention, which we could give only sometimes, when we had several volunteers in the house. During my project, one-on-one attention was impossible, therefore, I recruited the children who could perform relatively well in groups, even though that did not ensure exemplary behaviors by any means.

Interestingly, all the kids who expressed interest and who were eventually recruited as participants, except for one, were related to each other. They were either siblings, half-siblings, or cousins. At the MH, we knew that some of the kids were part of the same family, but we did not understand the extent of these relationships until I began to recruit the children. They belonged to a quite large extended family and were very close to each other. To a great extent, the kids' relatedness facilitated the recruitment process and also the cooperation with their families, as well as the inter-group dynamics. However, for the only girl who was not part of the family, these relationships became problematic. A couple of weeks into the project, she felt as an outsider and refused to be part of the group photographs, claiming that she did not want to be part of their "family pictures." Eventually, this girl decided to withdraw from the project completely, after a discussion she had with another girl in the program.

At the same time, since the project aimed to be inclusive, and sought to understand the reality of African American youth in Sulphur Springs, in general,

regardless of gender, I wanted to have an equal number of girls and boys. However, it was difficult to recruit boys for this program. In general, I found out that my position as a woman allowed me to establish relationships much quicker with the girls, while the boys at MH tended to gravitate more towards the male volunteers and administrators at the beginning. At the end, however, I was able to build quite strong relationships with the boys I recruited as well.

Finally, I recruited a secondary group composed of three girls and two boys. They were interviewed for half an hour each about their knowledge and experience with community arts organizations, and in the neighborhood. These interviews confirmed much of the information collected in my work with the kids in the core group. I decided not to interview any more kids because the information gathered at that point appeared to be sufficient, and redundant, but also because getting consent from parents/guardians was extremely time consuming and not always possible; this was especially problematic because the core group and I were working intensively during that time, and there was little opportunity for me to track down the other kids and their parents.

### **Reward System**

During recruitment, a monetary incentive was offered for every hour of participation in the project in the form of gift cards for the core participants, and cash for the parents/guardians and for those recruited as part of the secondary and support groups. Participants were paid \$8.00 per hour, or \$4.00 per half an hour. The kids who constituted the core group and those who worked supporting the video production decided to save their money until the end of each video project, and we decided together

that instead of gift cards, it would be more efficient if I took them shopping. In that way, they could spend their money more freely, without the limitations of caps for each store. It also gave them flexibility, when they were unable to find what they wanted at the stores, or if they decided to change their minds and exchange any products at the end. I took them shopping with the help of MH volunteers the first time, and with family members for the second round of purchases. The participant who quit the project a couple of weeks after we began, received payment for the hours worked in the form of a gift card for her chosen store. Parents/guardians were paid immediately after the interviews, in cash. For the kids recruited as part of the secondary group, payments were made in cash also, immediately after the interviews.

### **Analysis of the Reward System**

Note: For all purposes, participants in this research were assigned pseudonyms in order to protect their privacy and confidentiality.

I realize that the incentives offered had an impact on the individuals' decisions to participate consistently in the activities of the program, and to stay until the end of it. However, I know that the incentives were not the only or the most important motivator. During recruitment, for example, the kids were not completely aware of the significance of the incentives, and they expressed interest in learning and in having a fun activity to do during the summer. As will be exemplified in a later chapter, most of the kids also expressed how happy they were while working on the project, and how boring it was for them to stay at home with nothing to do.

Nonetheless, to be sure, at the start of the program, I asked the mothers why they thought the kids wanted to work with me. Lana expressed that the kids “pick up a lot from you...” In her mind, the kids wanted to join the project “cause it would have a positive impact.” She added that the kids looked for the “inspiration and the motivation.” At the same time, Marsha expressed that the kids “...like to be independent, and doing stuff like that, getting their own money and being able to buy their own stuff.”

During the first set of interviews, I also asked the kids why they wanted to join the project. They wanted to bring their skills to the project and had lots of ideas about the messages they wanted to get across. Charlie said he wanted to join: “To tell anybody in the MH, I am with the MH and the Rec Center and them people over there [Community Stepping Stones, a neighboring community organization]... I want to learn how to do all the planning for a project.” Kaija said: “Because, it is going to be fun, and I am going to be with other people.” She said she wanted “to learn new dances and... what is hard and what is not hard... in life.” Cristina’s answers were: “Cause it is going to be about making music and videos and all that.” She also said she might be interested in learning to make videos and using the camera. She thought she already knew “something about my neighborhood,” and that she could teach us about it. Daquan was emphatic in his answer: “Cause I want to learn about the community.” Maria said: “Cause, we get money, and we can learn how to make videos.” Dalia said she wanted to “learn more about the MH.”

But their motivations were also evident during the first several weeks after we completed the program. I received daily calls from the kids asking me to pick them up and to take them to the MH to work on something (at that point all the MH programs had

ended and there were only a couple of activities open for the children). The kids were bored and wanted to have something to do, even without compensation. Interestingly, the kids also seemed to appreciate our work together much more when they skipped one or two days of work or when they were suspended for their lack of cooperation; at those moments, they realized that being at home was uninteresting and that being unoccupied was terrible for them in the summer. Those intrinsic motivators, then, became very strong as well, and were clearly stated throughout, and even more when we ended the project and they were left at home without anything fun to do or to learn. Several months after our program, for instance, one of the girls told me that we needed "another project." They wanted to create more things in a similar structure as the one we utilized during the summer, and were willing to do so without payments. They were genuinely interested in making more videos, learning more techniques and telling different stories.

Hence, although I am aware that the monetary incentives were strong motivators for the kids, and they also aided in my ability to maintain a consistent group and collect data for several months, there were also other important motivators that came with other rewards (fun, engagement in a creative practice, being away from home in a safe environment, and so forth). In that sense, community arts managers and administrators, as well as researchers, must be attentive to the issue of rewards. They need to incorporate them very carefully into their projects and those must constitute part of the general and long-term strategies in their curriculums. Material rewards, but also emotional and mental rewards are all important, but they need to be strategically placed in each program, and tapped into in order to help in the development and growth of children. The rewards can be immediate, but not so much that the kids do not learn about the importance of

sustained work and effort in the accomplishment of a task. Immediate rewards, however, can serve to capture the interest and attention of children, especially those who have already been conditioned to act through expecting rewards.

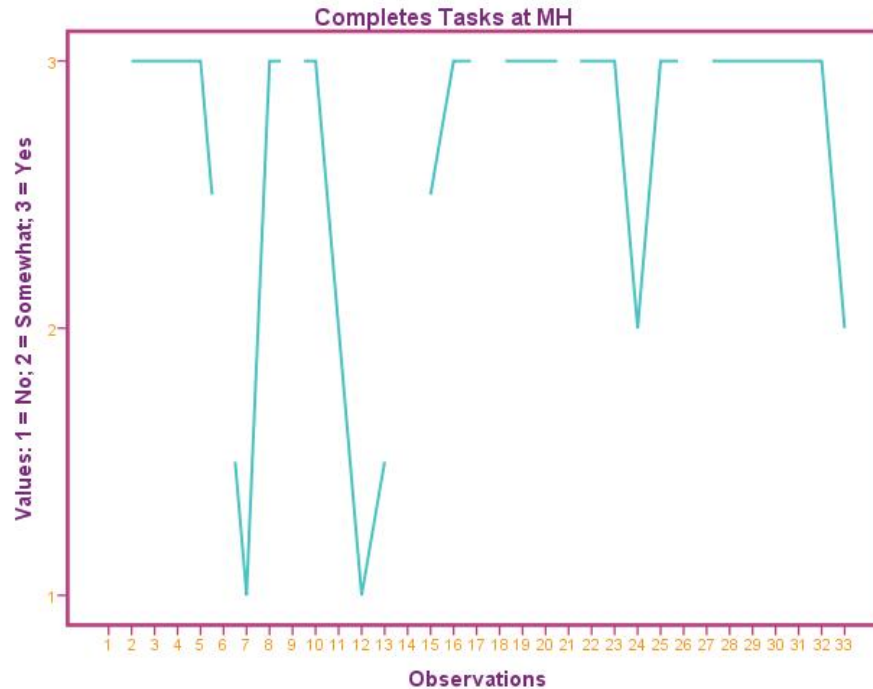
## **Data Analysis**

The analysis of data for this project was complex and non-traditional. The ethnographic field notes, analytical notes, and interviews were coded using Atlas.ti; however, the recorded observations had to be analyzed using inventive strategies, and in the future a more systematized form needs to be developed in order to increase accuracy and to facilitate the process.

Because this was a case study with few participants, it was impossible to generate statistical reports. However, SPSS was used to generate graphics that helped to find patterns in the records of my observations of the kids' behaviors and work. Three values were recorded, whether the kid had shown a particular behavior regularly during the day, whether the behavior had been inconsistent, but was present, and whether the behavior was absent and instead the opposite, and unwanted, behavior manifested. Figure 1 exemplifies the way a behavior was recorded for a particular child during the course of the project and the kind of pattern that these observations generated.

I analyzed each graphic for each behavior, and for each child, in this way. Each behavior was an indicator for a particular outcome. The figure below measures an indicator/behavior that was part of a cluster that defined the kid's industriousness, which helped to define in turn the larger outcome of creativity. This should become clearer in

the results chapter, and appendixes 3-7 describe exactly the items that constituted each cluster of indicators and which outcomes they defined.



**Figure 1. Sample of Pattern of Behavior - Observations for one Child in the Domain “Completes Tasks at MH.”** This Figure shows the pattern for one child’s record of completion of tasks at MH. It indicates that the kid was able to complete work regularly, but she had two low points, during observations 7 and 12, and mid points at 24 and 33. All other recorded observations were high in value, which means that the positive behavior was manifested consistently.

The kids’ self-evaluations were analyzed in similar terms, but not using SPSS, for each kid filled evaluations only twice, at the beginning and then at the end of the program. The evaluations were constructed using Likert-type scales. However, because, again, the sample was extremely small and few observations existed for each child, no statistical analyses were performed. Instead, the value changes in the kids’ responses were tracked. This was perhaps the least automated type of analysis I performed and it

will need to be revised and certainly improved in the future. Less manual and more efficient ways to determine the patterns in this sense need to be designed. Not only that, but it is questionable whether these type of scales are appropriate in evaluations with children. As will be discussed later, the kids' responses to these questions were sometimes diametrically opposed to their answers in interviews, to my observations, and/or to their mothers and grandmother's perceptions. Nonetheless, I used the data contained in these questionnaires for triangulation purposes, and I believe they can be helpful in my analyses.

As an example, figure 2 shows the questionnaires each kid filled out to rate their learning abilities. The answers to some of these questions were used as part of the larger cluster of indicators defining self-esteem and self-concept, but also to support other aspects of my research.

When the kids' answers in the initial and the final evaluations differed by two or more points in these scales, they were considered significantly different for the purpose of my analyses. Also, the answers were organized in three groups, in order to match the observations in my own evaluations. Thus, answers could have a high value, an intermediate value or a low value. In the case of the agree/disagree scale, there was also a neutral value. Below are explanations of how these values were determined exactly.

Finally, the coded ethnographic materials and the evaluations results were triangulated in search of the most accurate and representative information that could define patterns in the kids' behaviors. Although in many occasions the data differ from each other in significant ways, making it extremely difficult to arrive at a particular

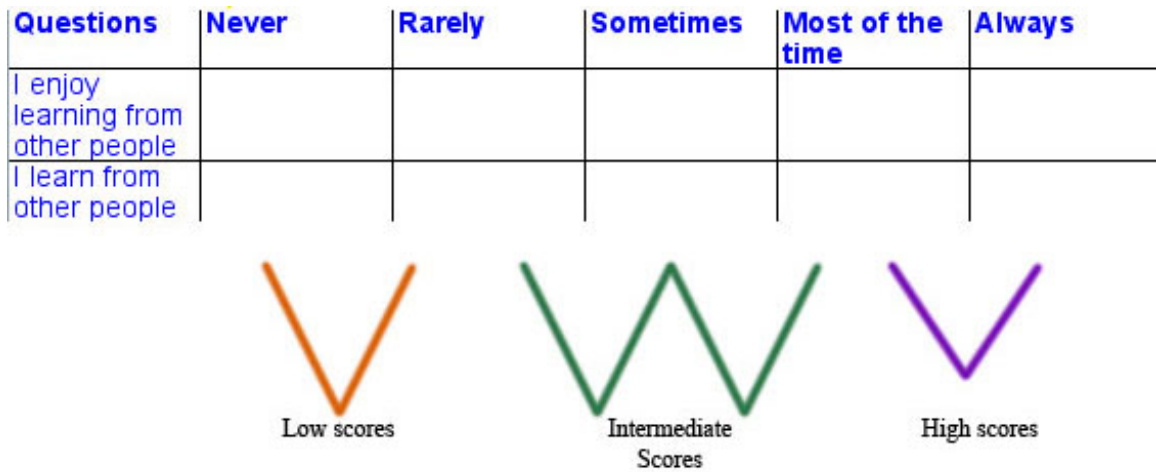


conclusion, in other cases, patterns were obvious and more clearly defined. This will become clear in the subsequent chapters.

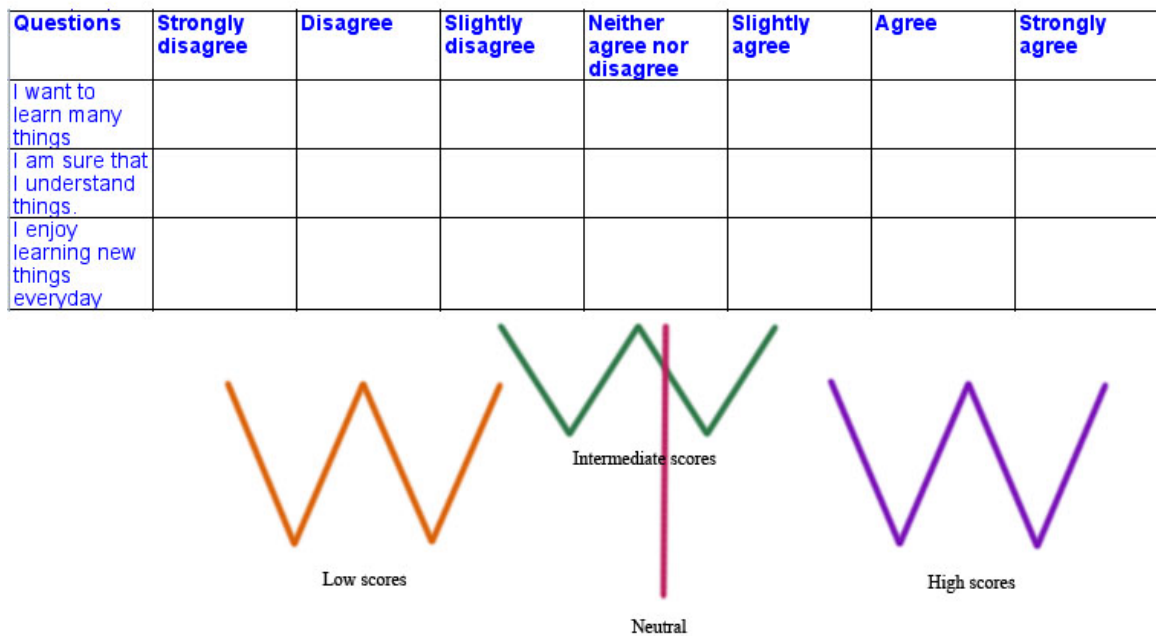
6	<b>Questions</b>	<b>Never</b>	<b>Rarely</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Most of the time</b>	<b>Always</b>		
7	I enjoy learning from other people							
8	I learn from other people							
9	<b>Questions</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Slightly disagree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>Slightly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
10	I want to learn many things							
11	I am sure that I understand things.							
12	I enjoy learning new things everyday							
13	<b>Questions</b>	<b>Far Below Average</b>	<b>Below average</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Above average</b>	<b>Far above average</b>		
14	How do you rate yourself in school ability compared with those in your grade in school?							
15	How intelligent do you think you are compared to others your age							
16	<b>Questions</b>	<b>Not important at all</b>	<b>Not too important</b>	<b>Important</b>	<b>Quite important</b>	<b>Extremely important</b>		
17	Compared to others your age, how important is it to you to be able to use your intelligence							

**Figure 2. Samples of Likert-Type Scales Used in the Kids' Self-Evaluations**

<b>Questions</b>	<b>Not important at all</b>	<b>Not too important</b>	<b>Important</b>	<b>Quite important</b>	<b>Extremely important</b>
<b>Questions</b>	<b>Far Below Average</b>	<b>Below average</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Above average</b>	<b>Far above average</b>



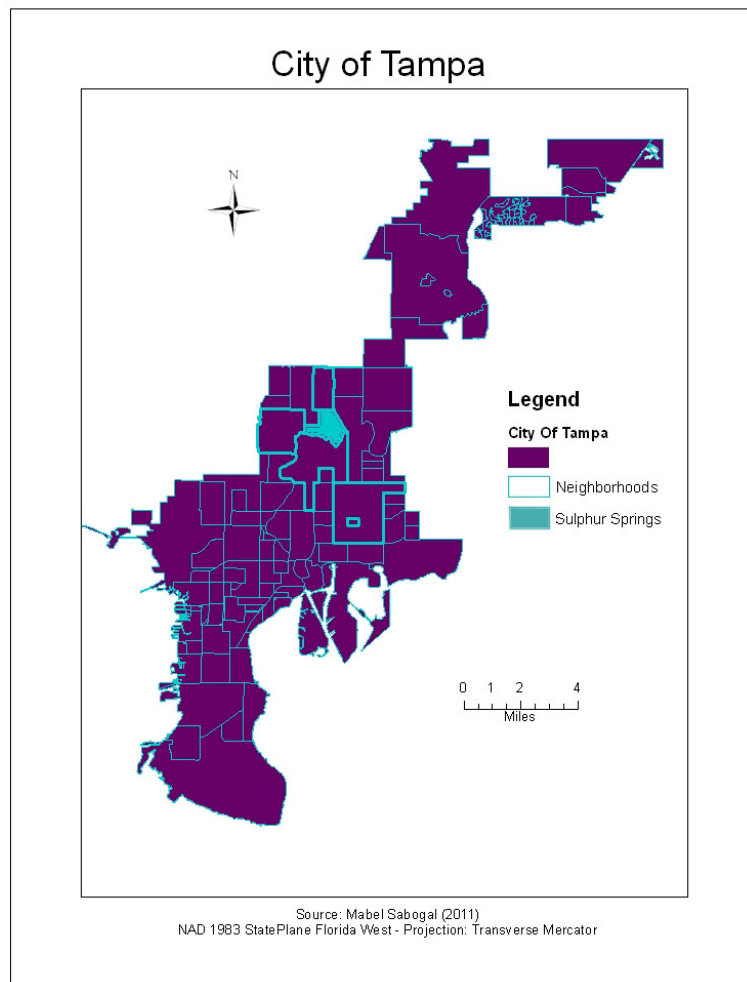
**Figure 3. Different Types of Likert-Type Scales Used and Possible Combinations of Scores.** This figure indicates the different types of combinations of scores, which produced low, intermediate, or high scores. A combination of never and rarely in the initial and final scores was considered a low score; a combination of rarely and sometimes, or sometimes and most of the time, was considered an intermediate score; and a combination of most of the time and always was considered a high score. If the scores varied by one or more points in the scale, they were considered significantly different and analyzed in that way.



**Figure 4. A Likert-Type Scale with Different Combinations of Scores, and a Neutral Value.** In this type of scale, more scores were combined to produce the low, intermediate, and high values. A combination of strongly disagree and

disagree, or of disagree and slightly disagree, in the initial and final scores, was considered a low score, for example. A combination of slightly disagree and neither agree nor disagree or the latter and slightly disagree, was considered an intermediate score. And, a combination of slightly disagree and agree or agree and strongly agree was considered a high score. Finally, there was the option of having a neutral score if the initial and final scores were neither agree nor disagree.

**Chapter 4:**  
**Setting and Access**



**Figure 5. Map of the City of Tampa**

Sulphur Springs and Surrounding Areas Road Map

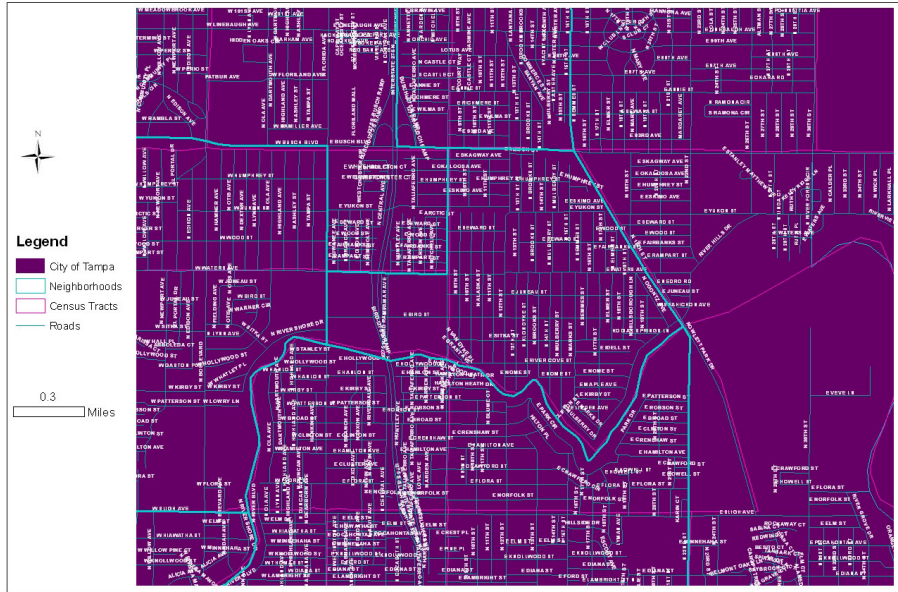


Figure 6. Road Map of Sulphur Springs and Surrounding Areas

Sulphur Springs and Moses House Map

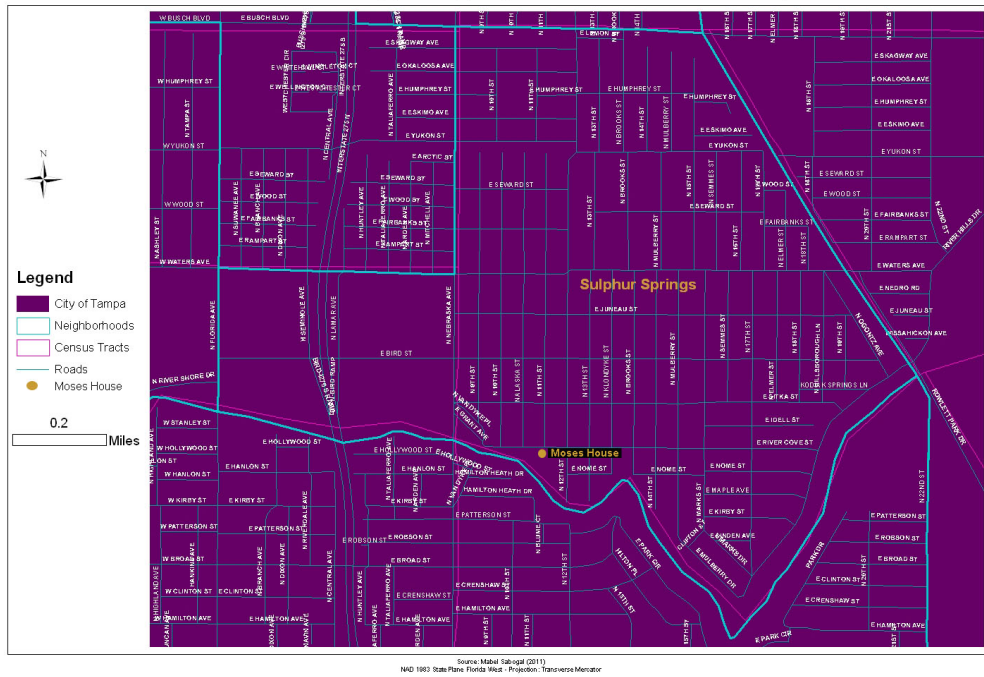


Figure 7. Road Map of Sulphur Springs

## **Sulphur Springs, Tampa**

Sulphur Springs has an interesting and important history, but locally it is generally regarded as a crime-ridden, poor, and deteriorated neighborhood (Spillane 2007). Statistics confirm the locality's problems and risk factors (Florida Center for Community Design and Research 2012). There is evident lack of opportunities for the youth to develop their capacities positively (Florida Center for Community Design and Research 2012; Hillsborough County City-County Planning Commission 2004; Spillane 2007). Children in the neighborhood neither have an adequate place in the social structure, based on current standards of living and technological advances, nor acceptable physical spaces where opportunities can be imagined and created, and where they can grow healthy and prosper.

As reported in the comprehensive Hillsborough Community Atlas (2012), Sulphur Springs is a low-income neighborhood in Tampa, with a population of 5,727 inhabitants, in the square mile that constitutes the area of the locality, making it very densely populated. African Americans account for 62% of the population, 31% are white, and Asian, mixed races, plus other unidentified races, constitute the remaining 7%. More than a third of the population is under 18 years of age, although the adult and elderly populations have grown, while the younger population has decreased, in the last decade. There are a significant number of single mothers with children under 18, constituting 20% of the households in the neighborhood; however, this number has diminished considerably in the last decade as well.

Sulphur Springs is an area that has experienced the enduring results of Jim Crow era's policies, and segregation and discrimination are to this day palpable. Almost half of

the population is poor, and it is one of the poorest neighborhoods in a city marked by huge income gaps. Of the 1,864 households in the neighborhood, 1,326 received public assistance in the form of food stamps and 204 received cash benefits in 2011. Most people do not live there permanently (SS Plan, 2004), and there are few incentives to create attachments to the neighborhood. Although residents believe that the neighborhood has improved in recent years, in terms of safety and community participation it still lacks important resources necessary for children to grow and fulfill their creative needs. A number of organizations serve the recreational and educational needs of children, but not enough assist adolescents (according to the kids' and mothers' reports, and in response to funders' policies in many cases), and more targeted programs are needed to fulfill the needs of the neighborhood's kids. Many programs only serve a small numbers of children, and families and kids do not always know about their existence, as will be illustrated in a later chapter.

More generally, Sulphur Springs is far from providing the necessary resources for healthy and prosperous lives. The neighborhood lacks important services, such as safety and incentives for healthy behaviors such as walking, nutritious food consumption and community building efforts, all elements that are now desirable in urban design (Farr, 2008), and which are fundamental to ensure wellness (Myers 2000), and also important to neighborhood residents. A spatial analysis of the neighborhood and distribution of services within it, using GIS (with data from the Florida Center for Community Design and Research 2012; referenceUSA 2010), helped to determine the scarcity of important services in the locality. Although there are green spaces around the edges of the neighborhood, and kids and families living in those peripheral areas may easily walk to

them, it is much harder for families inside the neighborhood to access them. There is extremely limited public transportation and many families may not be able to afford bicycles or other modes of transportation for their kids, or even for themselves. At night, walking alone around the neighborhood is not even an option, according to the kids' accounts; it is poorly lit and dangerous. There are barely any grocery stores in Sulphur Springs, although there are food markets and stores outside that are relatively close and accessible by car or a long walk. Inside the neighborhood, families complain that there are too many "candy ladies," who sell a variety of candy to the children, and a meat market that sells snacks too. As one mother said, "[there are] too many candy ladies around, and every time they [the kids] get a dollar, they run to the candy lady, so it is kind of hard to keep them out of the sugary stuff, but I mean cause they have it in the juices and stuff, but we try to keep them from the candy and stuff, it's kind of hard where there is a candy lady on every corner, almost."

More recently, however, a young couple opened a nutritious and low-cost food store (1Apple), on Nebraska Avenue, the western border of Sulphur Springs, in order to fulfill the need for more nutritious food options. Still, people living on the opposite (eastern) side, much farther away from Nebraska Avenue, might never know about it, unless they have a means of transportation. There appears to be only one health service provider on the west edge of the neighborhood. The closest pharmacy is even farther away, and not accessible by foot to most residents. Nebraska Avenue is a commercial strip, and offers a variety of retail services, again, accessible by walking to those residents on the west side of the neighborhood.



The mothers and children's accounts coincide with some of the problematic descriptions above and add other elements to this narration. One of the mothers, Marsha, expressed that the worst things "...would probably be... the lack of things to do in the neighborhood, it is a limit to what they [the kids] can do, cause I think they are even charging to go to the pool now, here, from what I heard, they are charging, the pool right by Nebraska, so I think that'd probably the worst thing... Not enough things for the kids to participate in." Furthermore, a major concern to the mothers was the violence in Sulphur Springs in the form of fighting, especially among the young kids. Lana, another mother, and Ms. Norma, the grandmother of the kids in my project, explained violence as one of the factors for them to make the decision to move outside the neighborhood. Marsha and Lana attributed the problem of violence in SS to the lack of activities for the youth. Katia, one more mother, expressed that the worst was the fighting "a lot of fighting on the streets, they fight a lot, and little boys on the corners, and the kids, the kids are influenced by what they see..." She added: "...That gets me scared. Some parts are good parts in Sulphur Springs, like 3<sup>rd</sup> Street is like another whole different world, cause it is quiet, you never see nobody; but then you go to other streets, like the street over from me, cause I stay right by the street where all the... Idell, it is very very... I would never live on that street." Regarding why all the violence occurs, she expressed "I have no idea, it would be the kids, it would be the teenagers, like Dalia [her daughter], the teenagers, some adults..." Similarly, for another mother, Diana, the bad things were "fighting... hanging out all the guys, wearing clothes, I mean inappropriate, the drugs, selling... It's not a healthy environment, let's put it that way."

In a second set of interviews, the mothers held similar opinions about the neighborhood. Diana said she did not like SS at all this time around. Marsha expressed “the only thing, I would have to say, is the teenagers still don’t have anything to do and they just fight...” Lana said “drug activities and fighting” were the main concerns.” Ms. Norma, whom I interviewed in the middle of the summer and then at the end, offered a different opinion. The problem for her was not with the neighborhood, but with the people who did not pay attention to their kids. “I don’t think they give them enough motivation to do what they need to do in life...” At the same time, she said she did not miss anything about SS,

...I am not saying it’s bad, but it’s just... a place I would never choose to raise my kids. When we first we got here, I used to hear them say things about Sulphur Springs that you might not want to move your children there. I used to hear people talk about it, but I never knew what they meant, I did not even want to find out; okay so I just moved my kids in other areas. [The kids] ...seem like they don’t have much guidance... Really not enough, and the parents let them do too much what they want to do, and then that’s not good for the next child. Because, you know, a lot of times, when we used to let Kaija [her granddaughter] be with the girls over there, sometimes she’d just say, I’m gonna walk off with you, even though she knew what Lana [the girl’s mother] wanted her to do; sometimes, they felt that they want to go to their house, she could go... But, now [in the new neighborhood], we don’t have that problem with her.

Likewise, the kids complained about the violence in SS and said there were a lot of bad things. There were lots of drugs there according to several of them. Charlie said the worst thing in the neighborhood was “smoking” (drugs). The most dangerous streets, where the bad stuff happened, in the neighborhood according to him were “Idell, Waters and Mulberry, and Simms.” Kaija said people fight on Idell. She said people fight there “cause it’s a dead end” and they do not get caught by the police. Daquan said the bad

things in SS were “Jail, the police,” and Maria also mentioned that the one thing she did not like about the neighborhood was “when people go to jail... [and] people that touch little girls...” For Karla, “people fight a lot, and there are shootings here,” while Maurice said “they gamble a lot, [and there are] shootings...” He said there were not a lot of killings, but shootings “yeah,” and “people getting robbed...” at night. “cause it’s so dark... they come out and rob.” Maurice explained that to be safe outside at night one had to be with other people. For Anna the biggest problems were “...fighting, gang related, a lot of kids running away from school... They got violence... it ain’t very violent, but it has violence, and any time they have violence, more than three or four polices come, and make it seem like overboard, make it look like something terrible happened.” Dalia said the thing she did not like was “...pretty loud music. I like music but late at night I be trying to go to sleep... but sometimes, the music be too loud and I be going *cut it off* (laughs), *time to go to sleep*, and they go, oh, my bad, and cut it.” Matthew did not like “how the cops harass people...” either, but he thought it was a good neighborhood. For Cristina, on the other hand, there was nothing good in Sulphur Springs.

During the final interviews the views of the neighborhood had not changed much among the children. There were still concerns about fighting, and other vices such as gambling and drugs. Kaija said the neighborhood was “a mess.” Daquan said it was “...ghetto... It’s like... I don’t even know how to describe it... they fight a lot... psycho.” They “fight with anything... People in Sulphur Springs, they just fight and fight with crazy stuff, and do all kinds of stuff... I don’t know... They shoot, they crompt.” The kids still felt extremely bothered by the presence and actions of the police in the

neighborhood. Daquan said he hated "...the noise, the arguing... I don't like the police... Cause they are always taking people to jail for a long time... Not fair... They wanna take me to jail, I will fight them all day... I'll fight the crack heads... and the police."

On the other hand, although residents are well aware of the issues in the neighborhood, they also appreciate their neighborhood's assets, including its rich flora and fauna, especially the big old trees, its central location, and the [somewhat] diverse population (Spillane 2007:62), and its affordability makes it desirable for low-income families as well. Other assets enjoyed by residents include an elementary school that serves the neighborhood's children, with a small adjacent library, and a few licensed childcare centers. Community services are offered by several religious congregations, and community organizations, including the MH, Community Stepping Stones, the North Tampa Recreation Center, the Sulphur Springs Elementary School and also a middle school in a nearby neighborhood, the Boys and Girls Club, the R.I.C.H house, run by a Police Officer, Ms. Debbie, among other community organizations. More recently, two residents founded the Sulphur Springs Museum, and their aim is to constitute an educational resource in the neighborhood, teaching the community about their heritage. However, this museum is not operating yet, and it is uncertain when it will open to the public.

Marsha, one of the mothers interviewed, expressed that although there was the issue of fighting, the neighborhood was "not too bad." Katia agreed with that statement. For her, without the violence, Sulphur Springs would be a good place to live in. She stated, Sulphur Springs "...is a close knit community, like the school right there, the corner store; I like it cause it is like a little town to me." However, she said she did not

have a lot of friends there... “I know a couple of people...” But she stayed on her own for the most part. For Lana, the good things were “The R.I.C.H. House, the MH... They have programs... [And also] affordable places to live.” For Marsha the best things were “I would have to say that is everybody knows everybody, and you know, everybody look out for each other, the kids; if they see them doing something, you know, they’ll let you know, so I think that’d be like the best thing.” Diana expressed, “I think what Ms. Debbie [from the R.I.C.H. House] is doing is good over there, I think what you are all doing, the MH, is good... there are more people over there, and they do call the police and when they be dicing or whatever they doing, and lot more going on...” During the final interview, Marsha said, “There’s a lot of positive going on now, people are more aware of their surroundings now; they are calling the cops a lot more when they see, you know what I’m saying? When they see something is not right. It’s like the community coming together now. It’s not like it was maybe two or three years ago.” For Lana, “it’s a place where most people can afford to live,” and she also admitted that the good things were “the recreation centers and stuff like that.”

The kids liked the neighborhood for their friends but also for the many activities they could do there. There were the Rec, the MH, and other organizations; plus, lots of people to hang out and to have fun with. Among the good things in SS, the kids mentioned the candy lady with all kinds of stuff she sold. Charlie said the teenagers would protect the younger kids from anything, and would help them get what they wanted (give them money for a soda, for example). For Kaija, “everybody is friendly” in the Springs. Daquan said the good things were “...school... the pool, silence... space... because you can play in it.” He also liked “Ms. Debbie [from the R.I.C.H. House]...

because she always tells the truth.” Ms. Debbie and the R.I.C.H. House were some of the best things in the neighborhood for the kids and the moms. They really appreciated the work Ms. Debbie did there, especially given that she was a policewoman and all the reservations the kids and sometimes their moms had about the police. Other things the kids enjoyed in SS included the park, relatively close and where they could go and play, the school, the MH, the Rec, and how nice people were in the neighborhood.

At the end, the kids also talked about the good things in Sulphur Springs. Charlie continued to feel protected by the older kids, “if you live here, they don’t let nobody beat you up or stuff.” Kaija expressed, “they got places to go,” and Cristina felt the same way. For Maria, there was nothing bad in Sulphur Springs. She said, everything is good, and her favorite was “going to my friend’s house.”

The following paragraphs explain how MH, the organization with which and for which I did this research has attempted to address the issues of children and youth in Sulphur Springs.

### **Moses House**

In Sulphur Springs, I volunteered for almost four years (2008-2012) with the Moses House, Inc. (MH), a grassroots community arts organization. MH was co-founded in 1984 by artists Taft and Harold Richardson, natives of Spring Hill, a historically African American neighborhood of Tampa. Mr. Taft was a renowned artist who made imaginative sculptures using animal bones and other discarded materials. After an important spiritual realization, he, along with his brother Harold and in collaboration with other family members and friends, started teaching art to the most disadvantaged children

and youth in the neighborhood. Their aim was to enhance the kids' cultural identity, to inspire and to invite them to envision and to create a new life for themselves, away from the maladies of the environment that surrounded them, and the social injustices to which they were constantly subjected.

Unfortunately, the Richardsons' work was interrupted in 2007, when Mr. Taft became seriously ill (he died in 2008). His brother Harold has also become ill in recent years, keeping him away from his previous community involvement. However, with the support and championing of Dr. Susan Greenbaum, now Professor Emerita of Anthropology at the University of South Florida (USF) and fierce advocate of the Richardsons' work, in 2007, MH began a partnership with USF's Department of Anthropology, and more recently with the University's Office of Community Engagement (OCE), in order to revitalize the organization. The idea has been to help MH continue with its mission to address the needs of the neighborhood's youth, and in some measure of the general population as well. In this way, after Mr. Taft's death, Lance Arney, at the time Greenbaum's doctoral advisee (and encouraged and supported by her), took on the leadership of the organization. Through their concerted efforts, Greenbaum and Arney were able to acquire a rent-free location for MH in Sulphur Springs, within the Mann-Wagnon Park complex. I joined them in the journey of revitalizing the organization in the fall of 2008, and decided to develop my dissertation research there in 2010 to assess the needs of the MH kids and the impact of community arts programs. With everyone's efforts, the MH expanded its youth programming and built collaborative relationships with a variety of partners, while trying to find means to maintain the organization.

My work at MH was intermittent from the fall of 2008 until the spring of 2010; since then, and until the spring of 2012, I served as the Associate Director, and as an instructor. I returned in the 2012 as an instructor again. In my tenure at MH, I was involved directly with the management and administration of the organization, specifically in strategic planning and programming tasks. I engaged in a variety of projects, including the production of media to enhance the visibility of the organization and support its identity. In collaborations with other MH volunteer instructors and administrators, I developed new artistic and cultural programs for the youth, particularly participatory video, creative movement, dance and martial arts, and, less consistently, community gardening.

Some of the projects include the creation and development of the MH website in the fall of 2008. Subsequently, in the spring of 2009, Lance Arney and I co-produced a collaborative community project that paid tribute to the life and work of Taft Richardson, which constituted a collaborative effort with the Richardsons' family and the Sulphur Springs community, and in which we used various media and forms of representation to memorialize Richardson's life and to revitalize the spirit of the MH. We aimed to increase the organization's visibility and to enhance the participants' commitment to the Richardsons' work with that work. In the summer of 2010, Arney and I created another participatory video, this time with Sulphur Springs youth. The video represented the kids' perspectives regarding the City of Tampa's imposition of fees on recreation centers and programs. This was part of a larger collaborative community research and advocacy project directed by Dr. Greenbaum. During that time, Lance and I also began outfitting the organization's newly acquired and renovated building with grant money from the



Children's Board of Hillsborough County. Up to that point, my work at MH had been part time. In the fall semester of 2010, however, I began working full time at the organization, acquiring administrative obligations while I developed my doctoral research. During my full time involvement with MH, I co-produced several art and media projects with MH kids and with various USF anthropology professors and their students who partnered with the organization. Through these projects, and as part of my research, I expanded my understanding of Sulphur Springs, the children, and the families we served. And, through the evaluation of two specific participatory video productions with the kids, the core of this dissertation, I have learned about the best practices of evaluation research in a community arts setting, but also about teaching, human development, social inequality and innumerable other aspects of life.

**The philosophy of Moses House.** Understanding the history of MH was one of my major interests from the beginning of my work with the organization. During one of the video-recorded interviews for Taft Richardson's tribute in the spring of 2009, Dr. Kristin Congdon (member of my doctoral committee and retired professor of philosophy and humanities at the University of Central Florida) talked to Lance Arney and me about the Richardsons' art, their community service and passions, and also about the beautiful gardens they created in the previous locations at MH, and how essential the ecology they built was in the larger vision of their work. I was fascinated by Dr. Congdon's account and wanted to investigate it in depth. It was one of my goals during this research to understand how the MH space was created and conceptualized by its founders and how it related to their pedagogical and spiritual work.

Moreover, the need to align the work at the new MH with the elders' ideas became evident to me after spending several months with the children, and struggling with their behaviors and our lack of knowledge of their needs and the ways MH could more effectively offer its programs. Thus, in the spring of 2011, I asked Elizabeth Murray and Stefan Krause to help us with this research; they were at the time graduate students in the anthropology department at USF, doing service-learning work at MH for their visual anthropology class, which was taught by Dr. Elizabeth Bird (my major advisor and current professor of anthropology at USF). Dr. Bird had partnered that semester with MH and many of her students did projects with us.

Although the knowledge we gained in the MH garden and history project was not available during the design of my dissertation research, as I learned about it, I tried to implement some of the main principles into my fieldwork, and these are certainly reflected in the other programs I created for MH after I ended the core of my research. This historical information has indicated a much clearer direction for the MH. Other more detailed descriptions of the Richardsons' gardens and philosophy of place can be found in Zarger (nd), and Sabogal (nd). I will offer here, however, some of the fundamentals in order to frame the subsequent sections of this work. The following is a brief recreation of this history based on an interview and an informal conversation with Harold Richardson (2010; 2011b), interviews with other MH elders (Dickerson 2011; Richardson 2011a), Dr. Kristin Congdon's work (2009; 2010), and Lance Arney's and my other experiences working at MH.

As stated earlier, Taft Richardson had a spiritual experience that changed his life, which prompted him and his brother Harold to create the MH. One day, while eating

meat, Mr. Taft saw the image of a giraffe in the bones. For him, this event was pivotal in his life; it represented a message from God, one of resurrection, of bringing life after death. From this moment on Mr. Taft began creating sculptures using the bones of dead animals that he found on the streets and on other grounds. He, along with Mr. Harold and other artist friends, began to teach the neighborhood children how to create art, while enhancing their cultural identity, self-concept, and self-esteem. In addition to Mr. Taft's sculptures, the MH artists created other artwork, much of it made out of discarded materials, and with the idea of bringing life after death, of resurrection.

In the same vein, the Richardsons created the MH with the idea to "resurrect" the children in the neighborhoods where they worked, including East Tampa, and Sulphur Springs. They worked with the most disadvantaged children and youth, affected by the enormous social problems brought about by conditions of poverty, within the context of racial and class struggles in Tampa. They taught the kids a variety of skills, but what was fundamental, according to Harold Richardson (2011b), was to guide them in the process of getting in touch with their spiritual selves. This was not about indoctrination, although the Richardsons were Christian; instead, the idea was for the kids to communicate with a higher being within them (the spirit, God), to meditate and converse with this being, and to listen for guidance, in the process of creating their own lives. Through meditations, God would eventually show them the path; the kids would receive a message and a mission for life, much as God had reached and guided the Richardsons.

At the MH, kids were taught to imagine and create. They were allowed and enabled to put their ideas into concrete productions that expressed their messages to others. Art was used as a communication medium in this sense; it was the way to speak to

the world, and it was also the way to learn about cultural identity, and their African roots (Dickerson 2011). The message at MH was about cultural pride and resistance, and this was evidenced when Mr. Harold told the MH kids during our interview that they could do anything they wanted to do in life, and asked them to never allow anyone to tell them or treat them otherwise. They could do anything, as long as they did it “spiritually.” For Harold, the kids and people in this society were too concerned with the material world, with the “flesh,” and they forgot about what really mattered, which was the essence, the spirit, of people; the only thing that remains after death.

The Richardsons’ message was holistic, and it was represented not only in their artworks and their teachings to the children, but also in their lives in general. At the MH, they created a luscious space that resembled the Garden of Eden, according to Mr. Harold (2011b), a space they called “The Garden Beneath.” The MH was covered and surrounded by fruit trees and ornamental plants, and the works of art were placed in the middle of the garden, between and on the trees, as well as inside the house. The kids could eat the ripe fruits, and experience a peaceful environment. It was an “Oasis,” as the elders’ described it, in the middle of a rundown neighborhood. It was a safe place for the kids and others to go and feel connected with each other and with their own internal powers, which helped them to envision and concretely represent possible ways out of the violence and destruction that permeated their lives. The elders talked about the amazing creative energy that transpired and inspired the MH during those times, the comradeship, the peace, and the productivity they experienced; one of them said MH was like his home during those times and they worked all day and night, tirelessly, on their projects.

Creativity at the MH was about connecting the spirit, the mind, and the body, with the natural and material environment. Harold said in the artistic process it was necessary to “connect the mind with the hands” (2010). The purpose was to reconstitute the ugliness of the existing world into beautiful and harmonious creations, to give the world a new meaning and to communicate new ideas and share new life with others. For this purpose, the kids learned to listen inside, they were instructed to pay attention to what was happening inside and around them, to be aware; they learned expressive techniques and were able to create in this way. It was necessary for them to appreciate life, animals, plants, and the human body. And it is this holism and integral pedagogy that we attempted to rescue and bring back to MH at the new location, the legacy of the love, compassion, and brightness of the elders at the MH.

### **Rough Start**

Unfortunately, the conditions under which the Richardsons’ and others at the original MH worked were completely different from the conditions in which Lance Arney and I found ourselves when we opened the MH at the new location at Mann-Wagnon Park. It is my goal to write this history with more detail at a later time, but here I will outline the main challenges we encountered during the first months at MH.

While the Richardsons were part of the community and lived there, Lance and I were “outsiders” in the neighborhood. We had a strong connection with the MH elders, and Lance had worked hard to establish good relationships with the youth and other community members and organizations in the neighborhood as well. However, it was not easy for us to manage the temperaments of the kids, and mostly the marked aggression

and rebelliousness of some of the children who eventually became regular MH kids (most of them in the last years of elementary school, or already in middle school).

Lance and I were anthropologists, with interest in education, social work, social justice, and the arts. In that regard, we were able to remain open to cultural differences and behaviors foreign to us, without experiencing cultural shock. We were also aware of the necessity to use participatory methodologies in our work, allowing the children, their families, and other community members to influence the course of the MH. We had connections with artists in the Tampa Bay, who came to volunteer their time with the kids at MH, and I was also able to provide artistic and media instruction. We knew the maltreatment and abuse to which African American populations had been subjected for generations in this society, and knew the current policies that continued to exclude Blacks from societal decision-making processes, and that kept them in marginal conditions. We knew that we needed to be sensitive to the needs and preferences of the kids and their elders.

What we did not know was what was needed to begin the conversation with younger disadvantaged African American kids. Initially, Lance had connected with the teenagers in the neighborhood and had established relationships with several of them for his dissertation research. I was also envisioning working with adolescents in my dissertation research. However, during the first few months at MH, we saw an influx of younger kids who wanted to be part of the organization; they had been recruited by the other youth to participate in specific projects with us, but now were a permanent presence in the House.

Adolescent kids could relate better to us. They had better communication skills and they had abilities to maintain relationships with people different from them and older than them as well. They could engage in conversations about life with us more easily and share the space with us without trouble. The younger kids, however, still had much to learn, and nothing could have prepared Lance or me for what we experienced at MH while attempting to understand the kids and negotiate the terms of our relationships and the uses of the space with them. We had begun with very open pedagogical principles, allowing the kids to make decisions about projects they wanted to engage in and activities they wanted to pursue. We were amicable and respectful, but some of the kids did not seem to be able to manage the freedom that was given to them at MH and their impulses.

Some kids were incredibly destructive and aggressive against others and even the volunteers, instructors, and administrators at MH. Even though we treated them with love and care, sometimes they brought with them their frustrations from the streets, from home and elsewhere and dumped them onto us with all their might. Although dealing with the kids' emotions and their frustrations appeared to be a major need for an organization like MH, we were not prepared for the task, and had to learn through experiencing many uncomfortable situations.

Not all MH kids acted in the manner described above, but many did and those who were not naturally inclined to aggression were either pushed out by the tensions generated by the less controlled kids, or were influenced to act in inappropriate ways. It was never our intention to manage the problems at MH with aggression or by violating the rights and autonomy of the children; however, eventually we came to the realization

that our participatory approach, with which we began, had to change, if we were to maintain the younger kids at bay and the MH and its people safe.

It took several months to figure out and implement a disciplinary system and the necessary rules to make the MH function as an educational institution. We engaged the kids in the process of creating the norms, and of maintaining the MH safe and clean, but it also forced us to use authoritative and in many cases authoritarian strategies in order to be able to relate to the kids. We realized that the kids were not used to being given freedom of choice, or to make decisions in this type of setting; they were not used to dialogical conflict-resolution strategies either, and they lived in a very convoluted environment, many at home, and most in the neighborhood.

When Lance and I began to discipline the kids more and to demand respect and the observance of basic rules for behavior, at the end of 2010, and the beginning of 2011, many kids ceased to attend the MH. Others continued to come, but challenged our new strategies and ignored them when they felt like it. Others understood the need for discipline and helped to maintain order, but these were not many. The adolescent kids withdrew from the organization when they realized the younger kids had outnumbered them, and were using most of the space and the resources. They did not want to deal with the uncontrollable kids; they wanted a place to “chill” and to create.

Lance and I realized that we needed a structure and specific programs and activities at the organization. It was not enough to allow the kids to go to MH to play or to decide what to do once there. We needed to have something pre-established that still gave them some freedom of choice, but not enough to allow them to take over the space and the resources. We created a schedule for work and for play for the kids, and engaged



the other volunteers in specific tasks with the kids that included games, tutoring, artwork, sports, and even fieldtrips. Having this structure, the schedule, and clarity over the rules and collective responsibilities changed dramatically our relationships with the kids, even though we were still challenged by their developmental needs and the choices they made in our interactions. Although we still needed more information and skills to have more productive experiences at MH, we were at least able to understand the needs of the kids, their families and the neighborhood more generally, and the place of MH in this context.

In the months from November of 2010 to June of 2011, we created a variety of projects with the kids, all of which impacted the cultural praxis projects that constituted my dissertation research. During that time, we made an autobiographical video with the girls, and through partnerships with USF anthropology professors Rebecca Zarger and Elizabeth Bird, and their students, we were able to offer a variety of programs. In the spring of 2011, we created the infrastructure for the MH garden; an internal exhibit of the MH history inside the building; prepared and decorated the rain barrels for the garden; made public service announcements with the older kids; and researched the MH history, and engaged in other research projects. The kids were even hired at the end of that semester to create the tabletops for a wedding. It was a rich semester that gave us much information in order to create a more solid organization, with relevant programs that could address the needs of the children and youth. This was the environment in which I began my cultural praxis project with the MH kids.

## **Chapter 5:**

### **Participants**

As mentioned in the previous chapter, unexpectedly, most of the children recruited for this project and all of those who participated until the end, were related to each other. Although the kids' families were not the focus of my study, I ended up learning a great deal about them and the conditions in which the kids lived, which contributed an important dimension to the richness of my ethnographic account. It is thus important to describe the family and their social environment in some detail, using pseudonyms to protect their privacy.

**Family Life: The Carters.** The Carters is the name that one of the children, Charlie, gave to the entire family. He explained that the last name came from “my momma and aunties, grandmom and granddaddy.” Mr. and Ms. Carter had at least four daughters, Marsha, Lana, Diana, and Darlene, and one son, Julius. I did not inquire about other siblings who did not have contact with the children, or who did not appear regularly in the family scene, even though the kids mentioned to me that they had many other aunts and uncles, mostly from their grandfather, Mr. Carter's, side. The children who participated in this study were the kids of three of the daughters, Marsha, Lana, and Diana, although one other kid who somewhat regularly attended MH programs, Trisha,

was the daughter of a fourth sister, Darlene, and close to the participant kids too. I worked with her a few times in other projects, but she did not want to be part of this one.

Of the three daughters whom I got to know more closely, the oldest was Marsha. At the time of my research she was 37 years old. Four of her kids participated in this project, two of them (Charlie and Cristina) in the core group, and a third one (Karla) as part of the support group during the video recordings. Karla and one of her older siblings, Maurice, were also interviewed as part of the secondary group.

Lana, one of Marsha's sisters, was 33. Three of Lana's children, Maria, Daquan and Kaija, were part of the core group in the project, but one more of her kids, Damon, participated briefly in the video recordings, and two of the older ones, Anna and Matthew, were interviewees of the secondary group as well. I had worked with Damon and Matthew in other projects prior to this one, and continued working with Damon afterwards. My relationship with Daquan and Maria was also long-lasting.

Finally, Diana, the third sister, was 36 at the time of the project. One of her children, Tatiana, was part of the video support group and an interviewee in the secondary group, and another, Daniel, also participated in the video recordings briefly as an interviewee.

Although the three sisters were very close to each other, two of them, Marsha and Lana, appeared to have a particularly special bond. Their children stayed in each other's houses and lived together at least for a while. Quite often, I only had to go to Lana's house to get all the children. The kids' grandmother, Ms. Norma, helped to raise them all; she lived with Lana almost permanently during that time. In my first interview with Lana, I mentioned that it seemed to me that family was very important to them, and that the

three sisters and Ms. Norma were very close to each other. She agreed, “yeah, we grew up around each other,” and “everybody is still together.”

**Family history.** The Carters’ daughters were born and raised in St. Augustine, Florida, and the family appears to have roots in Georgia. Marsha explained that they moved to Tampa when she was “like 7 or 8, so it has been a long time being here.” She added, “if I had to make a choice, I would raise my kids there [in St. Augustine]. . .” Lana said that she had lived in or around the Sulphur Springs area “for 8 or 9 years.” Before moving to Sulphur Springs, however, Lana also lived “off of Nebraska, in the downtown area.” Lana had never been in other cities or around other places different from Tampa and St. Augustine.

Lana lived with five of her kids, and sometimes with Ms. Norma, her mother’s. Norma lived regularly with her husband, according to one of the kids; however, in all the years I worked with them I never saw or met him. Lana explained also that her brother, Julius, did not live with her either. “He stays here, but lives with my sister.” However, like Ms. Norma, Julius was always at Lana’s place during the course of my tenure at MH. Almost every time I picked up the kids at her house, they were there, morning, night, or during the day.

At the time of the first interview, in May of 2011, Kaija (one of Lana’s daughters) said that there were about 13 people living in her house, including siblings, mom, grandmom and cousins. That house had six rooms, including the living room, and the cousins were staying with them at their current location only temporarily. One day I entered the house early in the morning and saw people sleeping everywhere, on the couches, on the floor, and even on the kitchen table.

When asked to describe his family, Daquan said his family was composed of “my grandma, my uncle, my momma, my brother, my sister, my momma (Lana)... Not my momma twice, ah... My momma, my sister, my sister, my sister, my sister, my brother, my brother, my brother, and me, and that’s it.” And other close family members included Marsha, her kids, and Diana and her kids. Similarly, Maria (Daquan’s twin) described her family as “my momma, my grandma, my aunty, my cousins, my sisters... And my brothers...” Interestingly, she added “And my daddy, and people on my daddy’s side, and that’s it.” Their father, I learned, was in jail.

When asked to describe her family, Marsha said she had ten children “two grown, one left already... One, he say he wants to find an apartment, but he’s working and everything. He goes to school, and he work, but other than that, yeah, that’s what it is.” I was impressed by the number of children she had for her age; she agreed and added, “...but I got my mom and my sisters; they help me out, yeah.” She also said, “One of my sisters have seven and the other have five.” She said she was the one who had “The most... I am the oldest, though, haha.” She said, however, that everyone was done having children.

In my interview with Karla (one of Marsha’s daughters), she shared that her dad was in jail also. She said he got there because “he sold rocks.” I asked her to explain what rocks meant. She said, “rocks is rocks... Rocks that you throw... Yeah, he went to jail for that... But police is mean... The police don’t like him cause he’s Black.” She explained that she lived with “my aunty and my grandma... and my momma.” She lived at “Daquan’s, just for right now.” Usually she only lived with “my mom’s kids... [names them all].”

Charlie (one of Karla's brothers) said he lived with six people, "my brothers, and my sisters and my mom." Cristina, also Karla and Charlie's sister, said, "[in my family] I got people who are nice, mean, and that have manners." She lived with "my mom, six of my brothers, and I live with three of my sisters... and my momma, Marsha." She did not mention her dad being in jail but said "[he] lives by himself... but sometimes I go see him... He lives like 20 min away." It was difficult to determine how many people lived in the kids' houses because the information was not consistent among the children, or even the mothers. Also, the kids' were not all of the same fathers, and very little information, if any at all, was shared about them (I did not pursue it either).

Diana, the third sister, did not live in Sulphur Springs. She lived "off of 26<sup>th</sup> avenue, and that's the East Tampa area." She said she had never lived in the Springs, "not on my own." She had five children, and she was still with the father of her three youngest ones. "I got three kids from him." Her daughter, Tatiana, explained that she lived "with my mom and my dad... And my brother [six years old] and little sister [she is five]." The other two kids were "18 and 19..." one of whom "just moved back in. He had an apartment, but now [he broke up with his] girlfriend... and he's back, but he said he is going to find another apartment, and in one month he'll be out of there; and my other brother, he lives with my auntie Darlene, cause he just loves my auntie Darlene. I don't know why, but he loves her." He lives with Trisha's mom... "He helps them pay the bills," and he works, she said.

I also interviewed Dalia and her mother, Katia. Dalia was recruited for the project, but was not part of the Carters' family, and dropped out of the program a few weeks after it started. In her interview, Katia explained that she was born in a small town in Florida,

“...it is in Palm Beach county, about 45 min from Miami, 35min drive from West Palm Beach; it sits right on a lake... I moved up here when Dalia was 1 year old... I have been here what, 10 years? Dalia was born there; I moved here April 23rd 2001...” She said, “they did not have much” in that area; that is why she moved. She moved to find “something different, get away; I thought I could do more, I wished I could go to school.” She would not like to live in another city “because when I moved from where I was from, I was skeptical because I was moving to a big city, I don’t know, but I like it, I don’t think I could move anywhere else, cause I tried to move back, and I did not like it, cause I was so used to being here, so could not stay.” Her family was composed of her and her four kids, “all girls.” She had a boyfriend living at her place, but they broke up, and he left.

**Residential instability.** One of the most unsettling things I confirmed while working with this group of children was the dramatic residential instability of their families. As stated earlier in the review of African American family life literature, this is not an uncommon situation. This was a salient topic for me, because I was interested in learning about the importance of place and space, and the ecology in which the kids lived and developed. I confirmed that residential instability is one of the issues that a community organization such as the MH, albeit better established, and with a more solid infrastructure, could potentially help to offset for the children. After having witnessed the kids’ moves from one place to another several times, I decided to inquire more about it and try to determine to some extent the impact this issue has on the kids’ lives.

During our first interview, Lana told me that her family had lived in “five to six” houses in the last two years or so. When I asked her why they moved so much, she said:

“Problems with the area, problems with the house, and stuff like that... Problems with the house, as far as plumbing and stuff like that.” I asked her if she planned to stay at the house she was at on 22<sup>nd</sup> street, and she responded affirmatively saying that she was not planning to go back to Sulphur Springs. Although Lana said she would be staying at the house on 22<sup>nd</sup>, they moved again in August, after this interview. She had said she would “...be here until April.” Then, she would “try to find a bigger place... Probably in the same area so the school does not have to change.” She did not like moving “No, [I] prefer to stay put,” but they moved “cause of the size of the house...” When they moved from the previous home, I had gone there to look for the kids and found a sign on the door that read “evicted...” Lana did not mention this, and I did not ask either. In the fall of 2012, I learned that the kids moved once again (back to Sulphur Springs), thus, in total, this family moved at least 7 or 8 times in the course of 2 years.

During the second interview, Lana told me that she lived only with her seven kids, and that Marsha and her kids were staying there for a few more days, “Yeah, on Friday... They are moving back to Sulphur Springs... they are getting their own place... They are moving because their place was not big enough, she found a bigger place.” During Marsha’s second interview, I asked her why she was moving back to Sulphur Springs. She said “cause I don’t really want to change the kids’ school... I want to keep everything the same, for me, you know what I’m saying, I don’t want to uproot them now.” She moved in fact to Sulphur Springs, only to move back out to another place, close to Lana, who had moved as well, a few weeks later. Marsha’s family also moved back to Sulphur Springs in 2012. In total, this family probably moved 5-7 times in the course of two years.



I spoke to some of the kids about moving. Daquan seemed to be a bit resentful of his mom, even though he said repeatedly that he loved her very much. He made comments about his mom not taking him to the doctor when needed, about her not being home, or there, all the time, and also commented on his frustration about moving. He hated the fact that they moved so much. It seemed to me that part of the reason why Daquan created such a strong attachment to MH, which will be discussed later, was the stability that it provided him for the time we were there. Lance and I, along with a couple of mid- and long-term volunteers, were there most of the time, and he received much love from all of us; he enjoyed learning different things, and having the opportunity to be happy without getting in trouble, staying off the streets.

Karla also shared her thoughts about her family moving so much. She said they had moved three times in the last year, but, in contrast to Daquan, she liked moving. For her, it was “fun,” and she preferred to move than to stay in the same place.

Tatiana’s family, on the other hand, seemed to be the most stable of all. She said, “I didn’t move, I’ve stayed in the house for five years, but my aunties, they just move . . . my mom [Diana], she stays in one house; my mom only moved three times, since I was a baby, but she is staying in this house, but my aunties have lived in different houses.” She said she liked to stay at her aunties’ houses “cause, like, I’m the biggest girl that my mom has and I have stuff to do over there, but I just like being with a lot of people.”

I brought up the topic of moving in one of my interviews with Ms. Norma as well. I was concerned that the kids had left the neighborhood, Sulphur Springs, and the MH did not have a regular form of transportation to pick them up and then drop them off after programs. I picked up and dropped off the kids for two years, first only occasionally

because they still lived in Sulphur Springs and could walk to MH. When they moved out of the neighborhood, I transported them on a regular basis, in order to keep my research core group intact as much as possible. This was absolutely exhausting, and expensive. My car was very new and intact when I began working with the MH. By the time I stopped picking up the kids, the paint was scratched on the outside, and a seat and a visor were broken. Thankfully, I made sure to cover the seats when the kids got in, and usually did not allow them to eat inside the car, but even with those small protections, my car's value diminished significantly and I spent a great deal of money trying to keep it clean. Being a graduate student, with a small stipend, this was impossible to sustain in the long run (and it was also a serious liability), although worth it for the time I did it, because of the rich experiences I had with the kids.

Thus once the kids left the neighborhood, I knew they would probably not be able to continue to attend MH programs without someone transporting them regularly. Nonetheless, Ms. Norma said, "it is not a problem for the kids to go back to the MH," even though they do not live in the Springs anymore,

...Because both moms are getting cars, but you know when you have to relocate, you just gotta be patient; sometimes you have to wait for a blessing. You might not understand that but a lot of people when they are raising a lot of kids, they either have to wait for a blessing, or somebody to come along, and say, I'm gonna be there for you, and do this, so that's why I'm here, I try to support my daughters, as much as I can so they can one day take care of their kids, do stuff for them, you know, have transportation, and teach them how to do and act, so when they take somebody there, you know they be better for them and the kids, so I don't think it will be a problem in the future, because we love them going to the MH, so it will not be a problem in the future, either one of the moms will have a car soon... Yeah, their moms are working on transportation.

Ms. Norma explained in another occasion that it was necessary for them to move because Sulphur Springs was not a good environment for the children.

That same day I had told Ms. Norma that the kids cursed a lot, she replied:

I don't understand that because I guess they are scared to do it at home... But, that's why we immediately moved them out of the Springs. You know, we can't say that they got it from the other kids, the kids with bad influence, we are not going to say that, but, the kids in the Springs, they like, okay, nobody cares what they do. Nobody cares where they go, what decisions they make... Okay, if you do something is okay, and you know... cause I used to watch Maria [one of her granddaughters] hang out with them little girls that didn't make good decisions. I used to sit and watch them do things, sometimes they be in the yard acting out. I told Lana, I think you need to move them out of the Springs, but she was already planning to do it, but sometimes, you just hate to uproot your kids into new surroundings. But, they immediately got here [the new neighborhood], and acted as if they had been here all the time. They adjusted here, they like the kids, the kids like them, no fighting, they get along, like they have been here forever.

Ms. Norma said she knew Daquan was very sad to move out of the Springs because of the MH. "Yeah, they love being at the MH, and they hate... that's one of the reasons for them hating moving over here, because they could not get to go to the MH, like they was..."

Sulphur Springs appeared to offer an inexpensive housing alternative for poor families, but it was not the best alternative in terms of the environment, and these feelings were expressed by most of the heads of family I spoke with. Katia, Dalia's mother, for example, explained that her family used to live in Spring Hill:

I would have never moved from the house in Spring Hill... But we lost everything [their house burned down], so I came here, cause it was not deposit, trying to get something quick, get us back stable, get my kids... So, yes, this is a bad area... I said I was going to move like next year, cause I got them in different schools... I don't want to uproot them, move them again, so that's why I am trying

to stay here like another year, but eventually, yeah, I am going to move.

**Other family characteristics.** In addition to residential instability, the kids brought with them other different needs. Especially at the beginning, they did not seem to have enough health care, and they also came hungry to MH at times. We fed them snacks, but it was never enough to replace a meal. This was a continuous concern for us, since we were aware that hungry kids could not learn or enjoy other activities. During the first months, we discovered that some kids came to MH only for the snacks. This was, of course, not sustainable for us, so we decided to feed the kids only at the end of the day, after they worked with us. This was a complex arrangement, because many times the kids came from school, and needed to eat something then, so we had to make exceptions. Furthermore, it appeared that the kids did not eat in a balanced way, and we had to start thinking more carefully and globally about the kids' wellbeing, and how we could influence it.

In the fall of 2010, after an incident involving a kid losing one of his teeth (for unknown causes), and his lack of health care in this regard, we began paying more attention to the kids' health. I began to notice that several children had cavities and other dental problems. I began investigating what they ate and giving them advice about nutrition. We changed the MH snack menu to include less sugary foods and starches, and incorporating more protein, and calcium, for example. The kids ate an enormous amount of candy and sugar in general. One kid said he put about a cup of sugar in his cereal every morning, and although he might have been exaggerating, the reality is that the kids' observable sugar/candy intake was not healthy at all. We had had discussions with the

kids before about healthy foods, and they seemed to know which ones were good for them, but in many occasions they chose to eat other less healthful things despite our and, reportedly, their mothers' advice. The concern with the kids' general health remained latent in my work with them, underlining the need to understand the larger context in which the MH arts programming was located.

Thus we implemented a variety of activities to induce the kids to be more conscious about this. In the spring of 2011, the kids began to plant vegetables in the MH garden, and our hope was that they would begin to be more conscious and connect more with the sources of food, and teach them to make better choices to improve or protect their health. We also reinforced the need to exercise, and eventually taught them techniques to calm themselves when they felt anger. During our summer 2011 program, I also decided to introduce the kids to a variety of ethnic foods, and I did not allow them to buy junk food at the store, or at least not with the money I paid them for our work. They were able to buy healthy foods, fruits, juice, and whole meals, but only very occasionally candy and other less desirable foods. I witnessed a great deal of progress in several kids. Daquan, for instance, came a long way. He learned to appreciate different kinds of foods, even though his passion for McDonalds never ceased. It was his favorite restaurant, and he always wanted to go there. After hearing us talk about the downsides of fast foods and after having been introduced to a variety of foods during our program, he began to think about different options, and often chose fruits over packaged foods. He also implemented a variety of activities that we taught him to control his emotions, as will be discussed in a later chapter.

In addition, during the interviews, I talked with the mothers about their families' food consumption and preferences. I asked Lana one day, for example, whether she bought fruits and vegetables regularly. She told me that she did buy them and that it was "cheaper to buy vegetables and fruits than snacks." She got them at the Walmart that was a few miles away from the Western edge of Sulphur Springs. Marsha said she also shopped at Walmart, and that she had never tried to buy her products at fresh markets. She said the kids liked to buy candy, and explained,

I rather have them eat grapes and oranges and stuff like that, cause like their teeth, keep them better, you know... Apple juice, they like that too, and it is sweet too, and it's good for them, but it's natural sweet so it's good.

Interestingly, during our program, I discovered the kids' preference for shrimp and rice. They ordered these items almost every time, albeit prepared differently. They also expressed their love for Chinese food, and seemed to have learned to like Mexican food too. They said they rarely ate those foods, and they loved them. Going out to eat was not a common experience in the kids' lives and it gave them the opportunity to learn how to behave in public places, and to appreciate the customs of other countries and peoples, in addition to the different kinds of foods. They were introduced to the world outside of their neighborhood and this gave them a chance to interact with people who were very different from them.

As I discovered, although the kids had loving families and caring parents, their lack of resources (economic, educational, etc.) impeded them from protecting the kids from basic health care issues, and, in that sense, we could offer them, even if only temporarily, at least basic information and encouragement to help them make better decisions to protect their physical, mental, and emotional integrity. Of course, some kids

were more receptive and prepared to respond than others, but all of them gained and gave us important lessons in our project to co-construct a better life for all of us.

### **Kids' Profiles**

Although the children in the core group had similar living conditions, because they were related to one another and also because of their close ages, they were also very different from each other, had different views of their lives and different goals for the future. Some were very serious about succeeding in life whereas others were more relaxed. Their personalities made a huge difference during our interactions in projects at MH, and certainly in our work together during the summer of 2011.

### **Daquan**

Daquan was 10 years old, and turned 11 during our project. He described himself as “a human... Black... Smart... dressable, [fashionable]...” He said he was “bad and good... cause in school [his behavior] is bad... and at home (he laughs).” He explained, “...the teachers... they are too mean... Someone made the whole class laugh, and everybody laughs and they pick you out of the whole class.” However, he did not think he was a “bad boy,” even though he did some bad things, for example, “fighting” sometimes. According to his account, he was really good at “clean up, help out, and do anything that they ask me to do.” He liked to be a good boy at home, and if he was not good, he got “punched.” He added that he punched himself “cause my mom makes me... If I do not punch myself hard, she will punch me.” Daquan recognized that he was very good with “technology... hooking up stuff.” And he was also good at “football, basketball... computers, wrestling... kicking... definitely good at kicking.” He said he

was not good at “nothing,” but after reflecting a little, added, “softball, I hate it... soccer, I hate it... cause you have to hit it with your head, your feet, you cannot touch it with your hand.” On the contrary, his favorite activity was “fashion.” He said he was a very happy boy, and fashion was what made him the happiest; also “my ma... [and] money.... That is it.”

In the final interview, Daquan was less playful than in the first one, and his answers were more concrete; he seemed more mature and less aggressive. He described himself as “A boy... Like to dress up... Want to reach goals in life... want to learn how to drive.” I asked who else was Daquan, and he answered: “nobody...I like to goof around... I like to play... Anything... play around... Do all kinds of stuff.” He said again he was really good at computers, but not so good at “science... cause, I don’t like the teacher... cause, she’s mean... every time you say something she says shut up... No, I don’t like that... cause every time someone talks she thinks it’s me... But I pay attention to my work... They talk to me.” He said he loved people. He was a happy boy, but “not super [happy], just happy.” And what made him happy were “people... Special kind of people... You, MH, my family.”

Daquan’s mom, Lana, described him as “Quiet at home... Eager to learn... Outgoing... hands on...he’s good with his hands... Does not cause trouble, and quiet... Helpful.” She said he was very good with computers, but that he could work more on his writing because he “writes too small...” Lana said Daquan and all her other children were happy. The only thing that could perhaps make them unhappy or unstable was that she did not “have too much...” In our final conversation, Lana said Daquan was “quiet... He is quiet; he really, you don’t know he is here.” She said he “needs to speak up more,” and



“he likes to help clean up.” For Lana, what made her kids very happy was “Being together... And the family... Being around their cousins and stuff.”

I met Daquan in the summer of 2010, at MH, when we were recording a video that Lance and I co-produced with some of the neighborhood kids about the increase of recreation fees in the City of Tampa. Our first impression of Daquan was that he was a very sweet kid, and he remained caring and sweet for most of the time during all the projects I worked on with him.

When we met Daquan, he was very much a child; his voice soft, and he seemed shy. This changed when he became more comfortable with us a few months later, and eventually blossomed into an outgoing and much more secure boy. He seemed to be short for his age and was self-conscious about it; he was very conscious about his personal image and liked to look good and fashionable. He was tiny, and looked almost fragile. He kept his hair very short, sometimes cut completely bold; other times, he left it a little longer, and some other times styled it with creative designs. He loved fashion, and was always beautifully dressed up. He did not like to wear his shoes at MH, because he wanted to keep them clean. He carried them in his hands, but did not put them on. One day, I went to pick the kids up and his uncle Julius told Daquan to make sure to keep his shoes clean, and he did, every day. All the kids liked to be clean and well dressed for the most part, especially when they were going to go and visit a place or for a special occasion. Their hair was impeccable and unless they played outside, their clothes were clean; only the little ones who came to MH were sometimes dirty, from playing on the ground outside. Most of them, if not all, dressed with a great deal of style. At the

beginning, Daquan's nose sometimes was runny and accumulated dirt inside, but after we told him to keep it clean with tissue, we never had to tell him again.

Daquan's passions were not only fashion, but also computers. He always wanted to be on the computer, watching videos on YouTube or playing games. His preferences were the violent games, fighting games, but at MH we restricted the kids to educational games. His favorite non-violent site was Meez, a game where he created and dressed up characters, and played with them in a parallel world. He told me a few times that he wanted to be a game producer.

Ever since he was introduced to MH in 2010, Daquan continued attending and participating in every single project we ran. He was the most dedicated MH child, and certainly one of the smartest, if not the most wise of all. He rarely missed a day or activity, and became very attached to Lance, and later on to me. His tendency was to get attached to the volunteers he liked the most at the organization, especially the women who paid much attention to him because of his caring and sweet demeanor. He always felt sad when volunteers left, after they finished their work at MH. Most of the MH volunteers were there only for one semester, and in some special cases for a year.

At the beginning of our work at MH, Daquan did not have much control of his emotions. He got extremely excited and happy at times, and very sad at others. For the most part, however, he was a very happy child while at MH. He used to climb doors, tables, desks, chairs, fences, everything, until we instilled in him the need to care for the space because replacing things, or cleaning, took time and money which we did not have a lot of. Daquan also laughed hysterically sometimes, and rolled himself on the floor, laughing and joking around.

Daquan was a kid full of love. I became very attached to him because he loved to work in the office, and used to sit for hours in front of the computer. He helped with computer tasks, setting up equipment, the projector, and organizing things. He could do a great deal of sophisticated technological tasks, much more advanced than any other kid at MH. In many ways, he seemed to think like an adult, when he was not behaving like a child. He was extremely responsible and extraordinarily curious. He wanted to learn everything, and liked to be smart. He enjoyed being praised for his good work and when we admired that he could do so many things. He was very much loved at MH. All volunteers, Lance and I used to enjoy working with him; it was almost effortless when he paid attention and focused on the task at hand. These characteristics were similar at home as well. His family expressed much love for him as well, mom, grandma, and his sister Kaija, although Kaija sometimes called him ugly and other names when they were not in good terms.

His grades in school were not perfect, but he did not fail. I checked his report card at the end of the 2010 academic year, and he got Cs, Bs and maybe one A. He did not seem to be strong academically, but through our work together, I found out that he was a kinetic and experiential learner, and with time he said his grades improved too. He could learn well as long as he had the chance to work with his hands and practice what he learned. He also seemed to like math. When we did calculation exercises, for example, to figure out how much money they made in the project, converting hours into money, he seemed to be fast at the task, or faster than other kids in the group. On the contrary, Daquan did not learn reading as well, and his reading and writing skills were not strong. He said he hated writing; his writing was very small, and it took him a long time to come

up with writing ideas. This was also the case with drawing. He did not think he was a good artist, and therefore hated it. However, little by little I pushed him to become more comfortable with his drawing. In one project, the MH kids were hired to do the tabletops for a wedding, and Daquan struggled a lot. He did not think his creations were good enough, and did not have ideas about what to write regarding love or how to draw things about love. He got frustrated about it, and sometimes wanted to cry.

During our project, the kids had to learn how to analyze photographs and camera movements, and to identify what things were good and not so good about other projects. The kids evaluated other projects through writing and sharing their thoughts with the whole group. They had to read and learn new words and concepts and become critical of media products. Sometimes Daquan, and the other kids too, were bored with these evaluations. Daquan, in particular, showed that he did not like the classroom setting, even though he was happy working on the project, giving ideas, participating, and wanted to make money and learn. He wanted to learn about the camera and video technology, and then editing. He participated in all the roles available, in pre-production, production and postproduction. He wanted to learn everything, but he did not like lectures, drawing, reading and writing.

Nevertheless, Daquan was hard working, and he made more money than any of the other kids involved in this project. He worked more hours, and almost did not miss one day of work. When he was at home, the days we did not work, he called me and asked me to pick him up. If we were working in the afternoon only, he would call me in the morning asking me to pick him up earlier. I had to make him and other kids aware

that I had other work to do, in addition to our productions, so they would stick to our work schedules. Daquan understood, but he was always ready to go and work.

### **Maria**

Maria was Daquan's twin, thus, like Daquan, she turned 11 during the project. When describing herself, Maria said: "I can be good sometimes; I can be bad sometimes... I am good most of the times at the MH." Being good for her was to "be proactive... That is when you think about what you are doing and what you are saying and take care of yourself." When she was bad she said: "I get frustrated... cause, when I am around Cristina [her cousin], they say stupid stuff and that makes me sad and I get frustrated." She explained that when she was bad, she said "...mean things to people, and that's it." According to her account, she was very good at "being good (laughs)." She also thought she was very good at math, but not so good in "reading and comprehension." However, she said that she was going to start reading. She wanted me to read with her one day.

Maria's favorite thing was "that I can do things my way, but sometimes I can't... cause, you do not get your way all the time." One of the things she could not do, for example, was to "hit people..." Her very favorite activity was "PE [physical education]... When you go to specialty, you get to play outside, you get to pick a game and play." She liked to exercise, "jumping jacks, sit ups, push ups." What made her the happiest was to "...do stuff good... [and] when I go to PE, cause that's the only specialty I like."

In the final interview, Maria was not sure how to describe herself anymore. She was not focused and it appeared that having spent time with one of her older sisters made her more aggressive and insolent in some ways. She said she did not follow people; “The only person I would follow is Sharlene... my sister.” She also mentioned that Maria (herself) was “everywhere,” all over the place. Sometimes she was a good student, and “sometimes, people don’t like me, and I don’t like them.” She said, “I like to fight... Messing with people... Messing with Daquan... Go to the pool, walk around...” She did not like studying or learning. “I like playing... I don’t like answering questions... (laughs)... I’m just playing... I play games.” She did not like staying at home. However, she still considered herself very good at math, and not so good at reading, especially “fifth grade books.” Her favorite activity was “Hanging out... [with] my friends.” She considered herself a happy girl, and what made her happy was: “when I am around my sister [Sharlene].” She said Sharlene made her happy because “she got her car... she drives around with me, we go to the mall... get some shoes and clothes... We go to the movies, out to eat... She gave me a stack of money... Yesterday she gave me a stack...” She told me her sister Sharlene “...is going to start working... [and] she does drops.” Through inquiries about the meaning of “doing drops” I found out that in this context it means to falsify tax information and make money illegally in that way.

Maria’s mom, Lana, said her daughter “can be rowdy at times,” but she was good, in general. She believed that Maria “would probably work in the kitchen; she likes to help in the kitchen... She needs to work on not tell a tale so much... [not] telling on people.” According to Lana, Maria needed to work on her behavior, but, like all of her children, Lana recognized that Maria was a happy child. In the final interview, Lana said Maria “is

bossy too, she wants to help, but likes to be in charge.” She thought Maria was very good in that “she is very helpful... yeah, with the little kids.” But she thought she needed “to be not so controlling.”

Maria was a beautiful little girl. Although she was Daquan’s twin, they looked somewhat different, and they both looked much younger than they were. I met Maria in the fall of 2010. She was part of a group that worked with Gloria Castro, another volunteer, in the summer of that year. The MH did not have an operating home before then, and programs were held at the YMCA or at the Recreation Center. During the summer, however, the MH became habitable after renovations, and Lance and I equipped the organization using grant money provided by the Children’s Board of Hillsborough County. Gloria began to work with the girls at that time, in a program on health education. The girls were recruited for this program through Gabriel, one of the adolescents with whom Lance was working on his dissertation research. Gabriel and Lance went to the kids’ house when they were still in Sulphur Springs and asked them if they wanted to come to MH and be part of the new programs there. The kids agreed, and in turn, recruited other relatives and friends. Five of the girls, including Maria, began working with Gloria in her program; and these kids came to constitute part of the core group of MH kids.

Maria was usually happy, without the self-esteem issues that I noticed in other girls. She was also not as directly aggressive as other children, although I saw her a few times challenging other children and fist-fighting with her siblings, and she liked to impose her will. Sometimes she also used curses in ugly exchanges with other kids, including her relatives. However, she was always helpful around the MH and in all of our

projects, although sometimes she rebelled, not wanting to do anything, or doing whatever she desired. This became problematic at times when we needed her to focus. However, she liked to work. I often gave the kids tasks organizing drawers, doing inventories with me, helping to clean, and so forth. She impressed us also with her sharp mind, doing anything we asked her to do. She excelled doing inventories, counting things, making lists, and giving feedback on a number of projects.

Maria seemed to be quite a smart girl for her young age, although I learned later on that she was two courses behind at school. She wanted to learn different things, especially how to make videos. During the girls' video production, she was interested in learning how to operate the camera, and wanted to be the director and tell us what to do when we were working. She was a good observer and noticed small details. She was a good producer, coordinating everyone's jobs. I gave her this task, and she was in charge of the to-do list; she went through it, indicated what came next, and checked off what was already done. Interestingly, Maria seemed shy in front of the camera during the girls' project (not in subsequent ones though). Maria was very sexually curious; she always talked about sex, and made worrisome comments at times. To summarize, I believe her energy and her interest in the subject needed to be channeled and explained to her; otherwise she could end up hurting herself with her actions. This was the greatest challenge in my work with her. She was a very smart and funny girl; she really was hilarious, but needed direction in her sexuality and in channeling her enormous amount of energy in positive ways.

Maria was open in her communication and had no problem saying what she thought about things. I had many wonderful experiences with her, although she also



challenged me in a variety of ways. When she got out of control, it was incredibly difficult to contain her. She became hyperactive, unfocused, demanding, and sometimes hostile, imposing her will and blocking all communication. On those days, Maria and I would lose touch, and detach from each other. On the contrary, when she was attentive and focused, it was a joy to work with her. She was capable of doing very sophisticated work, and of quickly understanding and learning t difficult concepts. It seemed to me that her attitude depended on her level of interest or on whatever was going on with her life at a particular point in time.

These poor attitudes appeared to intensify when the family moved out of Sulphur Springs to a nearby neighborhood. She told me many times that she missed “the Springs.” She missed her friends, in particular Rico, her best girl friend. When she came with me to the MH, she oftentimes wanted to see Rico. She was always looking around, out the window, looking for Rico and spotting her friends on the streets. Whenever one of the neighborhood kids showed up, she would leave her work and go and talk to them. She did not want to work, only to play outside. I think it was very difficult for her to leave the neighborhood, and she could not focus on her work anymore.

However, she was a sweet girl. When she saw me, she hugged me and always wanted to kiss me in the cheek and asked me to give her a kiss too. When she was not feeling good, she liked that I took care of her, talked to her, caressed her head or her face in a friendly manner. I did this with most of the kids, who were very affectionate towards me and also receptive to my affections. When we went shopping the first time, she was so thankful that she hung out with me the whole time. She grabbed my hand, and hugged me when we walked. She was very affectionate and seemed to need a lot of attention. She

told me a couple of times that I was her mom, and loved to ride with me in my car. When she was working hard and behaving well, I would take her to do errands and buy materials with me. The kids in general had a difficult time sharing certain things with each other (such as food, money, and sometimes art materials). They shared with those they were closest to, but not always with everyone. I had to implement a system for them to get in my car: Only one of them could ride in the front each day, and they had to take even turns. They learned and accommodated relatively easy to that practice, and stopped fighting for the seat. In this and many other situations, Maria showed that she could learn and accommodate to the needs of the group, and my own. To this day, Maria remains noble, caring, and understanding. She also has not stopped being playful and irreverent.

### **Kaija**

Kaija was 12 years old at the time of our project, and exhibiting common adolescent behaviors. She described herself as “skinny, talented, [and] like going shopping.” Her talents, according to her, were being “flexible... dance, stepping, [and] singing.” Academically, she believed she was very good at “writing and reading,” but not so good at math. Her favorite activity was “helping people... like help them do things they can’t do... writing and reading and stuff.” She said she did not like to teach necessarily, just “help them.” The one thing she would not want to do was “working at school... like teaching kids... cause they do not listen (laughs)...” She said what made her happiest was dancing. During our final interview, she said she was “Playful... pretty... nice...” and was really good at “Dancing, fighting, stepping.” But she was not so good at: “Flipping, gymnastics, cheering, football and basketball.” Her favorite thing

about her life was to shop and "...have fun... party and stuff." At parties, she liked to do "everything, dance, have fun, talk." She said she was happy, and "everything" made her happy, her friends, for example. She loved donuts, and "playing around."

Her mother, Lana, described her as "more intellectual... She likes to do things among herself... Yeah, she likes to do things, being herself... She likes to be the leader." She is "...into music and dance," but she "... rebels against adult figures." In a second interview, Lana described Kaija as "controlling... She is the leader... [she also] likes to be seen... She has a quick temper [and gets] frustrated." Lana said, "She's probably good at dancing (laughing)."

During the first interview, Ms. Norma expressed,

Kaija knows she is using the final drop of my patience... She wants a phone but is far from getting it right now... She got to clean up her act, not only at MH, but also at home [we had had a few incidents with her at MH, which were not pleasant]... She feels that at home is okay; doesn't ask for permission to go out, and we tell her how important it is for us to know where she is at all times... You don't walk away from your mom... I want to get her a phone... Kaija was an A student, and started hanging out with the wrong crowd... she got awards and everything, but in 5<sup>th</sup> grade she would not listen to her teachers anymore.

During the second interview, Ms. Norma stated:

Kaija is my favorite of all the kids, cause I grew close to her when she was born; actually her mom let me take care of her, like I do Andrea [one of her youngest granddaughters], so I grew real close to her, like she was my own; but Kaija, as she grew older, she got her mom to give her permission to go and come... because she thought, because my age she thought, I don't have to ask grandma. She did not get disrespectful, but she felt like I wasn't mom, so okay I don't got to ask you. It was not disrespect in it, but a lot of times she knew that I was watching her... You know, she... I notice, Kaija can be a number one kid. She learns very well, at times she can be disrespectful, but on the other hand, she... If someone tells her what she's gonna have, and what she's not gonna have, she'll listen. Okay, if you are not gonna put up with her

being rude or disrespectful, she'll listen. All you gotta say is okay,  
I am gonna get your mom. She don't give her mom no problem...  
Cause she know her mom is gonna put her under punishment.  
Okay, you can't use the phone.

I met Kaija along with the other girls in the fall of 2010. She also worked with Gloria in the summer of that year. She was always interested in dance and music; those were her passions. She was very concerned with her looks, and was, like her brother Daquan, very fashionable. When we were doing the girls' video, Kaija acted rebellious; she always wanted to do her own thing, and would not listen. One day she pushed me away from the computer physically, and could act very abusively; she was not afraid of physical confrontation.

Initially, I wanted the kids to come to MH and tried to approach them with care and love. I wanted them to come back and have fun; even though sometimes they said it was lame and boring to be at MH, we gave them many opportunities when they failed to respond to us positively. We tried talking to them and avoided violating their rights, verbally and physically. Some of the kids understood our position, and that we were there for them, not against them. Kaija was one of the kids who changed her attitude a great deal, but still had much to learn at the end. She became fond of me in many ways, but remained somewhat resentful. She could never open completely to us. She was struggling growing up.

Kaija showed concern for us in her own way, even if not openly like other kids. One day, I could not find one of my hard drives with which I was working at MH. It had disappeared quite mysteriously, and Kaija was very concerned about this. She wanted to help me find it and looked for it with me everywhere. We learned that one of the students working with us had taken one of my bags with the drive by mistake.

Sometimes, Kaija worked to avoid aggravating me, but other times she was selfish and showed no concern. She did show some humility when she was expelled from our project because of physical aggression towards me. I let her back in because I wanted to give her a last chance, and she said she was sorry. Kaija was a handful in many ways, but could also be reasonable when she needed to stay on good terms to maintain her privileges. When she needed something from me, she became more respectful and more caring, as her grandmother had described.

In early 2011, Kaija stopped coming regularly to MH before we began working on our project; again, she was showing difficulty following rules and being considerate to others, and was hanging out with her friends on the streets or each other's homes. When she was at MH, she liked to be on the computer, and like other children, she opened her Facebook page at MH. The kids were allowed to be on the computer only for a few minutes at the end of the day, and Kaija always looked forward to this time. She took pictures of herself, and liked to interact with her friends through the social networks.

Kaija was always extremely creative, in dance and music activities, but also with art and crafts, and even in the way she dressed up. She liked to draw and found out during a project in which the kids decorated water barrels that she liked working with pencils and colors much more than with paint. She never got interested in the barrels project, not only because it involved painting, but also because we had to work outside, and she did not like being in the sun. She did all the preparation work for the barrels, which incorporated a variety of activities inside the MH; she drew, decorated pots, even though it was sometimes difficult for her to focus on work. Even the art teacher, with whom I worked running the barrels project, said that Kaija was quite a good artist and could

develop some great talent if she would apply herself. She had a great imagination and was very aware of colors and shapes. She drew beautiful flowers, and even human forms and other shapes.

At MH, Kaija used to be quiet and mostly stayed on her own. She never screamed or yelled like other children. But when her other friends were around, Kaija would get distracted. One of her best friends was Laura, a girl who came sometimes to the MH. She did not live with her parents, and was under the custody of her uncle and aunt, and lived with them and their children until she moved out of the neighborhood. She was a creative girl, who loved to dance and came with us on the Busch Gardens fieldtrip in December. After she moved out, she came to visit her relatives and friends in the neighborhood; when she did, Kaija did not come to MH. I realized during this time that Kaija felt empowered with her friends around, and became dismissive and disrespectful towards the MH volunteers and administrators. Kaija seemed to have flourished when we were working on the tabletops project at the end of the spring in 2011. The task was to talk and express ideas of about love, couples, and marriage, and Kaija was always interested in those topics. She often talked about having boyfriends and marrying them and having children with them. She really wanted to get married at some point and looked forward to that day, so she loved working on the tabletops for the wedding and created several pieces for it. She enjoyed the techniques they were allowed to use, including coloring, drawing, and writing, and did a wonderful job with her tabletops. During this project, I pushed the kids to do the best job they could, as I wanted them to understand the importance of giving their best. After all, this was a real job, where they were being paid and had to respond in the best way possible to their “boss” if they wanted to be hired

again. I had them do drafts first, and then transfer their ideas into clean cardstock. Kaija was one of the kids who worked fast, clean, and nicely. She got frustrated a couple of times, but nonetheless, she made sure her pieces were the best she could produce and the bridal couple were completely satisfied.

Even though Kaija was never too close to me or as loving and affectionate as the other MH kids, I always wanted to have her in my project. I felt that she could learn a great deal and apply her creativity in interesting ways during our video productions. I wanted her to receive the benefits of the project; I wanted her to be able to buy clothes and accessories. She loved computers, and I thought that she could perhaps save enough money to buy her own. Mostly, I wanted to learn more about her and understand her in her complexity. She was a challenge for me in many ways; she continued to exercise her talents, but also reached her limits in her aggressiveness. From our experiences, she was able to grow a great deal and our rough interactions made me also understand her better and grow with her.

Unfortunately, Kaija's interest did not last the entire project. During the first phase, she did not come to work a couple of times, and she missed a few important classes, on camera and sound, and little by little she got more disengaged. She did help with the storyboard and the script, and excelled in this work. She had good ideas, and mentioned that she wanted to be an actress in the first video. She also made the rap for the project, but at some point became uncooperative, and would do only what she wanted to do. She wanted to joke around, and did not want to work all the time.

When she was engaged, Kaija worked hard and produced a lot, but when she decided not to work, she would disrupt everyone's activities, and became distracted after

her move out of Sulphur Springs. Not only was she not doing her job, but was also not allowing us to do our work. She spoke and sang while the other kids were working and distracted them as well.

After the aggressive incident that got her expelled from the project, and after being reinstated a week or so later, Kaija changed her attitude, although she still had a few days when she felt uncooperative. I wanted to show her the power of forgiveness. After we finished the project, Kaija returned to MH a few times, but she eventually decided to stay home while the other kids worked with me. Kaija is a girl with a great deal of potential, but her future is jeopardized by the influences of her environment, and also by her stubborn and proud personality. As I have learned, girls are much more difficult to deal with during adolescence, and this was certainly the case with Kaija. She did not want to deal with any authority, and would do anything to escape any means of control, regardless of the consequences. Having lost her spot in our project temporarily, however, taught her that her actions could bring negative consequence, and she regretted her actions for a while. When we went shopping after the kids had finished the first project, Kaija realized that she had missed many hours of work and the other children were able to buy many more things. She was very sad and cried; but Ms. Norma agreed with me that this was an important lesson for her.

### **Charlie**

Charlie was 12 years old when he participated in my research. He described himself as "...a good friend, but if you like messing with people, if you like messing with me, I get mad, and when I get mad, I got no self-control... I get mad and want to fight



them.” But only to people who are mean to him, he said. Charlie loved sports; it was his favorite thing in the world. At school, he did not think he was good in science, but he was very good in math and reading. He liked who he was, and what made him happy were the things he did. “I learn to play, I make a lot of friends, and I do what my momma tells me to do, and that’s it.” He also thought he was a “good football player” and expressed a great deal of love for his family. During the second interview, Charlie said again he liked “...to play football... I like fighting...” He said he liked fighting for “fun;” both, real fighting and play-fight. When he fought for real, he fought with “people that I don’t know and that want to fight me real real bad.” He also said he was “...fast at running...” And he liked “...different places... Places to eat, like Mexican, but I never go.” He enjoyed going out to eat, and liked to go to “different hoods” too. He said he was good at football and math, but not at playing baseball, or at science; the latter, because “it’s boring.” This time, he said his favorite thing about his life was his family, and what made him happy was still “how I am...”

Charlie’s mother, Marsha, said that her son was “...real smart, so anything that you can get him to do, he will probably be good at it...” She thought he was “really good at math,” and his “weak point... is probably science... Yeah, he’s not good at science, so I say that’s his weak part...” Marsha said, Charlie “...is good at organizing also, cleaning up and organizing... Ahhh... Artwork...” And he enjoyed video games a lot too. Marsha said her children were, in general, “...happy.” And one thing that made them really happy was, “spending time with me.” Marsha expressed surprise when Charlie got in trouble with another kid in the spring. “I was surprised that Charlie did that too, that he

got in that trouble that he did, cause he did try to stay out of trouble for so long, but I know that he's growing with the wrong crowd, so that's where that stems from."

During the second interview, Marsha said all her kids enjoyed "video games, play football on the street right here... Sometimes they go to the mall and walk around. They enjoy doing that a lot, go and look at what they want. They like to go to the pool together a lot." She said her kids were good at "outside activities... they like to do everything, they like to play football." However, none of her kids, according to her account, was good at "participating in household chores and stuff... They don't like to do their chores." But she believed her kids were happy, and that what made them very happy was "being with each other... being able to just be around their cousins every day, go places, have fun, you know..."

I met Charlie in the summer of 2010. He always seemed to be a sweet kid; he was compassionate and capable of loving and caring a great deal for people. I enjoyed working with him most of the time, and he was always engaged in our projects. When we worked on the recreation fees video and research, he was one of the main participants. He interviewed the other kids and introduced his cousin, Daquan, to the MH and us.

From the beginning, Charlie wanted to hang out with us, do interesting things, stay out of the streets, and stay out of trouble with his friends. In the spring of 2011, when we started the garden project, Charlie and the other boys became quite interested. They liked the opportunity to make money and also seemed to enjoy the manual work. Charlie always looked forward to helping with it and to making his money. He was never a problematic child at MH, and only once got into serious trouble with another kid who was very problematic and aggressive. During that time, unfortunately, Charlie had begun

to disengage from the MH, and seemed to have started to hang out with some of the most troubled children from school and the streets. He became, in some ways, like those children, not listening to us, confrontational, disrespectful, physically and otherwise. He was never aggressive towards us, but he became a bully.

However, after the incident mentioned above, I asked Charlie to come back to MH and hang out with us. I told him to do his community service hours with us if he had to, or just to go back and spend his time with us. He actually listened, and became engaged again in our programs. I went to see him at home when he was in confinement, and asked him to come back and work with me in my project. I thought he would have fun and stay out of trouble. I learned that all the kids were capable of showing a great deal of love when they felt like it and when they had been treated with respect and love, but they could also easily lose control and become aggressive and threatening sometimes, even physically. Some kids, showed aggression and violent tempers, while never losing their capacities to be kind and loving.

Charlie decided to join our summer project and at the beginning he seemed to be very focused on our work and extremely engaged. He was not going out as much with his friends, and came regularly to our sessions and worked hard. However, after the first video, he withdrew. He was very self-conscious of his acting in the first video, and I would say he felt embarrassed with the finished product. Perhaps his friends or relatives made fun of him, which he did not expect; he did not explain, but he was not happy. Other times, I could feel that he was tired. The kids did a great deal of work during the first video, and by the second one were getting burnt out. Sometimes, Charlie did not want to come, and did not want to work at all. However, he stuck around because he

wanted to make his money and did not want to be behind the other kids. He and Daquan seemed to be in competition, both trying to outearn everyone in the group. Charlie maintained this for a while, but at the end could not sustain it. He wanted to hang out with his friends and have fun; he was tired of work, and became disruptive sometimes. As he grew tired, he became less respectful of the learning environment, making fun and joking throughout the day. Nonetheless, Charlie performed wonderfully for most of the time he worked with us; he liked to be challenged to answer questions in class, and I pushed him to learn.

For the most part Charlie remained sweet and kind. He had loving and caring feelings for people in general. During the tabletops project at the end of the spring, Charlie was one of those who did the best job, expressing feelings about love, marriage, and couples. Not only did he want to make money, but also he was extremely engaged.

Like Daquan and Kaija, Charlie also loved to look good. All the children in the family seemed to have a great sense of fashion, and they wanted to attract the other sex. Several of them, especially some of Marsha's children (Charlie, and Karla) also loved to exercise. Charlie wanted to be a professional football player when he grew up. He liked to look good and groomed, not dirty or in bad shape. During one of our summer videos, when he acted as the main character, he had to put on dirty clothes, and he hated it. In other occasions, if we were going somewhere and he did not feel comfortable with the clothes he had on, he always wanted to go home and change. He also had good work ethic, and loved to learn new things and excel in them. My relationship with Charlie was always good, even when he was upset or tired. He responded to expressions of affection, care, and love. We became good friends, and we were fond of each other and respectful

of each other, as I was also with Daquan. As he grew, however, Charlie seemed to have continued his relationships with troubled kids, which intensified when his family moved out of Sulphur Springs. He was becoming more of an adolescent and I realized that he was spending more time with older guys and not always being the sweet kid we had known before, although he was never unkind to me.

### **Cristina**

Cristina was 10 years old when I met her, and turned 11 during our project. She described herself as “a little girl; a little 10 year old girl, with a mean attitude.” She explained, “people get on my nerves sometimes.” But she was also, “...sometimes, a nice little girl, and who loves to work with teachers... and, adults... cause they can help you with the things you do not know how to do, like they can help you figure out things.” Cristina said she liked to learn different things. She did not think she was good at running “like how you run track... I am not good at it.” Her favorite activity was to go to MH... Yeah, cause I would be bored [if I did not go].” She thought she was very good at writing, and was also good at drawing and painting, but got frustrated because she liked to do things very well.

Cristina told me she was a happy girl, “...a little bit... sometimes, sometimes not.” And what made her the happiest was “being with my whole family.” She could not think of anything that would not make her happy initially, but then said “when I get in trouble, that makes me sad.” She explained how she got in trouble sometimes, “I would be yelling at my sister, because she would be being destructive and all that.”

In the final interview, Cristina described herself as “a girl who gets in trouble in school a lot... I’m smart even though I am bad, I am a smart girl, and I like helping people... I like making people mad for some reason...” Like before, she said she was really good at “...drawing... writing... reading,” and not so good at “doing my math... I am good at it but I don’t like doing it... the fifth grade math, I didn’t do well.” Her favorite thing about her life was: “... My daddy... And my momma.” Cristina stated again that she was a happy girl, “I’m happy because I’m getting shoes and clothes for school [with the money she made in our project]... I wasn’t getting that, but, I’m happy because I’m gonna have another pair of shoes, about six or seven outfits... And... a diary, a whole bunch of school supplies... Yeah, I need all that stuff... cause I like to wear my outfits to school... I don’t feel like wearing raggedy clothes. And, I’m gonna wear my shoes everyday (happy voice and expression)...” She said she was also going to buy “a book,” and that it was going to help her in school. In addition, Cristina expressed that going to MH made her really happy “Cause, you all care about us, my mom cares about us too, but we like coming here cause we get to do fun stuff like get on the computer, do art, like draw, write, play music, and we get to do a whole bunch of fun stuff here.”

Marsha, Cristina’s mom, said “Cristina... she’s very smart, but she don’t apply herself like Charlie do. Charlie, he apply himself... I would have to say reading is her [Cristina’s] highest point.” Her “weak point is math, yeah, so it is like vice versa with Charlie and Cristina. Cristina is good at reading, and not good at math, but Charlie is good at math... They could probably help each other, actually.” She added that Cristina was also “...good at organizing... She’d get in a room and put everything where it goes.

She's good at organizing. According to her, what Cristina enjoyed doing the most was "...Dancing, I know that, singing and dancing, stuff like that." Later, on, during the final interview, Marsha said, "Cristina, she's really good at her school work, but mostly outside activities... Cristina even likes to play football..."

Cristina was a very beautiful girl. All the children in the family were beautiful, but Cristina's beauty was exotic, and registered beautifully in videos and pictures. Initially, however, she exhibited some low self-esteem issues. During the fall of 2010, when we did the girls' video, she used to feel rejected by the other kids; they did treat her as different. One kid told me that she had to take medicines, but did not specify for what or which kind. I did not ask. Cristina got sad and cried, because she did not feel loved by the other girls, was anxious, and required a lot of our attention. She did not feel as pretty as the other girls either. With time, she began to strengthen her identity, and eventually built a stronger character. However, Cristina seemed to have learned to cope with her anxieties or frustrations by eating. When we went out to eat, she ordered a lot of food that she did not need, and I saw her gaining a great deal of weight during the time I worked with her at MH. She seemed to be a little heavy for her age initially, but much more towards the end. I learned that she had a great deal of responsibilities at home, helping to take care of her little siblings. She was a very responsible girl, and was always doing something at MH or at home. She could be very serious, sometimes, and other times, she lost the seriousness and showed a more childish and playful side of her, especially when she gained more confidence and felt more at home at MH. She worked extremely hard, but when she was around her cousin Kaija, and other friends, she had a difficult time concentrating. Alone, or when in company of males only, Cristina was exceptional in her

work. She was also respectful of her elders, but with time, became more confrontational, sometimes demanding things from us in an aggressive manner. Cristina was also one of the girls who worked with Gloria in the summer of 2010. At the beginning, she was one of the sweetest girls – quite open to me and to others. She also enjoyed the girls’ video, worked hard on it, and was very considerate of all of us. She wanted to be the director and did much of the camera work. She always talked about wanting to be a doctor in the future, but she had some trouble with school. She showed love for reading and writing, but had difficulties comprehending readings sometimes. It also took her a while to write, but her results were usually thorough and accurate. It seemed to me that most of her difficulties stemmed from being unable to focus on her work at times, especially when other girls were around. Initially, Cristina also did not have a routine at MH. She came at different times and sometimes not at all. I know the reason was sometimes her obligations at home, but at others, she appeared to prefer to play outside with friends, instead of engaging in activities with us. During the spring of 2011, she was also not as active at MH as she had been the previous fall. She had begun attending dancing classes at the Y, while we finalized the schedule at MH. When she returned, however, she became more involved in the barrels project and the garden. She attended the drawing sessions, and eventually claimed one of the barrels for herself, but eventually dropped the project and lost interest in it.

During our summer project, Cristina showed interest, but she was not over excited. However, as time passed by, Cristina became quite consistent at work, unlike some of the others. She did miss a few sessions she grew to understand that we were all there to do a job, and that if someone was not interested in the work, it was better for



them to stay at home. She took that to heart, and enjoyed learning new things, working extremely hard. As usual, she struggled quite a bit with discipline and focus whenever other girls were around. She worked slowly, partly because of her difficulties concentrating on the tasks, but also partly because she liked to do a good job, and was a perfectionist.

Although Cristina had trouble concentrating, she loved to learn and was capable of understanding complex concepts. During the tabletops project, Cristina did a beautiful job.

In addition, Cristina was capable of feeling and expressing beautiful feelings. She could get rowdy and bullied others at times, especially after she began strengthening her character. However, she never reached the points of disrespect that Kaija did, for example. During our project, I saw her doing things that seemed problematic, but she also expressed loving and caring feelings. When the group became uncontrollable, Cristina showed compassion, asking the other children to stop. She could tell when I was getting frustrated, and she would say, “Mabel is getting a headache,” “she is getting aggravated,” “leave her alone.” She was usually the first to calm down, and apologized immediately after making fun of me or other volunteers, or after making inappropriate comments. Her line was “I am sorry, my bad.”

### **Other children**

Other kids interviewed for the project (four girls and two boys), five of who belonged to the Carter family as well, described themselves as creative and talented in different ways, in sports, art or other specific academic subjects that they enjoyed. Some

of these kids appeared to be excellent students; one was also a talented artist, another, a great sportsman, and all of them loved to dance and music. Only one girl appeared to lack discipline in general; however, I discovered that she enjoyed greatly physical activity and it was her strength. The girls, interestingly, always appeared to be more aggressive than the boys. They could be sweet and calmed, but also expressed their latent aggressiveness and anger, in one way or another. The boys on the other hand, seemed much more mellow and relaxed on a regular basis.

All in all, the kids who participated in my project were gems. They were talented, intelligent, compassionate and happy kids, with certain less positive aspects in their personalities like every other child and human being. They exhibited normal behaviors for their ages, and, except for their sometimes marked levels of aggressiveness and lack of self-control, they were capable of making good decisions to protect themselves and others. I was able to discover the great potentials and also the challenges of these children by engaging with them in many conversations and projects, all infused with an applied anthropological perspective that I have come to regard as fundamental in doing not only community arts research, but also in any type of community development engagement.

## **Chapter 6:**

### **The Anthropological Difference**

There is no question about the need to bring and use an anthropological perspective in the work of community arts organizations and of any community organization for that matter. At MH we operated as a grassroots development organization, with a social justice mission and an educational framework, funded by small grants and run mostly by volunteers. This is a reality that continues to define the organization's fate to this day. What has made MH different from other community programs in Sulphur Springs, perhaps, is not only its grassroots history, but also the anthropological perspective in the definition of the organization's strategies and in its relations with the community.

Although "outsiders" run MH, the organization was founded by community members and has maintained a strong cultural identity in its mission and vision. Its objectives have not been imposed from the outside by "developers," delivering some sort of truth, but the needs, goals, and means of engagement were identified and defined by members of the community. Lance, Greenbaum, I, and others involved in the organization's decision-making processes have brought with us new ideas, resources, and information, but the anthropological precepts that we adhere to maintaining and giving priority to the autonomy, assets, and cultural preferences of the community have been central in our work. We could have never been able to relate as well to the Richardsons,

their family and social circles, or to the kids and the families we have served, without an anthropological foundation. Although the organization is in need of a different financial approach, and strategic planning more generally, the organization has been successful during the times of resource influx and economic flexibility. It has been the anthropological perspective which has helped to facilitate a dialogue to determine the ways in which MH can best serve the community.

Anthropology is fundamental in helping us to understand and negotiate our differences and similarities. It gives us the ability to comprehend other people's living practices without judgment, without generating mistrust, and without imposing our values on others. It opens up channels for communication with others and therefore a wealth of knowledge that would be unavailable otherwise.

Our anthropological approach has allowed us to seek understanding in puzzling situations, and to face our biases and overcome them whenever we could not agree with something we observed or experienced more directly. This is not easy and I still struggle with the idea that we had to take on the task to modify the children's behaviors as part of our job as educators, for example. Education, after all, is about guiding and indicating a path for students, or at least helping students to create or find paths that are allegedly appropriate for their development; what makes some paths more appropriate than others is a set of social and cultural standards and the past experiences of ancestors who delineated our modes of conduct and our norms and values that keep the social structure functioning in some measure.

The problem is that such values and norms do not always incorporate the ancestral wisdom, the cultural norms and values of the populations that have been

dominated and relegated to the margins of society, which are in general the populations that many applied anthropologists are determined to help and understand. Thus, although anthropology gives us the tools to understand these discrepancies between our educational and civic values and those of others whose voices are silenced in the societal power dynamics, we are still operating with the understanding that certain behaviors are more appropriate than others and that learning certain skills constitutes the path to “success.”

The anthropological exercise is to align the “helpers” values and norms with those of the populations they seek to serve. In our case, we started with the concerns and values that the Richardsons indicated to us. The basic premise was that their work sought to renovate the lives of children and youth in the neighborhood, who were constantly attacked by the police on the basis of their cultural and ethnic history, and the behaviors they had become accustomed to seeing and experiencing in their neighborhood, a product of the social conditions to which they have been subjected for generations. These conditions, of violence, of drug trafficking and consumption, of delinquency, are not the natural inclinations of the children, but because the society in which they live provides so few tools for them to move beyond those experiences, they eventually end up assimilating the deleterious behaviors, as survival strategies, which are then sanctioned brutally by the police state in which we live. The kids are punished for being poor, for being Black, and for not having enough options to succeed and grow as human beings in their society.

The Richardsons recognized that the neighborhood’s children needed not punishment and abuse, but love and care. They needed to be provided with tools to

imagine and create a better future for themselves; they needed to be guided in pursuing a virtuous and spiritual calling; they needed to be taught how to trust themselves and their abilities to raise from the difficulties of their lives; they needed to learn how to take care of themselves and of others; they needed to dream and to follow their dreams.

Most of these premises were completely clear to us as we began our work at the new MH, but not all; we understood the general needs, but were not yet entirely sure on how to guide the children in the direction the Richardsons had envisioned. For me, the assumption was that artistic production would provide some of those tools to the children, for that was what the Richardsons did at the most fundamental level, or at least it was the most obvious to us. But how exactly the necessary changes occurred, we did not know.

At the same time that I investigated whether the community arts literature's claims about the benefits of participation in community arts could apply in the African American youth setting, given the kids' needs as described, implicitly or explicitly, in the African American literature, it was also crucial for me to further understand the mechanisms through which the Richardsons did their job and how we could further use their tools in the design of our programs. In other words, were the needs of the MH children comparable to those of African American children elsewhere? Could community arts programs fulfill those needs for them? And how so exactly?

Only with an anthropological perspective in our research were we able to open the path to investigate such questions, and this became very clear to me as I observed the differences in our relationships with the children, in comparison with those of volunteers who did not have an anthropological background.

During the production of the girls' video, in the fall of 2010, for example, one of the most faithful volunteers at MH began to judge harshly the way in which the girls moved and the music to which they listened. She was an African American woman, born in the Midwest, then in her late 20s, and as she observed the sexuality of the girls' dances, she expressed her view that we should not allow the girls to move like that; for her, they were obscene, and their behaviors unacceptable. Although it was shocking for me to hear the songs the girls chose to dance to as well (not so much their dances, for I am Colombian and very familiar with somewhat similar Caribbean dances), I removed my own cultural lenses and approached the situation in an inquiring, rather than a judgmental way. The girls' moves were indeed highly sexual and the lyrics of the songs were in my mind violent towards women; they diminished their capacities to sexual and reproductive activities. The chorus of a song, for example, was "bust it pussy wide open, bust it, bust it, pussy wide open..." and the girls moved in the way indicated by the song. When I inquired about the dances, the girls explained them as ways to elicit male (boys') responses. They sought to be perceived as being "juicy," or sexually attractive. The girls were expressing such sexual desires at very young ages, 9, 10, 11, 12, and the younger ones seemed to express them even more than the older girls. This might be normal, since menarche appears normally between 9 and 15 years of age, and, as some studies have shown, in the U.S., girls are developing even earlier nowadays, starting at 8 and 9, especially African Americans girls (Santrock 2011:355). Thus, girls can begin their reproductive cycles earlier than ever, and early menarche is linked to "early intimate behaviors in girls," as well as other risky behaviors (359).

But, my anthropologically inquisitive mind did not immediately attempt to correct them, or change them, as was the case for the other volunteer. I wanted to understand them, so, instead of judging, I asked questions. Why did they dance like that? Why those lyrics? Where did they learn the dances? And were those songs accepted among their peers and family and other community members? And so on and so forth... My approach was to let them express themselves first, and then show them different ways of being in the world. They knew I cared for them, but it was clear to me that they needed to learn that there were different ways to live in the world as well, and teach them that they could make choices based on their new knowledge and experiences. I did not want to reprimand them, or undervalue their practices and customs. Eventually, they evaluated their dances and determined on their own, prompted by my questions, that those dances were not appropriate in all settings, even if they learned them at home sometimes. They realized that even within their community there were more conservative and less tolerant individuals, and the girls did not want to upset them with their behaviors. One of them even said that she would never dance like that in front of her grandmother, even though for others kids' mothers and grandmothers the behavior appeared to be perfectly normal. I explained to the girls that just as they could not dance like that in those settings, at MH we could not allow them to put those images in their video because we could not promote a behavior that could upset in any way members of the community or their own families. We also did not want people around the world who watched YouTube videos (the platform where MH houses its video productions) think of them in negative ways just because they could not understand them. The girls agreed and they decided not to use their images anymore, and after that, they did not dance in the same way as much at MH



either. We had arrived at an agreement that they could understand and that made sense for everyone, but we did not judge them, and we did not punish them, and we did not violate their integrity. Having done so would have produced counterproductive behaviors in the children, which were evident in the way they related to the more judgmental volunteers. When the kids felt rejected, when they were not heard, they simply decided not to work with those people, did not listen to them, and did not collaborate either.

Similarly, some of the kids at MH presented extremely aggressive behaviors; they were sometimes violent, physically and verbally, and showed no respect for volunteers and administrators, especially during the first months of operation in the neighborhood. Although in my mind their behaviors were wild, instead of punishing them, or contesting their actions with severity, we observed, asked questions, and eventually arrived at conclusions with them. These issues of aggression and lack of control were much more complicated to resolve and it took a long time for us to figure out how to deal with them. It seemed that for the kids aggressive joking, bullying, and fighting were acceptable. Since I never worked with children this closely or in this setting before, I asked myself: Do all kids behave like this? Is this a cultural response? In the case of jokes and bullying against the volunteers and the MH administrators, I did not want to appear dull or too strict, but how could we maintain a good sense of humor and at the same time establish parameters of respect?

The issues of aggression and violence were extremely difficult to handle, especially when it came to safeguarding the MH and our own integrity in the organization. We did not make immediate and rushed decisions; we needed more information, we did not have all the necessary tools, but through committed observation

and inquiry, lots of patience, and strength of character, eventually we learned enough to modify our approach, without violating the children, without harsh punishment and judgment. Again, this was not the case for volunteers who did not have an anthropological perspective.

I believe we made innumerable mistakes and we could have been better prepared to assume the tasks we were faced with at MH. We also needed more resources -- human and material. However, because we had the ability to listen and to identify cultural differences and patterns, we did not impose completely our will, or our ways of being in the world. Initially, we did not know the crucial questions to ask, but we learned them, and asked them at some point or another. We assumed the responsibility of learning, when we realized that what we had to offer initially was insufficient, when we realized that we needed more, that we could not function perfectly, or just well, in our early environment.

And then, it became a process of learning with the children, and the elders and other collaborators. No longer were we there, providing tools or information to others, but we became receivers as well, and co-constructors of a new reality. We learned with the kids, their parents, the elders, and others, as well as ourselves, and little by little determined what it was that we could really provide to these children at MH. We understood what our role should be in the neighborhood, and how that was similar and different from what the Richardsons had done previously, and from what other organizations in the neighborhood provided.

Again, none of this was easy, and I struggled with the ethical problems of this approach, and of our experiment in the neighborhood. I also struggled with the realization

that our work was not sustainable from the beginning, but there was hope and we operated with faith in the future. I ceased to be concerned about our place in the neighborhood when I made the decision to give myself completely to the children and to our relationships, and when the children and my duty became more important for me than myself. It was my choice because in my mind, we had begun a journey, an adventure, and this journey implied a great deal of sacrifice if we were to maintain the integrity of the children and of their families. We had begun a process and could not stop it, or even backtrack; there was only moving forward in the best way we could, and it implied sacrifice and giving it all. We had a huge responsibility on our hands, and there was no other choice for us. I saw Lance do it, whether it was conscious or not, and I saw myself giving in more and more, breaking the resistance to maintain my own integrity above the kids' needs or those of the MH; I ceased to be the center of my universe, and the center became shared with the little guys, and the MH, even if only temporarily. It was my task to help take care of them and maintain their integrity, in one way or another, whether I felt comfortable all the time or not.

Perhaps complete sacrifice is not the way community artists, or applied anthropologists, are meant to do their work, although I learned it was certainly the way in which the Richardsons worked, and it is also what great spiritual maturity calls for: Sacrifice of the ego and personal wants and needs, for concern and care for others, service to others, and fellowship (Gold 2010:86; Morgan 2007:69-70; 236). This is no easy task, especially in an individualistic society like ours, where ego, competition, and hierarchies are the order of the day.

As time passed and as I found more and more tools to do a better job at MH, I became more conscious of what community arts organizations, artists, and others involved in this type of job must be attentive to, before embarking in the task to help anyone. Although I know it is impossible to control all the variables that exist in any social setting, I have learned that some of the frustration, the anxiety, and other negative experiences that we might have experienced in our job can be avoided and perhaps even transformed into more positive experiences.

None of my or Lance's work would have been possible without the anthropological framework that we brought to the MH. It is important to recognize, however, another factor that affected our approach: our personal histories. Lance and I are strong individuals who grew up in difficult environments, perhaps not as aggressive and disadvantaged as that of the MH kids, but certainly environments that made us impervious to many of the verbal and even physical aggressions we experienced while attempting to understand and refine our work with the kids in Sulphur Springs. We were able to withstand and control the volatile temperaments of the children because we were not foreign to them.

Thus, although Lance and I did not comprehend why the kids did not always reciprocate the way we wanted, we did not suffer as much as other volunteers who were also bullied by the children. One volunteer, for example, not only lacked cultural diversity competency, but she had been shielded as a child from such behaviors, and became almost incapable of withstanding the pressure. She began to make progress as she understood our techniques and characters; she ceased to judge as much, although never

completely, and began to put on a cultural relativistic lens, establishing more rapport with the kids.

As I learned, doing research in a community like Sulphur Springs, and especially applied research, entails a huge responsibility that cannot be taken lightly, and many factors must be taken into consideration before deciding to get involved in the growth and development of children and their community. Not only was the job difficult because of the relationships that had to be built and the need to understand complex cultural and historical processes, but also because of the structure of the community itself and the many actors, internal and external, who play a role in it.

For example, when I was trying to recruit the kids for my project, I tried approaching the schools, asking them to allow me to deliver fliers and information to the kids. Although initially I could not understand why my requests were rejected, the more I worked with the kids the more conscious I became of the need for community organizations and other service providers to shield the kids and the community from the activities of outsiders. I was not able to recruit kids at the schools, and the responses I received were rather aggressive in a couple of cases. It is possible that they were saturated with research requests already, but also that they had bad experiences and they needed to protect their facilities and also the children. Nonetheless, I understand that although research, especially if applied, can greatly benefit communities and individuals, it can also bring about a host of detrimental effects, and so researchers and any other stakeholders must be cautious. Such dynamics must be understood in the process of building partnerships and even in the design and delivery of programs. It is easy to cause more damage than to offer positive effects in development work.

One way in which anthropologists and community arts workers can help in avoiding some of the pitfalls of development is by learning as much as possible about the communities in which they work, and it is certainly one of the things that made our work stand out, and the reason why we were able to build strong relationships with children and youth in Sulphur Springs, as well as their families in several cases.

Not only was MH founded by members of the community, and therefore its mission was based on the needs and strategies identified by the elders, but we also began to understand in a more systematic way who the children were, how they related to community arts organizations and other organizations, and what their concerns, skills, and needs in general were. These were fundamental questions in my research, which have helped to define our roles in the community more specifically.

With the knowledge gained during the first two semesters at MH, and the relationships created with the kids who ultimately became part of this project (Daquan, Maria, Kaija, Cristina, Charlie, and for a couple of weeks Dalia), I set out to investigate more formally the research questions I had determined in my dissertation proposal. I had already begun to understand the kids' lives and needs, as well as the wonderful things they had to offer to the world; I had learned how to manage some of their problematic behaviors and they understood my style as well. They knew I was organized, liked to maintain the MH and my property clean, and that I also liked to stick to a schedule and program (and I requested this from them as well). But they also knew that my rigor could be softened with their love and care. They were willing to participate in this project under my supervision, but with the understanding that they would have the opportunity to

create; they also knew that we would be learning together and having fun together as we worked, which is how we had been running the programs at MH in the previous months.

This project was an opportunity to deepen my understanding of the needs and assets of the neighborhood and its inhabitants, particularly the children who frequented MH, all with the purpose of creating more effective programs for the kids in the future. It was important also to understand the place and character of community arts and other organizations in the neighborhood, and how MH distinguished from them. The following chapters present the results of my work in this regard, with information collected in semi-structured interviews conducted before and after the project with the children and their parents/guardians in the program, as well as others who were not part of the core group; focus groups; strict daily evaluations of specific behaviors; ethnographic notes from our daily work and interactions; elicitation exercises; and the kids' pre- and post- self-evaluations.

## **Chapter 7:**

### **How Do Disadvantaged African American Youth Define Their Place in Society, Their Present Contributions, and Future Possibilities? What Do They Want to Change? What Do They Want to Maintain?**

#### **The Kids' Dreams**

Note: In this section, I include the core and the secondary group interviews in order to give a broader perspective of the lives and dreams of the kids and their families.

The Carter kids, including those in the secondary group of the project, knew the importance of doing well in school. The kids thought about getting scholarships for college, based on athletic performance, in the case of some of the boys, or on behavior and grades, in the case of the girls. They were in some cases concerned about not having enough good grades on their school records; academic excellence is something we emphasized at MH quite a bit, since we knew from experience that good grades and working hard in school could help the kids to reach their college goals. Interestingly, most of the girls wanted to be doctors. Some of their mothers were encouraging that dream; they perceived a monetary potential in the medical field and encouraged their girls to take that route too; the girls saw it as a good option given their mothers' interest in the field. Some of the kids were interested in the arts as well. They wanted to be dancers or actors, but being a doctor dominated the girls' narratives. For the most part, the boys thought of professional football as their career goal. Still, one kid, Tatiana, also



expressed her interest in the culinary arts, while Matthew favored business, and Daquan, technology.

At the end, the kids reaffirmed their commitments to their goals. The boys still wanted to be football or basketball players, and the girls, doctors. Daquan still wanted to be a game producer, and Maria did not know what she wanted to do, but, like all the other kids, knew that she needed to stay in school, get good grades, and get her degree. The mothers did not always know what their kids wanted to do, but they had an idea of their interests at least. Lana, for example, said she had never heard Kaija talk about being a doctor. She knew her favorite activities were dancing and music, and saw her as a dancer. Although Maria all along could not describe what she wanted to do, Lana, her mother, thought she would be a good teacher for she liked to help her little siblings at home. Lana also knew Daquan was good at and liked working with technology and computers and thought that being a game producer would be a good thing for him when I told her that was his intention. According to Marsha, her daughter Karla could be good working with children, although it was difficult for Karla to define a goal at that point.

Diana said she did not want Tatiana, her daughter, to work as a chef because there was no money in that, and she was trying to get her in the medical field. “Ha, you know Tatiana is young, first she said she wants to cook, be a chef... she likes to help prepare meals... But I’m trying to talk her out of that cause there is no money in it... She’s “I want to be a teacher,” and I’m, ugghhh. I’m trying to get her in the medical field, so she is between being a chef or in the medical field.”

The concern with money was prevalent among the children, but also among the mothers. They knew how difficult it was to get into school, pay for it, and stay in it. They

had tried themselves. Diana, Katia, and Marsha had all tried to get into school, but their life circumstances were difficult. In some cases, they did not have all the necessary skills, or a school record, and they saw the need for money. They knew that in the precarious economy of the country at the moment they needed schooling if they were to get jobs. They tried to get jobs and were unable to do so, and when they did, they could not keep them for long. Thus, they pushed their children to get good grades, to focus and stay in school through the end, in order to be able to go to college and eventually find good paying jobs.

The mothers (not only of the Carter kids) knew their lives were not necessarily easy in terms of economic resources and social mobility, and this was their main concern, even if they still believed that their kids could do anything they set their minds to. Katia said of Dalia (the girl who dropped out of the project),

... You know school is a difficult time, and you know, you don't really know who you are, and a lot of peer pressure stuff going on, but if she stays focused, and like I tell her, be herself, keep her mind on where she want to be, her goal, she can do it; you can do anything you want to do... I always instill in them they can do anything they put their minds to, and I don't want them to, I really don't want them to get in the streets, you know what I'm saying? Boys, they can wait, no babies, no! Do what you gonna do, be better than what I am, that is the job... I think she can do it, if she puts her mind, she can do anything.

For Lana, "financially wise, they [her kids] might not be able to do some of the things they want to do... That may be it." Marsha agreed: "I would have to say, money [is the only constraint]... Yeah, cause they be want to play like football, and stuff, but you know it's so high, like 70 dollars per child, at most parks and stuff, but I would have

to say that that would probably be their biggest restraint.” Diana thought there might be some constraints to what her kids could do:

If they don't get scholarships, maybe, or if they drop out of school, that's the only thing that will stop them from going where they want to go... We don't make enough money for them to go to college, so they gotta get scholarships, that's the only way I see them going to college, really... Even from first grade, I tell them they look at your record from kindergarten and first grade. They don't think so...

The emphasis in doing careers where lots of money could be made was something the kids envisioned for themselves, even if they wanted to do things that did not necessarily produce much money, unless they were extremely successful, such as with the arts. This was evidenced during the first focus group, where the kids were asked to imagine themselves in the future and to write about their dreams, or express them in other ways. My intention was also to compare the kids' imaginative abilities and using other data from this research, assess whether the kids could make a plan of action and begin to execute it as part of a self-creation process. What did they want to do when they grew up and how would they go about it? What were they doing at the moment in order to achieve their goals? These questions were asked at the beginning and end of the project.

Maria saw her future with money, surrounded by people, owning many cars, dogs, and cats. Dalia saw money growing on trees, being a doctor, married, with one child, a four bedroom house, a nice car, and making \$10,000 dollars (seemed like a lot to her). Cristina saw herself as a doctor, with a “whole bunch of money around,” and shoes. Charlie saw himself as a successful and famous football player, owning cars, surrounded by people, with dogs, and two kids. He also envisioned many natural disasters in the future. Kaija said she wanted a big house, two children, and a lot of cars, a lot of money,

every pair of shoes, and a lot of clothes. Daquan wanted children, a girl and a boy, surrounded by nature, and girls, but also envisioned clubs, money, cars, and also education.

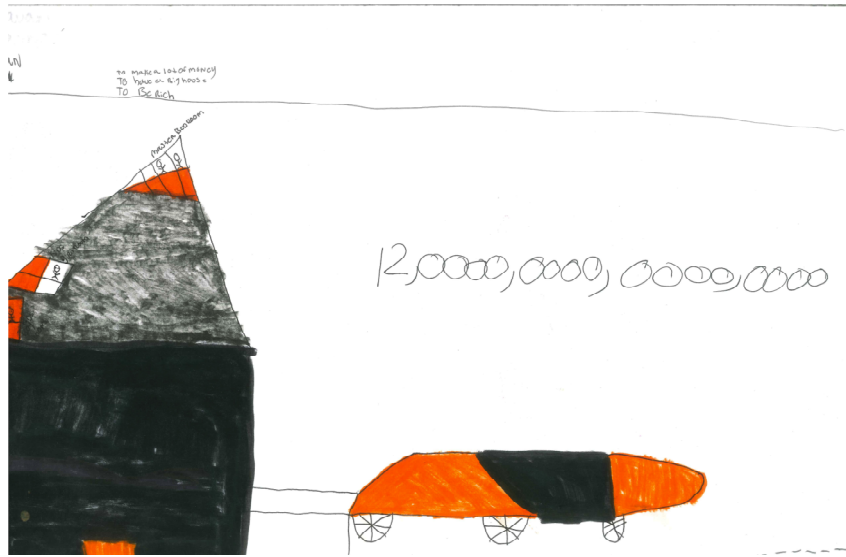
At the end, the kids depicted their responses to this question in drawings, and wrote about their dreams for the future. I used this technique in my attempt to obtain information from different sources, and to triangulate data. Although the MH kids were not shy, picture elicitation could increase their interest and deliver information otherwise uncaptured through other methods. However, the kids's verbal responses did not differ from their pictures; in the latter, they continued to wish for themselves lives that resemble the American Dream, drawing on media depictions of success. Their ideas of the future did not change much either from their initial responses.

In addition, during the first set of interviews, the kids saw no obstacles. They knew what they needed to do to get where they wanted to be. Charlie, for example, did not think he had any constraints to do what he wanted, and reach his goals. Kaija said she had to "work real hard and be one of the better doctors." She wanted to make her family rich, and she said she did not have obstacles to reach these goals. There was nothing in the way to her objectives; nothing could stop her from getting her goal "except being like... things you do in school that get you bad grades can stop you from getting your education..." Daquan's obstacles at the moment were his grades. "I have to get higher, I got Bs," he said. He would "move up to an A... By doing my homework, study, do not fight, stop playing in class, just learn." He needed "education... study, knowledge." Dalia also did not see any obstacles between her and her career goals, and neither did Matthew. He was positive that there were no obstacles for him. Similarly, nothing could stop

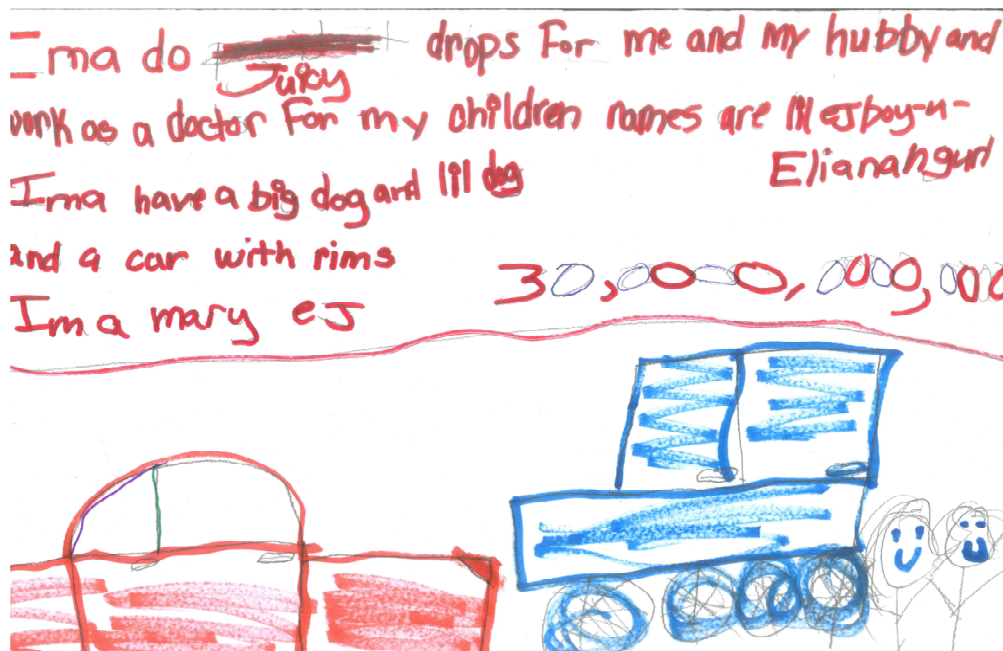
Maurice from getting his goals, and there were also no obstacles for Anna “I just gotta keep pushing myself.”



**Figure 8. Kaija's Dreams of the Future.** Kaija imagined herself being rich, with lots of money. She wanted to marry the boy she liked and have two kids with him. She would do drops and have a house, 20 cars, and a dog. She also wanted to be a doctor.



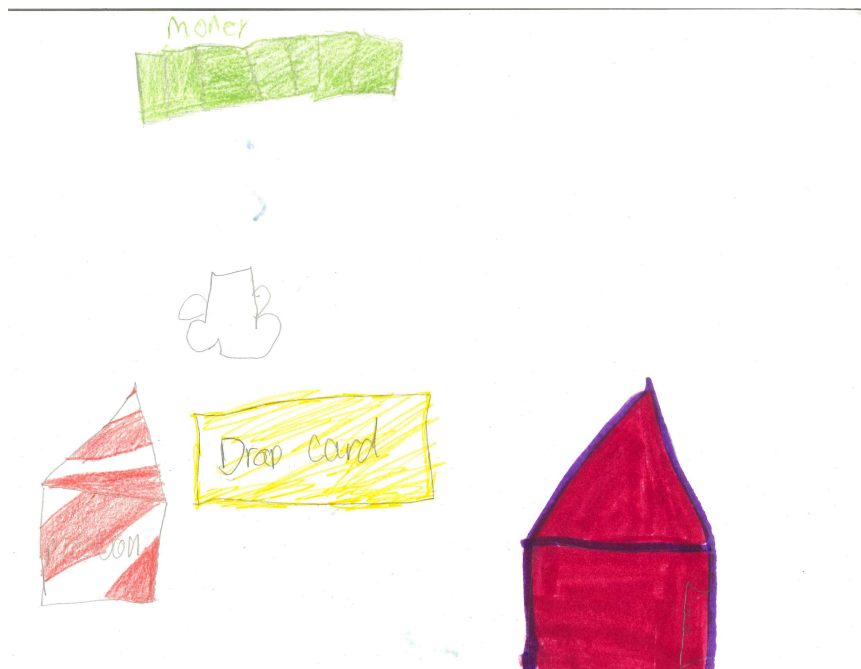
**Figure 9. Daquan's Dreams of the Future.** Daquan also wanted to have lots of money and be rich, to have a big house, a car, a wife, and children.



**Figure 10. Maria's Dreams of the Future.** Maria wanted to do drops, to have a husband, be a doctor, and have children. She also wanted to have dogs, a fancy car, and lots of money.



**Figure 11. Charlie's Dreams of the Future.** This is Charlie's drawing. In the back of his drawing he wrote: "When I get older I want to be a football player in have 1 son and a wife and be rich. And a big house with everything I want."



**Figure 12. Cristina's Dreams of the Future.** Cristina wrote in the back of her drawing that she wanted to be rich, to have a car, to do drops, to get a job, have a house, and money.

At the end, the kids still believed they did not have any obstacles to reach their goals, and their moms agreed. Lana did not think anything could stop them. She said: “They have to strive for their work, to achieve excellence... work hard... Yeah, as long as they stay focused, keep working hard on it.” Marsha said, “I am a believer that they can do anything, and I hope they believe the same thing, that they can do anything.”

It can be inferred from the interview information offered above, and my personal experiences with the kids, that despite their economic limitations, and contrary to other children who frequented MH who seemed to be without much control or support at home, this group had a strong support system, including their mothers and grandmother. Later on, I met other concerned mothers in the neighborhood too, worried about their children’s friends’ influences, the neighborhood’s environment, and always trying to protect the kids from engaging in deleterious behaviors or from falling victims to the surrounding problems; unfortunately, not all children were sheltered in this form.

In the case of the MH kids, they felt quite safe in their lives, primarily due to their family system. Some kids also mentioned their friends in the neighborhood as sources of safety, and one said going to church was a source of safe feelings. At the end of the project, the kids continued to feel safe in their environments, with the protection of their family members and friends.

Among the mothers, however, perceptions of safety for the children were varied. Katia for example, did not think the kids were safe. “This neighborhood, you see, where I live in... Boys be standing on the corners; there would be a lot of fights.” Lana thought they were safe in general, but not in terms of the neighborhood “...Too much violence, fighting.” Marsha, on the other hand thought that



...Generally yes, it [the neighborhood] has gotten better over the last years, a whole lot better... like over that last two or three years, a whole lot better. I mean, there was a lot of drugs at one point, at every corner, but now, you don't see that on the corners no more, or the stores, so I think it is a lot safer now, from two or three years ago.

She continued to hold this position until the end. Diana also thought the kids were safe for the most part..

In general, the kids had a concept of freedom defined as “doing what you want.” Some of them added to this notion not just whatever you want, but “being good” at the same time. They thought freedom referred to having rights, to not be “bossed around,” and to have no limits, and they felt they could do what they wanted, but within the limits established by their moms. They had some freedom, but not all. This was particularly true for the girls, who expressed not being able to date, or to go out at night, or even sometimes during the day in the middle of the week. Although the boys were limited in some ways, they had more freedom. For instance, Daquan thought that he could do what he wanted: “Yeah. Well, you have to pay money, but no money stops... Only you.” For him, some things that made you free were “career, education... being famous.” He thought he could do the things he wanted to do “cause this is a free world.” Still, the mothers determined the level of safety of the kids’ activities, and made decisions based on such limitations. The kids had limits that respected maximum authorities – not only their mothers, but also the police, whom they had learned to fear and sometimes despise. However, they respected societal norms not only out of fear; they had a sense of what was and was not good for them and for others. Nonetheless, although the kids were capable of understanding and even of establishing appropriate behavioral norms for themselves, they still chose sometimes to not follow them, and in that way seemed to

exercise their agencies (Bluebond-Langner 2007). But they also appeared to be unable sometimes to manage freedom, and required disciplinary control, whether at home or at MH.

At the same time, the kids' mothers thought of freedom at different levels. They defined it in terms of security, of doing things while abiding by the rules, and in terms of reaching goals, but they also saw the limitations of their resources and the impact on their children's ability to do what they wished. Katia, for instance, did not think that the kids had freedom to do the things they wanted, "Cause it ain't right... a lot of stuff going on... they can't really... they can't see outside the box... a lot of stuff going around... Like the fighting, and something always going on, and just the fighting in general, there is always something." Lana, on the other hand, thought the kids had a lot of freedom "Not just [to] do what they want, but stand by their rules... Not breaking the rules." Marsha thought that the kids could do "...whatever they set their minds to." Diana thought the kids were free to do the things they wanted to do as well, "...As far as being around each other, yeah, but as far as [other things], no, cause we don't have the resources."

During the final round of interviews, the kids still defined freedom as being able to do what they wanted to do, although this time it was more difficult for some of them to come up with a definition, or perhaps they did not want to think about it. They also seemed to be more aware of their limitations. One of the girls was able to define freedom as doing what she wanted, but she felt that she really could not do it, "I can't get my own house... a car... cannot have a baby..." Cristina also said, "I ain't got my freedom yet, cause I'm a little girl still," yet she could do some things: "I can go to the store, to my friends' house, I can go to the pool, the MH [and] ... Sometimes, I get to go to the

mall...” Thus, there were some constraints in her freedom: “My momma, stops me from doing what I want... Sometimes, if you do what you want you get nowhere in life. That’s why I listen to my momma.” Daquan, on the other hand said he felt free to do the things he wanted, “Cause, I’m not behind bars, not in prison or jail, just playing free.”

Similarly, from the beginning, the kids expressed their abilities to move around easily, but mainly by getting rides with their moms or family members, or friends who had cars. They were able to go anywhere with their mothers or on their own, but only with the moms’ permissions. Although they could also ride bikes and walk, their mobility was restricted primarily to car transportation because of the limited availability of public transportation in the neighborhood and the city more generally. Anna, for example, the oldest kid interviewed, and pregnant at the time, thought she could move around easily to some extent. She took the bus to school, but it took her “about an hour. I take two buses... Monday through Thursday.” She expressed that her only constraint was “transportation, really. It’s hard for me to get on the bus every day, but I still do it.”

According to the mothers, the kids walked around all the time, and in groups, for example to go from and to school; there were numbers of children walking around all the time.

And, usually, the mothers owned cars, although only one had a car at the time of this project. At the end, the kids still believed they could move around freely, except one of the girls who said she had problems with walking, and thus could not get to places easily. And these opinions remained stable through the end of the project for at least one of the mothers as well.

In sum, the kids were happy and had a great sense of freedom, even with the limitations their mothers put on them to control their actions. The only obstacles from the

mothers' perspectives seemed to be limited economic resources and the insecurity of the neighborhood in one case. But the kids had a good support system at home and were motivated to reach their goals. They understood norms and respected them, but not always, as will be detailed later on.

### **Relationships with the Neighborhood**

In order to elicit information from the kids about their relationships with the neighborhood, I prepared cartographic maps for them to locate places and show me how they moved around in the "hood." The kids could walk or even direct a driver (including me) to their favorite spots in the neighborhood, and other important locations, including their homes, and some of the kids had a good sense of location on the maps I showed them as well. However, most kids could almost never remember the name of the streets, even those they frequented, and this made it difficult for them to orient themselves on the maps. In order to be able to locate places on the maps, they required help with the names of the streets and also identifying intersections. The mothers had owned cars in the past (one still did), and drove around; they demonstrated being knowledgeable of the different routes in the neighborhood and important locations.

The kids, however, not only had a hard time locating streets and places on the maps, but they (especially the younger ones) also lacked knowledge of basic geography and thus were unable to locate the neighborhood, Tampa, and even the U.S. on maps. They seemed to have only a vague idea of where these places were, and only the older kids were able to find the exact locations of some places on the maps. In particular, one

of the adolescent boys interviewed, Matthew, had a great deal of knowledge and was able to apply it well in all of the map exercises.

There were some places the kids enjoyed more than others in the neighborhood, among them, the MH, the Recreation Center (the Rec), the pool (although neither of the last two was accessible for free anymore), and Idell Street; those were the most preferred. Others included the candy lady, and one kid mentioned the park as a favorite as well; several said they enjoyed visiting their friends and mentioned their friends' homes as favorite places too. The mothers believed in general that the MH was the kids' favorite place in the neighborhood. As for places out of SS, the mall was a favorite one, and Daquan said his favorite was an Indian restaurant I took him to once, which was also not in SS. These "favorite" places and things are what the kids said they wished to have in their neighborhood always, specifically, the MH, the Rec center, the people, the pool, and the candy lady. The people by far were what the kids loved the most and what they wanted to always keep in their lives.

The above perceptions were maintained through the end of the project as well, although by then the kids were spending much of their time in the new neighborhood, and in their favorite hangout there, the mall; this one dominated their responses, and those of the mothers as well. In addition to their favorite places in SS and the new neighborhood, the kids mentioned Adventure Island and the theme parks in Orlando as well.

When asked what they would want to change in Sulphur Springs, at the beginning of the program, the kids said they did not want to have drugs, or fighting and violence. Kaija also said she would not want to have the police because they were bad, "sometimes they be arresting people for nothing." However, she mentioned a couple of nice police

people there, Ms. Debbie, from the RICH House included. A couple of kids said they would not change anything. And, in the final interview, the kids maintained most of these views. Kaija continued to believe that the police should not be there, arresting “people for nothing.” Another kid said she would like not to have to pay to get in the pool. By this time, however, the kids seemed to have begun to appreciate more their old neighborhood, Sulphur Springs, in the sense that they believed there were more activities to do there than in the new neighborhood. Several missed their friends and the organizations they used to attend. Cristina said Sulphur Springs was perfect “...it’s a whole bunch of things to do over there.”

Some of the kids thought they could help the neighborhood “by... be picking up trash and stuff,” for example, but others did not know what they could do, and one more expressed that there was nothing she could do as an individual. One girl, Maria, said she would “...kick some of the bad people out of the neighborhood... I am gonna tell them that they need to go, and will make them go, and if they don’t want to leave, I am going to call the police.” She thought she could help make things better. Anna, the oldest interviewed, said she could help by “...opening a center for the older kids, so they can have... they are the ones right now on the streets, the older kids. The younger kids are off the streets, at MH, Rec center and stuff, so older kids need something.” Tatiana said, “...I would make signs and stuff like that... I would be like MLK, actually... I would make speeches and stuff like that,” about how people should behave and do things. And Dalia said she could also improve the neighborhood, “I would build something like a water park, or a water pool... I could ask people to help me, but my friends sometimes, they be busy, and they be gone.”

From the information gathered, it appears that the kids had a strong relationship with Sulphur Springs; there were places they enjoyed there, although they also identified problems, and they believed they could help to improve the neighborhood in some way.

### **Relationships with the Society at Large**

For the most part, the kids lacked information about the city and the US as a country, and the people living in these places. They knew very little about them even though their perceptions were mostly positive. They pointed out differences among people based on their experiences at school, especially nationalities, some languages, and skin color. Yet, some of the kids perceived people as people and not incredibly different from each other, perhaps given the fact that they had not experienced much of the world outside of Sulphur Springs. Similarly, they did not seem to struggle with, or at least express, issues of racism as much, at least not in a conscious or direct way. The kids' tended to extrapolate the information from their experiences living in Sulphur Springs in their descriptions of the city, the country and the world at large, although sometimes they introduced information acquired from the media, or from school. In general, however, they did not seem to engage in much thought about places or things outside of their day-to-day lives and environments.

The mothers had much more knowledge of the geographical location of the neighborhood and the city, based on their ages and experiences, of course. Katia said, "...There is nothing I don't like.... I can adapt to anything." She also said she liked that "you always have a place to go and something to do. I like living in Tampa, I would not

live nowhere else.” Lana said she liked the city. She liked the “good programs for families...” Marsha explained that she had lived in other places besides Tampa

...St. Augustine, yeah, is a smaller town, but comparing it to Tampa, if I could raise my kids in St. Augustine, I probably would, cause like it’s smaller, you know... I am trying to... Mhh, it’s small, it’s not like the city... Well, I guess it is, I don’t know, it’s just less people, but it’s okay, the city, I mean Tampa, is okay too. I don’t really have no big problems with it... I would not describe it as safe. It’s guns, you know what I’m saying, guns, and I would not describe it as safe at all. St. Augustine, I thought that was a safe place, that’s why I said, if I had to make a choice, I would raise my kids there, where I was brought up.

Marsha also liked Tampa in that “...there’s stores everywhere... you don’t have to go far to get to what you need, ahh, yeah, I guess.” But she would get rid of the traffic in Tampa. Diana said: “I think... [Tampa is] overcrowded, I don’t think there is enough resources, I think not enough opportunities.” And Marsha agreed with this statement during the final interview. She said it was “...too crowded... way too crowded, too many people at the same things too, same jobs and same, you know what I’m saying? Programs, everything.” This time, Lana expressed that she did not like the city, “too many people here,” and she could not find anything good about it. They seemed to have grown more unsatisfied since our first interviews.

The moms, again, had a broader perspective of the country than their children and expressed their thoughts. Katia, for example, said,

Oh lord, they need to do more to help us, single mothers, they need to do a lot to help single mothers, and they need to... How can I say it? Ha, they also need to just more to try to help us, like, especially us single mothers with no criminal record, trying to make it, I think they could do more for us, in that area.

Marsha expressed, “I would have to say, right now, I would say jobs, the lack of jobs, it is hard to get a job... I’ve been looking for like the past six or seven months,



yeah, it is really hard.” She said she thought the country was a good one “probably because there’s a lot of possibilities, a lot of, you know, I think it is a good country, I really do, as far as things, and what you can become, free federal schools, I mean there’s a lot of good things about the country itself.” Diana said, “...I think it’s going to get better, though, hopefully... I think if we can get a Black president, we can do anything, so, I hope that they will get better... [for] all people.”

The mothers’ answers were similar at the end. For Marsha “the country is okay, it’s just it need a little work, that’s another whole other... I could go on and on... I’m saying as far as jobs, there are no jobs, the economy all messed up, schools have no money, it’s... I can go on and on...” Lana laughed cynically, then said it is not a good place “not really... They need work...” Again, the mothers exhibited more critical views during these interviews. They were pressed to find jobs and those were scarce.

In sum, the kids were still young to have a broader understanding of the world outside of the neighborhood, but the mothers were conscious of their social setting. They liked the freedoms and certain opportunities they found in their city and the country at large, but especially at the end, they felt resentful of the fact that they could not find jobs to provide for their families. They were continuously concerned about their economic situation. They appreciated every little bit of help they could get, and this is evidence in the next chapter where the place of community arts and other organizations in their and their kids’ lives is discussed.

**Chapter 8:**  
**How Do Disadvantaged African American Youth Define and Experience the Role of  
Community Arts, and Community Arts Organizations, in Their Lives and Their  
Neighborhood?**

Moses House was founded as a community arts organization in the exact sense of the concept as defined when the community arts movement became prominent in the United States (see Chapter 2). However, MH has expanded the concept of community arts as well, to involve other activities that aid in the integral development of disadvantaged African American youth in Sulphur Springs, according to the kids and families' needs.

This section helps to understand the ways in which the MH and other community organizations could advance the objectives of the populations they serve in Sulphur Springs. It defines the ways in which the kids and their mothers define the arts, how they relate to them, their preferences and the results they expected from artistic and other cultural activities. I conducted pre- and post- project interviews with the kids in my project, with their mothers, and with others in order to gain a broader perspective.

## **Relationships with Art**

When asked to define the concept of art during the first set of interviews, in general, the children knew what it meant, but in a somewhat narrow way. The kids' initial concept of art was associated primarily with the art activities at their school, where their "art" classes focused on drawing or painting, although the older kids said they took some music lessons as well. The kids more involved in art activities, such as Maurice and Cristina, associated art with creativity and the imagination, and as an expressive form. These concepts also resembled the kids' mothers' definitions in some ways; they liked the arts, and thought about art in broader terms than the other children.

Even though most of the kids showed strong inclination towards music and dancing, initially, it was difficult for them to conceptualize these activities as art forms. However, once they understood art in terms of creation and of self-expression, and learned to see other forms as art as well, music and dance became their "favorite" art forms. Only a few kids preferred drawing or painting, but always in addition to music, and in some cases dance as well. Kaija, for example, said she liked the arts, and her favorites were dancing and music; they made her happy. Cristina said the arts show how one feels and they show "your way of creating something." Daquan said making music made him feel "Grrreat" (with that emphasis). Maurice preferred music and painting; he said he felt that he was "creative" when he painted, that music made him feel good and dancing made him feel "like a superstar, in the spotlight." Matthew liked music, and for him, it "has a lot of potential... [for] expressing your feelings." Then he added that music "calms me down." Karla said dancing was her favorite, after which came coloring. She said she liked the arts because they were fun and made her feel "good," by allowing her

to have fun and “feel smart.” Anna said that art made her feel “relieved, free... I can do anything... It takes a lot of stress off of me.”

During the second, and final, interviews, after the project ended, the kids exhibited a wider notion of what art meant. Some of them defined it in terms of creativity, and they could also talk more securely about some of their favorite activities, dance and music, in terms of art. These continued to dominate their preferences, but drawing and sometimes painting made it into the list as well. They thought these activities were fun and made them happy. Some of the kids also included martial arts among their favorites, since I exposed them to capoeira, specifically, during the summer. They also included video as a favorite in a couple of cases.

The mothers also enjoyed dancing and music, they said. Lana actually expressed that her favorite type of art was dance, although she did not dance as much anymore, but she listened to music a lot, R&B and Gospel. “Gospel gives me a piece of mind... R&B gives me a happy spirit.” She said that she liked and enjoyed the arts several times during our interviews, and at the end reminisced about some pottery classes she took in her neighborhood when she was younger.

It was important to clarify the concept of art in the interviews, in order for the kids and the mothers to feel identified with the artistic activities they liked, and to feel that they could be artists as well. Seeing themselves as potential artists could help the kids increase their confidence in their productions, and invite them to sharpen their skills in the future as well; this, because art seemed to be an activity of special people, talented and successful, in their eyes. In this sense, art, during the first interviews, appeared to be a foreign concept to some, until they began to see music and dance as artistic forms, and

recognized that they could be proficient in these areas. It was clear that these were the culturally relevant forms for them as well, and the ones we could expand and nurture in our programs to provide most satisfaction for the kids. This was evident in some ways before the interviews, but having these discussions gave me a good idea of the types of programs that could be introduced or expanded at MH, at the same time that we introduced the kids to new art forms. During our summer projects, for example, the kids decided to incorporate their interest in music as an asset to be highlighted in the videos that we produced. They used original raps created by one of the girls, which were accompanied by other kids' choruses, palm rhythms, and improvised drums. They also used some of their favorite tunes as soundtracks of these videos, although we had to edit them quite a bit in order to avoid the explicit derogatory language so common in this type of music. Dance, on the other hand, was not a main character in these videos, although the girls had incorporated it in their video the previous fall semester, and were quite proud of the end results.

### **Relationships with Community Organizations in the Neighborhood**

It was equally important to define more clearly the roles of the organizations that the kids frequented in the neighborhood, and the ways in which such organizations sought to fulfill their objectives, which, except for caring for the kids, and teaching them new things, were not clear apparently for the kids or their mothers.

I inquired about the places in the neighborhood where children could learn art, whether there were any at all, and if so, the specific activities that were offered there. For the most part, the kids talked about "The Art House," which I later realized was another

name they used for Community Stepping Stones (CSS), an organization also housed in the Mann Wagon Park complex at that time, which had been operating in the neighborhood for several years, and which was linked to the Art Department at USF. The kids knew that CSS offered art classes but almost none of them had been there. A couple of kids mentioned the MH, and others also referred to the library and the elementary school where learning art was also possible. Other places mentioned included The RICH House and the Recreation Center (The Rec). The mothers also included the YMCA, located at the elementary school, in addition to the RICH House and the library.

The kids had very little knowledge of the history of these organizations. They knew who ran some of them, but not the founders, or when they opened for the first time. The history of the MH, for instance, for them began with the new location at Mann-Wagon Park; they had first come to MH when it opened there, and they helped to renovate, or organize the place during the first weeks or months of operation. Some of the kids knew a little more about the history of MH because we had given them information in the spring, before these interviews, and also created an exhibit with the important historical facts about the MH, inside the building, but not all could recall this information and had more questions than answers to my questions. One of the kids, Matthew, knew that “Granddaddy Taft and Harold” created the MH. He knew this because Taft was his friends’ “granddaddy.” He learned about the MH at Mann-Wagon Park, and he was one of the kids who helped with renovations of the building. Before then, he only “...knew about Granddaddy Taft,” but not the MH itself. As I talked to the kids and explained to them the historical facts of the MH, they listened attentively. They were interested in learning about Taft and Harold and what they had done in the past.

The mothers also did not know much about the history of these organizations. Katia, for instance, one of the girls' mothers, had never heard of the MH, until two months earlier, when her girls told her they wanted to be part of it. She did not know anything about it during the interview. She knew about the "art house," only, and she also knew that her daughter, Dalia, was in choir at the school. Lana, on the other hand, when asked what other places in the neighborhood taught art, mentioned MH, the R.I.C.H House (RH), and the YMCA (the Y). At the RH, they teach "arts and crafts," and at the Y "they do like drawings and stuff like that..." Lana thought the R.I.C.H House had been around for eight or nine years. She did not know about the MH, and assumed that it had begun with Lance. She said that the Y was founded by a police officer, Ms. Debbie, but she was confusing it with the Rich House, actually. Finally, Marsha did not know anything about the MH or the other programs. But she was very interested in learning about Taft's work with bones; she wanted to understand the process of making the bone sculptures. She was also interested in learning about Harold, and asked how old he was when she learned that he was ill.

It appeared that the neighborhood's organizations needed to communicate more efficiently and broadly about their missions and activities to the populations they served, but also to connect more with the participants. The kids and their mothers were fascinated with the history of MH, for example, when I began to tell them about it during the interviews. They wanted to learn more, and the fact that it had been founded by members of the community, African American people like them, made them appreciate and identify more with the organization. This knowledge can make a huge difference in how the community members perceive the role of the organization, and can generate more

enthusiasm for its programs. But, most importantly, learning exactly what each organization's mission is and their purpose is fundamental, for it can help families make decisions about the places the kids frequent.

For example, if tutoring is a necessity, as it became evident for me later on, then the families should know where to send their kids for that; if the purpose is to recreate, then they should know this as well, or if they want their kids to learn about particular topics or if the kids want to know and develop certain skills, then they should know where to go. In addition, having this information available to everyone can help the community organizations avoid redundancy in their offerings, and in that way create a more integral system across the community. I am familiar with a map produced at one of the organizations, which shows a variety of service providers with a little explanation; however, it was evident to me that this map was not circulated enough around the families in the neighborhood, and/or the information was not communicated in the appropriate way.

As will be described in the next sections, in general, the kids expressed enormous satisfaction with the community organizations they attended. They learned a variety of skills there, not only art. They got help with their homework, and were motivated in some cases to stay out of trouble and to do something with their lives. They liked creating things and being busy, with a variety of activities during the week.

### **Relationships with Moses House**

At MH, the kids liked to make money working in the garden. They also enjoyed working on the computers and learning how to behave themselves, how to be respectful



and well mannered. In this sense the MH was also important for the mothers. They thought their kids learned many important skills that could help them in the future, including how to stay out of trouble, stay in school, and behave outside of their neighborhood environment. They asked for more one-on-one work with each kid, and mentioned how important it was for the kids to learn proper behavior. Ms. Norma, in particular, applauded the work we did at MH, because she thought we went beyond the call of duty, taking into consideration the particular needs of each child, and working with them on improving their lives.

The kids seemed to enjoy variety in their activities. They liked the MH because they had opportunities to learn about different forms of art and media, drawing, painting, music production, singing, but also other things like gardening, and they could play on the computers, and play football, and go on fieldtrips. They preferred places where they could combine these activities, such the Rec Center, which, like MH, offered a variety of options. But the kids also appreciated the places where they felt loved and taken care of, and those where they felt safe. The R.I.C.H. House was one such place, in addition to MH. However, the intergenerational dynamics among the kids at MH were difficult perhaps due to space issues where the older and the younger kids could not separate themselves and enjoy their unique interests, without interfering in each other's space. And there were not many places for the older kids to learn or enjoy themselves.

The MH was small and there was very little space to divide groups by age and keep them separated from each other. The older kids did not want to participate in the programs with the smaller kids and vice versa; thus, eventually the middle schoolers became the core population at MH, although Lance opened the garden program to the

teenagers, giving them the opportunity to make money there, while keeping them off the streets, if they were not already. He also worked with them individually. In addition, the music workshop was created mainly for the teenagers. Unfortunately, for logistical and sustainability/funding reasons most programs were eventually stopped. The garden, as well as Lance's individual attention to the teenagers, continues to be an outlet for their energy and a means to grow and develop. The younger kids with whom I work have a variety of options, and at MH we have tried to implement unique programs that tackle important aspects of development. As a result, they have learned a number of skills.

For example, I began to teach the kids breathing techniques to calm them down when they felt angry or frustrated. We tried to instill in them the need not to talk back to their elders and to respect the rules at MH, which they helped create and eventually to maintain. They had to learn patience because few of our projects showed immediate results. For instance, Maurice, a kid already in high school, mentioned that at MH he "learned to be calm, not talk back, and give respect." He said Lance and I taught him that. He also learned things that they did over and over again, "like work in the garden, pick up trash..." He liked "planting stuff, digging in the ground and stuff, and water and keeping it neat..." He also liked the music workshop, where he learned that "...it takes time to make a song and it takes patience and all that."

Tatiana said that she came to the MH "because the MH is a fun place to be at, and it's a good place to be around your friends and create stuff, and do stuff together." Her favorite activity was to make videos, and the least favorite to draw. She explained that she did not like drawing because, like Daquan, she did not know how to do it. Nikolas said he liked "being here with you all guys and it is fun and I like to work in the garden."

He liked the garden, “cause I get a lot of money, and I like planting the flowers and watering them.” He also liked the other activities we offered; his favorite was: “When the artists come and we just sit down and he can tell us we can draw with him.” He used to be scared to go out of his home, and then decided to go to the MH, recruited by his cousin, because it was open for all. Matthew said that when he frequented MH, he liked “getting interviewed by Lance.” He also liked when they “watched movies on the computer... [and got] snacks.” He learned “how to be creative... how to garden.” He did not do any art, except for the music workshop, which for him “was the best one.”

During the interviews at the end of our video project, the kids in the core group expressed what they had learned during their time at MH. Charlie, for instance, said he learned, “about rapping, and how to... I learned a lot of stuff... how to record with camera, how to interview people... how to plant seeds and... cut the grass.” He also agreed that he had learned a little bit of drawing, and painting. Kaija said: “Ufff... a lot of stuff... new words, how to do most stuff... how to use the camera, new words, making a video... time codes [she meant logging in post-production]... Oh yeah, I know how to plant.” Keiona said: “I learned how to work with cameras, do a video, log... edit... make music... how to create things, like paintings on a barrel... I learned how to garden... compost...” Then added: “All we do here is to have fun... I learned how not to eat with my hands, but I still do.” Daquan learned: “All kinds of things... video, ah... art... drawing... video... gardening... computers... I learned... the MH... Like, now I know about the MH [history].” Maria said she learned: “New things... About cameras... sound... editing... how to do a project... to put together a story... We did...”

evaluations... how to plant stuff... how to paint a barrel... I mean wash barrels... work with Ms. Judith... “

During the second focus group, at the end of our program, I asked the kids the same question. They mentioned most of the activities listed above, and other new ones. Daquan said he learned “logging (video), draw a palm tree, garden, ...how to control my attitude a little bit...” Maria said, “work on the computer with the hard stuff... editing, log, set up camera, do sound, when you are doing a story putting the story together [storyboarding]... paint with Ms. Judith, plant, [put] pictures on the wall... people coming to enjoy themselves... work with others, gardening, I mean, the compost, shoveling, mix the compost.” Karla said she “learned how to paint the barrels, compost in the garden, water plants everyday, plant the flowers, plant.” And Kaija expressed, “work on the computer... editing and stuff, water the flowers, paint barrels.” Daquan added also “computer, garden, plant, barrels, spray paint, clean the MH, set up the projector, the mixer, camera, mics.”

The kids’ responses show the great variety of programs that we were able to offer at MH, many of which, unfortunately, were short lived, and so the kids had the opportunity to experience them, but not to further develop the specific skills, except perhaps for the garden. The kids liked variety, but they also mentioned later on that they would like to expand on some of their favorite activities, in particular because they wanted to continue in that line of work, perhaps in the future. At the same time, they wanted to learn other things that were important to them, so it is very crucial to balance the programs offered by the organization, not only according to availability of instructors,

but also to provide some consistency for the kids, and expand the potential long-term benefits of these programs and expressive techniques.

### **Importance of Community Arts Organizations for the Kids and Their Families**

During the first set of interviews, the kids expressed, in most cases, that community arts organizations, and in particular the MH, could help them in their future plans by teaching them about school and behavior and respect for others, as well how to stay focused. They wanted to learn more, they wanted more computer time, play time, and to learn other interesting activities, more art, more video, more projects. For Charlie, who liked sports, what he learned at MH could help him because “we be over there in the garden, and in the back playing football...” He also learned “about eating fruits and stuff.” For Kaija, organizations like MH “teach you about school,” and Cristina, who wanted to be a doctor, said she learned how to be a good student. Daquan said, “...if you want to be an artist, you already know art. If you want to be a singer, you already know the cords, the notes, the vocal cords, how to use instruments...” He said he learned art, math, reading, and that was important “cause you got to know how to write... You got to write the game out first thing...” Maurice thought what he learned at MH could help him to become a football player. He learned “respect... calm, patience.” Matthew on the other hand, said he wanted to learn about construction, and in this sense, the experience of helping to renovate the MH was important for him because one of his ideas for the future was to have a construction business. Maria did not know yet what she wanted to do when she grew up, but she thought the MH helped them by “...helping us with homework.” Tatiana wanted to be a doctor and a chef. She said at MH she learned “how to create

stuff, like videos, and make stuff, and be creative and imagining stuff in your mind, and learn how to share and care, and stuff like that.” She agreed that she also learned how to behave at MH.

When asked if, and how, community arts programs, more generally, could help them to reach their goals, Charlie thought that they could help them because “we talked about how we be disrespectful and stuff, and how to use our mouths.” Kaija did not think that they could help her become a doctor. Cristina thought that they could help her in her goal of being a doctor also because “you got a first aid, and I learn how to put on band aids.” She thought this helped her to take care of herself. Daquan said, “...you is helping me learn stuff to get ready for it... computer, math, science, and stuff like that... math, but not science... We [already] know how to behave, but we don’t. I behave sometimes, sometimes not.” Maria was not sure how these organizations could help her, perhaps because she did not know what she wanted to do in the future. She had no specific plan developed yet; however, she agreed that she had learned how to behave well in public.

I also asked the mothers how they thought these organizations could prepare their kids to reach their goals in the future. Katia said, “yeah, they broaden their horizons, I think, like a lot of kids don’t grow up thinking that they want to be a painter when they grow up, especially Black kids, so yeah, that be a good thing, something different, something new that they can do and do any time.” Lana said these organizations helped “... them to stay out of trouble, gives them something to do.... Helps them to calm down... see what they are good at and stuff... feel good about yourself and do something positive.” As an example, she said that if Kaija wanted to be a doctor, these programs

could help her “cause she has to keep the focus on her goals.” For Ms. Norma, the MH could help the kids by:

... Encouraging them to get more education, like I said, whatever discipline, you know, you come from... give them more motivation on how to do when they are not at home, you know, teach them stuff like that. Cause you know, Marsha got seven [kids] and Lana got eight, so okay, one parent might not be paying enough attention to one child. Okay so maybe you can say you need to be on time today because you are not paying attention, or you are not following directions. I will tell you that be great for any parent, yeah... And teaching them how to make a better goal for their life.

Thus, it was evident to me that organizations like MH were very important in the children’s lives, and the children and mothers expressed this as well. Charlie said that they are important “so children can stay out of trouble, and not go on the streets and get harassed by the police.” For Cristina, it was good to have a place like MH “because when you don’t have nothing to do, you can go there and have your piece of quiet and draw, or do a fun activity.” For Daquan, the MH was important for “learning art... playing on the computer...” He felt that “the garden... it helps you survive... The plants give oxygen to us to live... computer help us, oh, learn about different stuff and what is going on, and do researches and all kinds of stuff. And, the art, helps you to become famous.” Maria said it was important to have a place like MH “so you can have something to do... All week long.” For Karla, places like MH or CSS were good to have in the neighborhood “cause like people can have fun, and not be bored.” She said that if she stayed home she would be bored “cause there is nothing to do... Just watch TV.” For Maurice, these organizations “help us, keep us out of trouble, and have something to do with our lives... like, make us stay on the right track, like... like doing good, staying in school ... and go to college and get a scholarship... stay away from drugs.” Anna said that these

organizations were important “so the kids can stay out of trouble. I guess, they see SS as a place that has high violence, so... with the programs, they keep them out of trouble, busy and stuff instead of running around, getting in trouble.” For her, being part of community programs improved her school “cause they always told you to stay positive and in school, get a good education, and put effort into school, to stay in school and stuff...” She said that hearing this all the time impacted her, and she thought that it was the same for boys and for girls. She thought that kids who participated in those programs, including boys, were likely to stay in school. Those programs, according to her, “help you more in life, than just being on the streets.” Dalia thought that having these programs was good “cause, you can express yourself... You can go there and calm down and stuff.” For Tatiana, these places were important “because it’s like important in my life so when I grow up, then I can tell everybody... about it and pass it down from generation to generation.” I asked her if she wanted to teach other kids the same things that she was learning, and she answered: “Yes, and make a tradition out of it.” She wanted to teach stepping specifically. For Nikolas, a place like the MH was a good place for children because “they teach you how to respect people and you do not just come there to act foolish; that is a community place, you come there like it is your own home.” This did not mean for him that the MH was his home, but *like* his home. He said that he respected the MH, and that it taught him how to respect other people. He felt that we should continue having the MH. For Matthew, places like the MH were important “cause they keep the neighborhood clean, cause some people litter a lot so they go around picking up trash around the neighborhood... You take kids from being bad and turn them around.”



The mothers felt similarly about these organizations. For Katia, for example, “they keep the kids out of trouble, gives them something to do, keep them focused also, show them something else they can do, yeah, that’s very important.” Ms. Norma expressed that the MH had already had a great impact on the kids. As an example, she talked about Daquan: “Because Daquan shows more interest, and it is giving him a lot of motivation to go and try things... For example, Lance get him on a computer, he comes home and he’s real good with it, and he teaches the other kids how to do stuff that he is learning there.” According to Lana, these programs are needed, and having them “keeps the kids out of trouble...” There was a lot of fighting among the youth, according to Lana “cause they don’t have nothing to do.” She liked her children going to these programs, and they were important for her “cause they are teaching them [the children] positive things.” The most important things for her were “high self-esteem, self-control, and how to express themselves and stuff like that.” In addition, she thought the kids were naturally motivated to go to these programs, “they have somewhere to go and be together and do things, out of the house.” Marsha thought the kids went to MH “to have something to do, really. They like having somewhere to go, you know, having somewhere to go and something to do after school, cause they got tired of the YMCA, they burnt out at the YMCA.” I asked why? She said, “I don’t know, they said they do the same thing over and over again, so they kind of burnt out on that, so the MH is like something different, something new.” She said a program like the MH “...is important because it keeps them out of trouble, keeps them from really being bad bad on the streets. I think it is very important, and then they learn new stuff, things that they would not ordinarily learn at home, or school, so I think it is important.”

Ms. Norma also expressed that having a program like the MH was important:

It most definitely is, and it gives the kids something to do, and in that way, they can do stuff, and at the same time, it helps them keep them out of trouble [...] I am all for them furthering their education, not just get graduated and get a GED diploma, but try to take it further to the next level, because these days and times, even with a 12th grade education, no matter what you got, it's not enough, if you don't motivate yourself to be better; nowadays is just, you know, just life don't work for you.

For Diana, organizations like the MH were good for the children “because it's a way to keep them out of trouble; they offer them help with their homework and they do different things... I think it's really good.”

At the end of the project, the kids still believed that these organizations were important in the neighborhood. Kaija thought these organizations were important “cause you can learn... [And] play.” For Cristina, they were important also “cause I want to learn how to draw and paint.” She said: “Because they can teach you how to draw, paint. They can teach you how to use actual camera and make videos and all that.” For Daquan, these organizations were important “because you are learning, and it's keeping you out of the streets, and making you make good decisions.” For Maria: “Yeah, so you can learn for school... they teach you so you know for school.” She comes to the MH “to play... and work.”

The kids' and mothers' responses indicate the need, again, for variety in the programs, as well as the need to continue emphasizing the things that were recognized as important, to motivate the kids for school, to teach them skills to improve the school experience as well, through tutoring or by correcting deleterious behaviors, to entertain them, while improving their chances of being successful in the world outside the neighborhood, to feel respected and loved and worthy. The big theme was to keep the

kids out of the streets, out of trouble, because in their views, not having anything productive to do brought them trouble.

### **What Should Organizations Focus On?**

During the first interviews, I asked the kids whether they wanted to continue participating in the MH programs, and, if so, what they would like to learn. We had worked together intensively during the spring, in a variety of projects and with good results in general. Charlie said he wanted to learn “how to put together a project... like what you are doing right now.” Kaija wanted to learn cheerleading. She had mentioned before also that she wanted to do a video on salsa dancing. Her new idea was to do a live video “like the way you grow up and what you can become.” Cristina said she wanted to learn “how to do... ah... how to build things... something that takes a long time to build...” I asked whether she meant a sculpture, and she said yes. “...I want to build a sculpture, of a person.” Daquan wanted to learn about technology, computers specifically. He wanted to “learn how to produce games.” Maria said she wanted to learn math, reading and science. Maurice wanted to “learn about more art... drawing, so I get better and better at it...” He wanted to learn football also, and wanted the kids to be taught “more about painting and art.” Anna said that if she could go back to the community programs, she would like to go back to the Rec, the step program, “...And they had a nice computer program too.” She said kids her age would likely be interested in “dance, step... all the kids I know are into dance and step, so, they are into music.” She was not sure what else they would like to learn but, “I’m hoping most school education and stuff, like math, reading, languages and arts... school related... just to improve.”

Dalia said she would like to learn “about the body of a human being, and stuff like that.” She wanted to be a doctor. She also wanted to learn “how to work the camera.” Tatiana wanted to learn “how to do CPR.” She was also interested in “creating videos, I just like creating videos, cause like when you look at them, they just look so funny and you can remember it and laugh at it.” She also wanted to do physical exercises at the MH, with me. Matthew said he would go back to the MH, even though he did not live as close anymore. He wanted to “work on the garden and play on the computer.” He wanted to learn how to work on the computer and “come up with random stuff at the MH.”

At the end of the project, the kids still wanted to participate in MH programs. Charlie said he wanted to go back and “play football... [and] paint.” Kaija wanted to go back and learn “yoga and capoeira... [and] how to play football and basketball.” Cristina wanted to learn “how to draw... [and do] art...” Daquan wanted to “have fun... any kind of fun... like the mixer, the mic, the computer, eating snacks, the camera... the projector... like video stuff.” He wanted to make videos on “like when we are on the mixer and mic, we can do a music video or something like that, and dance... that’s all.” He also wanted classes on “driving... sculpturing... like any kind of sculptures... drawing lessons... computer lessons...” Maria wanted to learn “new things,” and so far her favorite learning experience had been “the project [the video project].” She wanted to take “painting... drawing... driving...”

During the final focus group, all the kids expressed interest in going back to MH. Daquan was interested in capoeira. Maria wanted to learn more about the garden and vegetables. Cristina wanted to learn more how to draw. Daquan added driving also to his interests. Karla wanted to learn more about making videos in a project similar to the one

we made in the summer. She wanted to work with the camera. Kaija was not into our conversation and said she had already learned everything she wanted to learn. She was interested now in having fun and partying.

The kids seemed to be more motivated about the things they had participated in more intensely, such as gardening, and video production, but also physical activities, such as sports, and at that time capoeira, the martial art I began to teach them after we finished the video project. The kids liked technology, and seemed to be, at the end, much more open to learning anything. They loved to learn new things and to be introduced to new people, places and technologies, while remaining interested in some things more than others. Individual variations are also evident, and thus, it is important to find ways to serve all the children, through programs, or through individual time and space for activities that they can pursue on their own, or in small interest groups. This is how we were running the MH in the spring, in some ways. The kids had big projects they participated in on a regular basis, such as the garden, and then other activities that changed sporadically, such as painting, drawing, and coloring. They also had the chance to play outside, sports or other things, if they desired, and if there was no other option at MH. And, so, again, having regular programs with particular learning outcomes, as well as temporary projects, connecting the same outcomes and some new ones if applicable, plus good doses of freedom and play, seemed to be a good cocktail of programs for the kids and their mothers.

At the beginning of the project, I had asked the mothers if there was anything else we should do at MH. Katia said: “No, I think what you are doing is fine, you are already doing a lot.” Ms. Norma replied:

No, not really, I admire you and Mr. Lance, and the rest of them. You know, I don't know them all but I admire what your staff is doing, and I know all the parents, you all did a beautiful job, trying to do what you could for those guys, you did a beautiful job, because some of the programs, they don't go a step beyond, to try to meet the... not meet their needs, but show them if they behave themselves, you know, it pays off...

Still, Ms. Norma wanted the kids to learn more and explained:

Okay, maybe I should not say this but, other than the home training, we can try to encourage them to learn how to act on the streets somewhere else, and it's nothing wrong with nobody that you know teach them this; is something that you need to learn how to do when you are not at home. Okay I think you all should work with them a little more, okay I know your mom and your grandma, doing a great job at home, but this is how you act at the MH, you know that would give them a little more motivation about how things should be when they are away from home. [She thought we could work more on this].

[Kaija] needs to learn how to act more appropriate... work on her behavior... Daquan is very good, but I know you know sometimes, he might just need more discipline... They are not real real bad but they have to be told this place [is?] this place, so act accordingly." [Cristina needs] "A little bit more talking with her, and maybe she needs to pay attention when she is talking to..." [Then, she went back to Daquan] "...I'm not saying he is a perfect child, but since [he began attending MH], he is a very good child, he does things sometimes at home, he does not have to be told nothing, and I watch him around other people, sometimes the kids would do stuff, he won't do it, so you all doing a very good job." [And Charlie]: "He will follow directions, but sometimes he has to be told, you know, choose his friends better. That's, you know, if Charlie learns to choose his friends better, everything will be good with him, cause some of the boys that Charlie be around... I am not saying that they are bad kids, but sometimes I feel that their parents are not teaching them how to do and act, you know, each one knows how to raise their kids, but some of the things that I watch the children that play with them, it is just things that I don't thing these kids should do." In general, she said, "observe more. This one might need a little more talking to, this one needs more guidance, and maybe this one, she will not be quiet... I am sure you have your own rules and regulations, but this is just my thought... Maybe you just look at them and say nothing, but I don't think it works all the time..."

For Lana, the kids should learn more about “culture and stuff like that... [how to] stay out of trouble, and like what trouble can cause and have them fix their future and stuff... And positive things [like school and college]. For her, the MH could improve its programs by being open more days. She even offered to volunteer. “I would not mind doing it... teach the kids life skills, how to cook, every day tasks, laundry.” In the final interview, Lana said she would like to participate in programs working with kids “teaching them how to stay out of trouble... show them love and... cause some of them are lacking love and attention.”

Diana would like these organizations to offer other programs for the children,

I think, maybe like a second language would be good for them, like career avenue, and maybe some math tutoring would be good, cause a lot of the African American kids, they have trouble with math, and I think a math course would be good.

She also suggested other programs:

You could teach them about drugs and maybe sex education, teach them not to become a statistic of teenage pregnancy. That would be good too, because you have so much of that going on. So, yeah, stuff like that... staying in school, that’s number one thing... yeah, safe sex... cause I know she [her child] likes boys but she cannot be thinking about that... my baby... (she laughs)...

For Marsha, the kids could learn “more like life skills... sometimes, we, as parents do not always have time... especially the girls, I think they need all the talking... I am going to have to say life skills... like ah... parenting; you know what I’m saying. Yeah, that would probably be a big [thing] ...in this neighborhood.” She thought sex education was also important for boys and girls, because they were starting to question and experiment with sex earlier, “younger and younger, it seems like these days, for real, it really does.... That’s why we have to keep the girls aware (laughs).”

In terms of each of her kids, Marsha thought it was important:

... With Charlie and Cristina, probably just enforce like to keep up their good behavior; that they know that they need to be on their best behavior all the time. That is probably the only thing with them, cause they can get kind of rowdy at times.” [Cristina] “gets stubborn sometimes, and don’t want to do nothing.” [Karla is a little more challenging] “cause she likes to play a lot. She is real like giggly, and goofy, and she, she, uff, she is a handful, she really is... she is really nothing, she is more like playful. You give her some toys and that would keep her occupied for hours... she like wanna laugh out, even when you be trying to be serious she like giggle and play. She’s just kind of real goofy... I hope she will grow out of it, but she’s real goofy right now. I guess, it might be cause she’s young...

For the mothers, then, dealing with behavioral issues was fundamental. They wanted their kids to learn how to behave out of the neighborhood; they wanted them to be more motivated for school, and learn how important it was to stay in school. In this sense, good role models in community organizations are crucial. Also, evidently, they wanted the kids to not follow their own experiences of having children too young. Thus they wanted the kids to have opportunities to succeed in their lives, which meant learning the norms of society and following the path of success as defined socially.

Finally, what the kids and mothers wanted were things that one organization alone cannot provide, especially a small community organization struggling to get funding for its programs and infrastructure. Many of the skills that the kids wanted to learn and that the mothers wanted to offer their children should be provided by the schools, but policies continue to focus on narrow competencies that forget about the wholeness of the human experience. One single project, or one single teacher or artist, can only teach the kids so much, and program development requires a basic infrastructure in order to achieve the organization’s and its program’s outcomes, as will be demonstrated below.



## **Chapter 9:**

### **To What Extent Can a Community Arts Project's Assumed Benefits Affect These Notions (Answers to First Two Questions), and Influence Social Change?**

#### **The Cultural Praxis Project**

As an educational methodology, cultural praxis appeared to be potentially effective in the setting in which I was working and with the kids I had envisioned to recruit (adolescents, males and females). However, although the setting was appropriate, in that we had a decent space, materials, and a pretty basic infrastructure, because the kids with whom I worked were younger than planned, it was necessary to adjust the curriculum I had designed in order to meet the new needs. Despite my previous experiences at MH, I was still inexperienced in teaching the younger kids, particularly in a classroom setting. This was the first time I taught children video production formally, and the children had little pre-existing knowledge. We had made a couple of videos before but none of them included teaching the intricacies of video technology or even media literacy. This time, they got a full and intensive curriculum through which they learned and practiced many important skills. This made the project quite challenging at many levels. I had to make adjustments, sometimes on the fly, in my relationships with the kids and teaching approach, and had to establish various systems of behavior control

in the program, some of which existed at MH from our previous work, and new systems that the children and I developed during this project as well.

The video production curriculum I used was partly based on the EVC (Educational Video Center 2006) curriculum and on my own resources and experiences from making videos and teaching video production in the past. Teaching occurred normally in the activities room at MH, and in a group discussion format, where I presented materials and asked questions and the kids responded, discussed, and practiced any newly acquired skills. We used the MH projector, a dry/erase board, and my own AV equipment (standard digital video camera, tripod, microphones, cables, headphones, reflectors, bags) for demonstrations, practices, and for the actual productions, and purchased other necessary materials as well.

A few times, other MH volunteers came to observe our work and to help facilitate some sessions and take pictures of the process. They also helped the first time I took the kids shopping with their earned money. These volunteers knew the children and had worked with them in the past; the kids knew them and trusted them as well. Lance and another volunteer helped me with disciplinary issues on several occasions, conversing with the kids and helping them to calm down and to analyze their behaviors. They also participated as actors in the kids' video about drugs in the community. We recorded mostly on the streets of Sulphur Springs, the kids' homes, MH, and the R.I.C.H. House. We traveled in my vehicle to the locations, the stores where we purchased materials and snacks, and the restaurants the kids chose for their meals. I also transported the kids to and from their homes. The following is an outline of the schedule and of the curriculum:

## **Outline of the schedule and the project curriculum.**

### **Spring 2011**

Finished creating data collection instruments

Establishing rapport with prospective participants and setting background research continued from previous semester

Recruited participants

Initial interviews with participants

### **Week 1 (May 29-June 4)**

#### Pre-production:

Created the schedule

Planned project activities

Set up rules for the project

Generated ideas for projects

Did the first “imagine the future” exercise

Had a discussion about the good things and bad things about the neighborhood

Analyzed other videos for their content and aesthetics – PSA (public service announcement) critique from EVC curriculum

### **Week 2 (June 5-11)**

#### Pre- production continued:

Lesson about the camera and its different parts

Lesson about the tripod and its different parts

Lesson about maintaining and cleaning the equipment

Lesson about microphones and different kinds of microphones

### **Week 3 (June 12-18)**

#### Pre-production continued:

Lesson about camera movements and practice

Determined roles for everyone in the project

Made list of items and talent needed in the project

Created script and storyboard

Created music for the video

### **Week 4 (June 19-25)**

#### Pre-production continued

Began using deep breathing exercises before the group meetings

Continued breaking down the shots to figure out what was needed in each scene

Finished the pro-production sheet

Bought elements needed for production, including marshmallows (not used), make up, baby powder, and batteries.

Picked up clothing for main actor

Created “homeless” sign

Continued talk about composition and camera movements

Lesson about lighting, and the use of reflectors  
Practiced setting up and taking down the camera, microphones, and tripod, and inserting the tapes  
Lesson about how to store the equipment, and how to keep it organized  
Lesson about microphones, inserting the batteries, and how to monitor the sound

Production began:

Started video recording of first PSA, on drug use prevention  
Shot four scenes, under the bridge, in the field, in the bathroom, and the final shot of kid rapping

**Week 5 (June 26-July 2)**

Continued discussion about camera shots and movements  
Practiced again putting equipment away, including folding cords  
Reviewed pre-production, production, and post-production concepts and tasks  
Finished production, recorded school shot, and repeated the job search shot

Post-production began:

Visualized materials recorded, reviewing camera movements and shots  
Learned to log the video using time codes  
Digitized/captured video in computer  
Learned how to use the camera as a VCR, also learned about fire wire inputs and outputs, and daisy chains.  
Learned about Final Cut Pro and basic concepts such as cut, first cut, rough cut, and final cut  
Organized video in timeline, and learned to create a sequence, the use of bins, the browser, the viewer, log and capture, and reviewed the importance of time codes again  
Began cutting the video, and learned about the different editing tools, how to cut and paste  
Began laying out the story in a logical way, rearranging it a few times  
Learned how to create the narrative while editing, making sense of it  
Discussed title for the video  
Discussed continuity (realized that we missed one shot)

Pre-production of second video began:

Started jotting down ideas for the second project

**Week 6 (July 3-9)**

Continued post-production of first video:

Editing  
Learned to identify video and audio tracks  
Added video and audio transitions  
Learned about keyframes, fade in and out, and shortcuts  
Added the soundtrack, cutting audio and music, and cleaning unwanted noise  
Learned about render, and computer processing  
Mabel created the first rough cut for the kids to review

The kids gave input about how to make the video look better. They thought we needed to include titles between the sections, insert music, edit the sound to get rid of the unwanted noise and also video. They pointed out things that they did not like, explored other music, talked about getting rid of the voices of the characters, and inserting captions instead. They had several other ideas, and identified some of the most important issues in the video. They adapted the texts using their language and expressions, and suggested matching the lyrics of the song with the video shot.

Combined everyone's ideas to create the final cut.

A volunteer came to help and to work on her own project. She took pictures of our work

### **Week 7 (July 10-16)**

#### Continued post-production:

Color correction

Fixed inserted photographs

Finished sound cleaning

Finished titles

Project evaluations – critical viewing skills from EVC curriculum, and general analysis of video

Made final decisions about and corrections for the first video

Exported video for distribution

#### Pre-production of second project:

Created script, determining a coherent narrative with a central message

Created the storyboard, with samples of shots and camera movements to choose from

Discussed needed talent and production roles

Two volunteers came to help keeping the kids under control, and facilitating the discussions.

### **Week 8 (July 17-23)**

#### Pre-production for second video continued:

Created final storyboard, with camera movements and shots

Finished pre-production sheets for all the different production roles, including art, makeup, sound, and camera

Determined the final treatment of the video

Created a shopping list

Discussed the importance of the project and the audience of the same.

Evaluated the kids' camera skills.

Read about cinema verite, in comparison with documentary production.

Lesson about communication and media theory, including communication processes, media, and audiences.

Review equipment set up, including tripod, camera, and sound production (the kids taught each other).

Reviewed important sound concepts, including reception and transmission.

Created a production schedule.

Discussed maintaining continuity in the story.

Discussed interview release forms and information, using EVC curriculum.

### **Week 9 (July 24-30)**

#### Pre-production continued:

Camera work review – set up  
Camera shots review  
Camera use, record/stop review  
Interview set up, sound and composition  
Asking and answering interview questions

#### Production of second project began:

Recorded kids' interviews  
Reviewed interview shots  
Interview evaluations from EVC curriculum  
Reworked interview questions

### **Week 10 (July 31-August 6)**

#### Pre-production of second project continued:

Purchased materials for upcoming shots (eyeliners, fake blood, etc.), and clothes pins for the new behavior evaluation system  
Worked on the schedule for the month – changed it around the weather  
Identified other locations  
Reviewed planned shots

#### Production also continued:

Equipment maintenance review  
Microphone set up review  
Improved interviews with better questions and behaviors, white balance and conversation style were added  
Composition review  
New system of behavior monitoring suggested and implemented by the kids  
Second “imagine the future exercise”  
Interviews continued  
Release forms collected  
Recorded school and MH scenes, took pictures of the neighborhood streets

#### Post-production began:

Visualized recorded material  
Logged shots - time code review  
Video production stages reviewed  
Digitized  
Meditation session with humming

### **Week 11 (August 7-13)**

#### Production continued:

Recorded fighting and computer scenes

Created and recorded rap for video

Post-production continued:

Visualized

Logged

Digitized

Evaluated interview process

Evaluated narrative

Did music Internet search

Editing process began:

Using shortcuts

Cristina digitized, organized clips in FCP, created bins and sequences, learned to use the camera as VCR, helped to set up project

Maria finished organizing the materials in FCP, created a layout of the entire project with the music and all the video recorded. We also began setting up the pictures in the timeline, and cleaned up all the clips, cut the logged clips onto the timeline, and chose the best ones. Also began inserting interview segments in timeline.

**Week 12 (August 14-20)**

Post-production continued:

Daquan reviewed the previous kids' work and suggested improvements (white balance, clean and level sound, need for texts and credits).

Continued looking for music online.

Created texts and reworded sentences and messages, and added titles

Cut extra clips that were unnecessary, and rearranged interview segments

Cristina did not have a lot of suggestions to improve the project, but found narrative inconsistencies, and asked to increase sound level

Leveled all the sound with key frames

Inserted audio transitions

Cleaned up images

Kaija identified problems also and made suggestions (rearrange narrative, add photos, add transitions and texts, finish ending audio)

Changed the location of the rap in the video

Added missing transitions and more audio tracks

Fixed title

Color corrected

Reviewed entire video

Finished cleaning audio and video

Finished soundtrack

All kids video evaluation

Screened video, made comments and suggestions, using EVC curriculum  
Evaluation of editing skills, using EVC curriculum

Self-evaluations  
Final focus group  
Space-place exercise

Final edits: fixed titles  
Charlie wrapped up project, did video evaluation, editing evaluation, and self-evaluation and “imagine the future” and space-place exercises

All kids: Final interviews

**Week 13 (August 21-27)**

Final interviews

**Week 14 (August 28-September 3)**

Lunch and beach trip, end of project celebration  
Shopping

In the following paragraphs, I provide more detailed information about the cultural praxis project in all of its dimensions, and the learning the kids acquired through their productions. In a subsequent chapter, the more specific evaluation of the effects of the project on the kids’ behaviors will be presented.

**Developing research skills.** Through cultural praxis, the kids had the opportunity to decide the topics and treatments of their video productions. They were asked to think about issues in their community that they wanted to investigate and help to remediate. The kids showed initial interest in solving the issues in their neighborhood, according to my observations and the kids’ own reports. They said they knew and liked their neighborhood; however, their families moved out of Sulphur Springs during the course of our program, and hence it is difficult to assess the kids’ final evaluation scores about this topic. They may reflect their feelings for one or the other neighborhood, or for both.



During the first focus group, the kids made a list of all the topics that were interesting to them for the project. They included “drugs,” “careers” and “education,” “how to reach your goals,” “how to act” (how to behave), and “how schools work” (how to get into college, more specifically). They wanted to highlight the good things in their neighborhood too: “nature,” “the good people,” as well as “music.”

During the initial individual interviews with the kids and the mothers, most of them, if not everyone, talked about drugs, and fighting. Those were the biggest concerns and the things everyone wanted to change. Thus, I told the kids that those would be good topics to focus on, since they were interesting to all, even their parents. They liked the idea very much, but they were also really interested in learning how to get an education, and they debated which topics would be best. Since there were so many interesting topics, we decided to make two smaller videos instead of a larger one, as initially planned. This made sense, for, as explained earlier, the kids needed to learn the technical aspects of making a video first, as well as some theoretical concepts that were important for them to be able to get their messages across effectively. It occurred to me that, with two projects, they could use the first one to rehearse all that they learned in the classroom at first, and then make a much better project later on, with more tools and knowledge. This would give them variety, but also a small break in between. They really liked this idea, although I realized later on that the kids were tired and ready to have fun by the end of the first project. The second one was difficult, and possibly even counter productive, because the kids wanted to have fun with their friends. Although they all enjoyed the projects, in the future it could be better to pace them differently, in order to track important changes in the kids’ behaviors and learning in general.

Nevertheless, for our projects, the kids decided to make two videos, one on drugs in the community, and the other one against fighting in the neighborhood. They decided to treat the topic of education in a subsequent project. They also decided that they would emphasize music in the treatment of their videos, since it was something that everyone liked, and an asset for them.

The kids learned to do basic research, in the form of mini auto-ethnographies, where they examined their environment and the problems they wanted to solve, had discussions, and attempted to suggest solutions in order to prevent the issues, involving others in the projects and teaching them and a larger audience how to solve or avoid the issues as well. We did not get to the point of inquiring where the issues came from, at the societal level, because this is so complex. But these exercises helped all of us to discover the complexity of the problems, in particular that of violence. Had we had the opportunity to do other projects, I would have liked to further develop these questions with the kids.

In any case, the kids learned to use their own lives and experiences as sources of information in their research, to transmit this information, and engage in important dialogues with others. They learned to ask questions about the issues at hand, what drugs and violence do to people? And why are they not good? They tapped into their own observations of these phenomena. They noticed the consequences of being involved in deleterious activities, which they had learned to despise, but which still puzzled them and conflicted them. In their narratives, they explained the issues, how they normally occurred in the neighborhood, and talked about the negative consequences of such actions. Subsequently, they attempted to find the best solutions to the problems, and

delivered messages of hope that others might take away from their work. The videos can be found at <http://www.youtube.com/user/TheMosesHouse>.

**Learning to balance work and fun.** The kids were very excited about their projects. Initially, they chose to work three afternoons per week, which meant potentially extending the schedule through the fall semester. Later on, they decided that they preferred to finish the projects before the end of the summer, and thus switched the schedule to work every day. Although some of the kids were excited about working every day, this was difficult for a couple of them who wanted to enjoy their summer in other ways as well. This ambivalence continued throughout the summer, and the schedule changed at least once more. Sometimes, they wanted to have free time to hang out with their friends, and do other things; other times, they wanted to work more, be more productive, and make more money during their vacation. They wanted to finish before the end of the summer, so they could go shopping before going back to school. Thus, there was constant negotiation of the schedule, but at the end, it was decided that we would stick to three afternoons per week, and during the last week or two, I worked with each of them individually in the editing room.

**Teaching and learning through cultural praxis.** With my guidance, in a participatory way, and in the way cultural praxis called for, the kids targeted problems in their environment, and worked hard to develop them in narratives and productions, evaluate them together, and present them to others, with the hope of re-constructing and re-defining important aspects of their lives that affected them first hand. Participation and collaboration are evidenced in that we decided together in our sessions the messages and the treatments of the videos. My job was primarily to ensure that the learning and

behavioral objectives were achieved; as the kids learned, so I learned about them, and about the potential benefits of this program.

Teaching in this way is not about delivering information that will be regurgitated by students; it requires from the students self-awareness and self-knowledge, experiential learning, and the use of creativity. Yet, the kids were immersed in a classroom sometimes, receiving important information that would later be applied; they were asked to evaluate themselves, individually and in a group, and to demonstrate proficiency, in practical ways, in the meaning of concepts and the use of technology.

The most useful components of the EVC curriculum to me were the self-assessment tools for each unit, which helped assess the kids' skills from the beginning to the end of the video-making process. Like the cultural praxis model, the EVC curriculum was also designed for older youth, and their materials required greater reading and writing skills than my kids had. Thus, using these materials turned out to be quite challenging for them. However, none of this was necessarily a bad thing in the end, for the kids found themselves having to learn new words and practice their literacy skills intensively. I had to explain concepts and words regularly, but the kids recognized the usefulness of these exercises, even if they dreaded them at times. Kaija, for example, said that she learned new words during work several days, and the kids even began using some of the vocabulary I used, whether technical or of everyday use, so challenging their literacy skills was actually quite pedagogical.

**Developing technical skills.** The kids were immersed in classes in which I taught them the most important aspects of video production, and in which they were able to practice their skills. Before producing the first video, for instance, I had the kids critique

other audiovisual projects previously made at MH, and also others made by more professional production crews. They learned about different camera shots and critiqued photographs, good and bad, for their lighting and composition. They learned and practiced camera movements, and the basics of microphones and of audio production. They learned how sound is produced for video; what a receiver and a transmitter are, and what receiving and transmitting mean at their most basic levels, so they could apply the concepts in the video productions (this was part of a longer lesson on communication theory). They also learned about production roles and chose which ones each kid would assume, based on their interests and skills; they rotated roles in the second video and had the opportunity to learn from each other everyone's jobs. They worked on pre-production, scripting, and creating storyboards and pre-production sheets, deciding the talent needed and the elements to be utilized for each scene. Similarly, the kids identified the locations where each shot would be recorded. During production, they learned to keep the equipment organized and clean. They learned about production barriers such as bad weather and unwanted noise, and of ways to deal with those, including scheduling changes and technical responses. They identified the songs they wanted to use as soundtracks for the videos, and one of the girls, Kaija, actually created a rap song for each video, which summarized in creative ways the messages the kids delivered in their projects.

During the second video production, which also incorporated interviewing people, the kids learned interviewing techniques, and how to ask detailed questions that elicited complete answers. They learned about release forms, while asking other kids and parents for permission to use their images. In post-production, the kids visualized and logged the

clips they recorded and chose the best ones, for their composition, lighting, and technical skill. They learned about the importance of continuity in recording the scenes, maintaining the same scenarios and materials to convey a sense of unity of space and time in their videos. While logging the shots, the kids learned about time codes in digital video, and of the nature of video and film, or motion pictures more generally. This was a particularly interesting lesson for them, for they understood that it is the sequencing of pictures or frames taken consecutively that makes a video or film segment, and that there are 24 frames in a second of film, and 29.7 in a second of standard video.

In post-production, while digitizing the video, the kids learned about internal and external hard drives and other computer storage technologies. We used Final Cut Pro (FCP) to edit the video, and although the kids did not get to learn the software in depth, they helped me make editing decisions and learned basic cutting and transition tools. They became familiar with the FCP interface; they used the timeline, the browser, the viewer, creating bins, sequences, and organizing the different materials that were digitized. They learned about keyframing, how to make basic texts, and create basic video effects, including color correction. Not all the kids were involved in the entire editing process, but each helped in one or two steps of the process and made important editorial decisions.

Although my ideal was to take the kids to the point where they could make most if not all the aesthetic decisions themselves, video production requires a great deal of sustained learning over a long period of time, and the kids did not have enough technical information, even after we finished. I had in mind the production of relatively high quality products that would constitute sources of pride for the kids, because competent

performance has the potential to enhance self-esteem (Santrock 2011:316). This also seemed to be an important factor in community programs, although one that appears to be contested (some artists believe this, while others focus more on the process, without much regard for the final product, especially in the area of expressive arts therapies). For me, it was important to ensure that the kids felt pride for the work we produced together. I wanted the kids to feel satisfied and motivated to learn, to imagine and to create more at the end. This did not require the kids to get everything “right” from the teaching sessions, but learning the basic skills was necessary, and supervision was crucial in order to safeguard the kids, the equipment, and in order to produce quality products that would provide them with good feelings about themselves, and enhance their learning capabilities.

As expected, the kids were particularly proud of the second video. In the first production, they were still learning to make the script, to shoot, and to edit the story. Naturally, the second video had better quality and the story flowed more and with more intensity; besides, the issue of fighting was more exciting to them, as will be discussed later. In the end, we made the best products we could make with the skills, resources, and time we had. The kids created the stories, but I helped them to produce them. Although they participated in the entire process and in all the fundamental decisions, the videos resulted in co-productions given the need for me to demonstrate and manage the different processes, to ensure timely production, and good quality at the end. In addition, since my goal was always to enable the kids to feel good about themselves after these productions, I had to influence many of their decisions. Thus, our work was as collaborative and participatory as it could be, and was successful, in the kids’ views. Most of them said

they wanted more of it at the end; the work was important to them and to their families, and motivated them to do even better in the future. Even a year and a half after this project, some of the kids told me they wanted to do another video, and wanted me to teach them other things.

In sum, the kids learned that to make a good video requires a great deal of time, work, patience, and concentration; that it is a complex job, and that mastery takes much practice. They reaffirmed the lesson I had taught them in previous projects, that without love and care, a project does not come out as well.



## **Chapter 10:**

### **How Can The Effects of a Community Arts Project Be Evaluated?**

#### **Internal Evaluation of the Cultural Praxis Project**

Any educational institution needs to determine the roles of its educators, and their preparedness to be the best possible role models. This corresponds to the need to evaluate educational programs, including community arts, and this was the purpose of this project. The cultural praxis project was designed to evaluate whether a community arts program could provide the MH kids with benefits to potentially offset some of the negative experiences they live. As we saw before, the MH and other organizations had positive impacts on the kids and their families. Yet exactly how does a single project affect the outcomes, and what variables are important to keep in mind in program design, implementation, and evaluation?

The objectives of cultural praxis were to prepare the kids to investigate, analyze, understand, and subsequently act upon their lives for their own wellbeing and that of their community. I evaluated this internally, through daily in-depth assessments of the kids' learning, behaviors, and creations, with the objective to produce information to design more effective programs in the future. Even though cultural praxis was entirely participatory, the evaluation of it was not. I made all the decisions about the latter, according to the proposal described in the methods chapter. Although adjustments were

made throughout the program to better fit the curriculum to the characteristics of the kids, and also to respond to the demands of the environment, most of what was proposed initially took place in the course of the program.

It was a very intense, and perhaps not ideal, process to engage simultaneously in the gathering of the necessary information for the program evaluation, while teaching the kids, facilitating their activities and work, and maintaining order in the house. However, I chose to do an internal evaluation because the MH was just beginning to determine the appropriate methodologies in its work with Sulphur Springs' kids, and as the designer and executioner of cultural praxis, I wanted to understand first hand the complexities of this type of work. I was analyzing my own pedagogical approach, which is something all educators should do. Although more resources and methodological improvements would be ideal in the future, I believe that the data contained here are useful and help to enlighten the future design and implementation of programs at MH, and possibly other similar institutions.

Moreover, this information alerts us to the difficulties in making generalizations about African American youth and their experiences. Even though the kids might share the same social environment, their home practices and histories influence and change their perceptions and adaptations to their environments. Even the Carter kids exhibited very different behaviors and thought processes from each other. Thus, my data cannot serve to make broad generalizations about the behavior of all Sulphur Springs' children. However, the rich ethnographic detail I provide allows us to see lived experience in a way that more traditional evaluations may miss.

The following are the results of the systematic observations of the kids' behaviors and productions, as well as of their self-evaluations, conducted at the start and at the end of the program. I also provide ethnographic data captured during each day of work with the kids, and some interview data, for triangulation purposes. I emphasize the positive observations of the kids' behaviors rather than the negative behavior observations. I made this choice because capturing information about the absence of positive behaviors, or about the presence of negative ones produces confusing results, while the capture of positive behaviors was much clearer and less judgmental.

Thus the main outcomes sought in this program and evaluated here were: Political and civic consciousness, self-awareness, self-esteem, communication skills, sense of place, imagination, and creativity. A variety of indicators were chosen in order to determine the achievement of such outcomes (see appendices 3-7), and my observations and the kids' evaluations measure those indicators. Other additional indicators and information are offered to enhance our understanding of cultural praxis as well as the place of community arts programs in the lives of disadvantaged African American youth and children.

### **Self-Esteem and Appreciation for Life**

As established earlier, the Carter kids who were recruited for my program appeared to be different from others who attended MH. This could be due to their strong family relationships and the support they received from concerned mothers and a committed grandmother with a great sense of responsibility for her grandchildren. These kids had motivating families who protected them, and even though they could not provide

the kids with great comforts, they did have the best desires and intentions for their children. In general, the mothers demonstrated great care for their children, even though, as Ms. Norma put it, having so many children did not allow them to pay as much attention as the kids needed, underlining the need for an organization like MH. The families needed more resources and found in MH a way to alleviate some of their pressures.

For the mothers, poverty was the most pressing problem. Lana expressed, for example, “the financial situation is the only thing I would change.” And Marsha agreed:

Well, I'd have to say that I wish I like have a real like good paying job... so they could do more things, you know, that would probably be it, cause they are happy kids, you know what I mean? I guess, that's all parents wish, have happy kids and kids who stay out of trouble; they don't get in too much trouble, they bad sometimes, but they don't like go out and beat people up, or stuff like that, you know, or go to jail. Well, Charlie, you know he got in a little bit of trouble, but...

She said she was trying to improve the situation: “I'm gonna start with school... And I am gonna take it from there, cause I know if I go to school, I'll probably be able to get the job that I want, with the skills and the training that I need.” Similarly, Diana said: “... right now, I am trying to get my RN license. I would have done it earlier, stayed in school, not be a teenage mom, so I could do more for them [her kids].” These concerns, and others, were true for other mothers in the neighborhood.

In the first interviews, the kids were most unsatisfied with personal events that occurred to them at some point in their lives, or that continued to occur to them at school or in the neighborhood. Their preoccupations were for the most part with how they looked, or how teachers or classmates treated them. Only one of them, Charlie, said he would not change anything about his life, and Kaija emphasized that she wanted to make

her family rich. The kids said they would like to change themselves to avoid being harassed by others. Daquan, for instance, said he would change some of his actions, because other kids often called him names, such as gay, and insulted him for his appearance. Only one kid, one of the Carter girls who was not involved in our project full time, mentioned concerns with lack of money. She said she would like to lower the prices of things that people needed all the time, like gas prices or the cost of notebooks.

At the end of the program, most of the kids continued to agree that they would not change anything about their lives. Only Kaija mentioned the wish to be rich and to get money by being famous. For Cristina what was important was that school should begin later, so she could sleep longer. In contrast, the mothers still believed they could have done things better for them and their children. Jashunda said: “just would have waited to have kids, so you can give them a better life, that would be my main thing.” For Lana: “Being more successful... myself... so they can have a better future... more education... cause that would have a positive impact on them.”

The kids’ self-evaluations and my observations support in some ways the information gathered from the interviews. For instance, the kids’ strong relationships with their families are reflected in the evaluations. In general, they felt loved by them, and they felt loved by others. Charlie, Cristina, Daquan, and Maria believed that their families, teachers and neighbors liked them. Kaija initially reported feeling loved by her family, neighbors and teachers. She had similar beliefs at the end of the program, but her scores lowered from a strongly “agree” score to “slightly agree,” in the case of her neighbors’ appreciation towards her, while her belief that her teachers liked her also changed, from an initial “slightly agree” to “disagree.”

In the case of Charlie, his scores improved in his perception that his teachers liked him. His scores changed from an initial slightly agree to strongly agree at the end. And according to my records, kids and family members expressed their love and admiration for him as well. Daquan recognized that others respected him, and he was certainly loved by instructors and administrators at MH. However, only sometimes his family and other kids expressed their appreciation for him. Similarly, the kids and family members expressed love for Cristina, but not always, and not as much as for other kids. Finally, Maria scored low in these areas, according to my observations. She did not seem to have as many fans. And other kids even expressed negative feelings towards her many times during the program.

As we can see, the kids' and my observations do not match completely, and this is a pattern that is repeated throughout in the program evaluations. What really allows us to make conclusions is a comparison among the evaluations scores, the answers the kids and their mothers gave in their interviews, and all other ethnographic data. Not one of the instruments can possibly give accurate information, as I found out, but a more credible conclusion can be arrived at from an analysis of all the information gathered and an aggregation of all the data available.

Nonetheless, the kids show adequate although not necessarily high, senses of self-esteem, which seems to be normal for children in general (Santrock 2011:601). In my records, they appeared to express good feelings about themselves throughout the program, and this was evidenced in their self-evaluations except for Cristina, whose self-evaluation shows intermediate scores in this area. The kids in general also agreed that they took a positive attitude towards themselves, although, this time it was Charlie who

reported intermediate scores; Cristina's lowered from strongly agree to strongly disagree. All the kids thought they were pretty good kids (the first score for Cristina is missing), although Kaija's final score lowered from "strongly agree" to "slightly agree."

Similarly, all the kids said they liked the things they did in general, although Cristina's score was intermediate in this sense. They all showed being proud of themselves in one way or another, and enjoyed being praised for their good work. All the kids reported liking when people gave them compliments, except for Cristina, who no longer agreed. My observations differ from her reports.

Indeed, all the kids were proud of their lives, even Cristina. Daquan and Maria agreed that so far they had gotten the things they wanted from life, Charlie and Cristina's scores were intermediate, and Kaija's score lowered from "agree" to "slightly disagree." Likewise, Charlie, Daquan and Maria thought that in most ways their lives were close to perfect, and while Kaija strongly agreed initially, her score lowered to "slightly agree." Unfortunately, again, Cristina's score lowered from "slightly agree" to "slightly disagree." Maria agreed that if she could live her life over she would change almost nothing; Charlie's scores were intermediate; and Kaija and Daquan's scores improved, from "slightly disagree" to "strongly agree." Once again, Cristina's score lowered, from "agree" to "slightly disagree."

Thus the kids' scores are not homogeneous, even though they show appreciation for their lives. Daquan and Maria remained on the higher levels, while Charlie's scores were mostly intermediate. Kaija seemed to have improved in some areas, but with scores lowered in others, while for Cristina, life seemed to be less exciting than for all other kids at the end.

Although it is safe to say that the kids were not depressed about life, the less positive changes in Cristina's appreciation of her own life are important to note. This occurred for many indicators in her evaluations, but they not always match my observations, or even her interview responses or those of her mother and grandmother. In fact, I recorded Cristina's low levels of self-esteem since the beginning of our work at MH, and, in my observations, she seemed to have improved dramatically, as well as in many other areas, during our work together. While this did not seem to have been the case according to her own reports, for me, Cristina's behaviors in general during the summer program did not become worse at all, and she showed signs of growth in her appreciation for others and for herself.

I do believe, however, that it is possible that Cristina, as well as the other kids, began to be more critical of their lives in general, for we engaged in a deep process of self-evaluation where the kids were asked to analyze their behaviors, their lives, their hopes for the future, and so forth, becoming more conscious of everything around them. It is likely that this continuous self-evaluation and self-exploration, in addition to the developmental transition from childhood to adolescence, made an impact in their understandings and assessments, especially, as we will continue to see, in the case of Kaija and Cristina. Developmentally, it is possible that self-esteem drops during adolescence, especially among girls (Santrock 2011:382). Other possible explanations are that these kids approached the self-evaluations differently from the interviews and focus groups, or perhaps they rushed while filling out the evaluations; it is also feasible that they felt freer to disclose personal information on paper. These variations should be taken into consideration in future projects, and also show the value of the multiple methods in



evaluation, rather than the reliance on the single measurements of gain often used in evaluation of arts programs.

One more puzzling and concerning area for all kids was their self-reported increase in levels of anger against themselves, which again, did not show in my observations, or even during our interviews, except for Cristina, who showed some aggressiveness towards herself in her initial interview. Kaija reported feeling less anger against herself at the end, but Maria's report shows that she felt anger against herself continuously, and all other kids' levels of anger increased at the end. Nonetheless, Daquan and Kaija said that they did not engage in activities that could harm them; for Cristina, Maria, and Charlie the scores were intermediate, and Charlie's assessment improved at the end, reporting that he never did things that could harm him.

Hence, although the kids may have felt less compassion towards themselves, they still did not engage actively in deleterious activities that could hurt them. Where these feeling may have arisen from is not clear, but it could be a byproduct of being exposed to our rigorous program, where again they constantly engaged in self-evaluation and evaluation of others, and where they participated in a deep exploration of problems that affected their lives. Even though they were never punished harshly at MH, we did work towards the elimination of anger towards others, via constant self-evaluation, perhaps increasing their levels of guilt and remorse, by teaching them to evaluate and correct their actions based on ethical and moral principles (Gold 2010:116-117).

## **Learning, Self-Concept of Intelligence, and Academic Capacity**

During our program, the kids had to learn advanced technical and theoretical communication concepts, and engage in analyses that seemed complex for their ages. Charlie and Maria did not seem to be afraid and were able to take on difficult activities for much of our time together, except perhaps a little less towards the end. According to my reports, Daquan's scores were intermediate in this regard, while Cristina's initial low scores improved at the end. Of all the kids, Kaija seemed to be the most afraid to engage in complex tasks, and this did not change throughout the project.

Nevertheless, all the kids ultimately showed a great capacity for learning and for applying their new knowledge. Charlie, Daquan, and Maria had inquisitive minds, and Kaija and Cristina improved in this aspect, becoming more curious about different aspects of our work at the end. They were all able to ask questions whenever necessary, even though Kaija's scores were intermediate in this regard. Charlie, Kaija, Daquan, and Maria desired to learn many things, according to my observations. And Daquan, Cristina, and Maria also reported wanting to learn many things. Cristina's own score was even higher at the end, and in my observations she improved as well. All the kids said they liked to learn from others. For Daquan, his assessment improved dramatically at the end, reporting always enjoying learning from others. Kaija said she actually learned from other people, while Charlie, Cristina, and Maria had intermediate scores again. Daquan once again improved greatly in this aspect.

As we can see, the kids had high scores in regards to their learning abilities and enjoyment of learning. There were few intermediate scores, and no regression in the kids' or my observations. Instead there was a great deal of improvement in several areas. In

addition, the kids showed a great deal of trust in their intelligences. Charlie, Kaija, and Daquan showed pride in being intelligent, and even Charlie expressed being smart a few times. Furthermore, Charlie and Daquan thought their intelligences were above average in comparison with others their age. In the case of Daquan, his initial score lowered at the end, but still remained high. Kaija, Cristina, and Maria had intermediate scores, although Cristina had scored herself higher at the beginning, and Maria rated herself higher at the end. Likewise, Daquan believed it was extremely important to be able to use his intelligence, compared to others his age. Charlie, Kaija, and Cristina had intermediate scores, and Kaija's was lower at the end. In contrast, Maria's scores improved dramatically. In the same vein, the kids believed in their school abilities. Charlie, Daquan, and Kaija rated theirs as above average compared to those in their grade in school. Daquan and Maria's scores lowered in this regard, but remained high nonetheless at the end. On the contrary, Cristina had rated herself as average in her school ability initially, and at the end she scored herself as above average.

Thus, the kids believed in general in their capacities to learn, and considered themselves intelligent, if not always above average. Cristina and Kaija reduced again some of their scores, but were never low, although Cristina, along with Maria, also showed some improvement.

Even though the kids showed great learning abilities, because of their ages, lack of knowledge of video, and of familiarity with the learning process we were engaged in, I had to limit my own expectations from them. But, I was still quite demanding. I met them at their level, but also brought them as far as I could in the learning and production processes, as I had done in previous projects with them. The complexity of the lessons

increased every day, and this is reflected especially in the kids' own reports. In my observations, Maria and Charlie seemed to be confident about understanding things, and Cristina and Daquan even improved this confidence at the end. Kaija, however, at the end did not seem to be as confident about understanding concepts and tasks as well as in the beginning. Nonetheless, she and Maria reported being sure of their capacities to understand, at the beginning and at the end, while Charlie reported intermediate scores in his self-evaluations. Cristina's own scores lowered from high to intermediate, while Daquan's scores lowered, but much more than Cristina's.

As seen before, at the end of the project, we were immersed in highly specialized computer activities during the editing process. It is very likely that the higher learning curve for those tasks made the kids feel less confident, for it was truly a new world for them, and we also did not have as much time to spend in the editing room. Still, whereas in my observations the kids were able to ask for help whenever needed, in their view, their abilities were not as high. Only Daquan's scores matched mine, while the other kids reported intermediate scores in this area. Nonetheless, these scores are not worrisome to me; not only are they are not low, but also during the interviews and in our interactions the kids showed immense enjoyment in learning new things. I could see them growing as they were asked to review and revise their assumptions about things, to open their minds, and to be more conscious of their own learning and understanding. They had to learn more every time, and to be more critical of their own abilities, ensuring mastery and comprehension of tasks, all of which could have impacted their appreciations of their capacities at the end.

The kids continuously showed strength, resiliency, and capacity for work and for learning, perhaps more than they ever imagined they were capable of, perhaps much more than other teachers had ever given them credit for. They were challenged, and at the end showed signs of tiredness, but they did not break, and they enjoyed themselves.

### **Creativity and Imagination as Cultural Praxis**

As stressed before, cultural praxis, as a creative process, was an exercise to enable the kids' imagination of new life situations, and to encourage them to engage in processes of personal and social awareness and change, while maintaining their assets. Cultural praxis refers to the creative construction or reconstruction of reality, by way of imagining new ways to live our lives, and working towards creating new possibilities, and inspiring others to act in new and more positive ways.

Art and media in this project, then, had a variety of purposes. In general, there is intrinsic value in video production (as time consuming and difficult as it might be), for example, in learning new skills, in seeing an interesting (for the producer and perhaps others) final product made, in feelings of accomplishment in an important medium, in participating in a social dialogue through media, and so on and so forth. Here, however, video as an art form had additional utilitarian purposes. The kids could derive much pleasure from the creative act itself, and could express their concerns, but were also bound by particular educational objectives. In this view, the conditions of the artistic production mattered; the overall objectives of the organization had an impact in the final products, the process of creation, and the ultimate relationship of the kids with the art form. Creativity, in cultural praxis, could be to a certain extent personal, but it was even

more so public. The kids' creations were products of imagination exercises that prompted them to reinvent reality, to reconstruct it, as praxis.

Creativity was the crux of this project, and although the kids had been engaging in a variety of creative projects at MH, it was important to find out whether and how exactly creativity, at the individual level but also the collective level, or praxis, could be enhanced or supported in a community arts program. Evaluating the levels of creativity of the kids, however, was not easy because of the complexity of the concept. In addition to all the other outcomes sought in the project, an evaluation of cultural praxis required paying attention to the kids' levels of industriousness, or their relationships with and abilities to work, as well as their problem-solving abilities. Creativity, after all, is about translating ideas into concrete productions, and it is through work that ideas and projects are materialized. All the kids expressed fondness for creating new things, and Charlie, Kaija, Daquan, and Maria also showed great ability to produce innovative work; Cristina did too, but more so in the second part of the project. In general, the kids had a great capacity to work.

**Relationships with work and industriousness.** Cultural praxis, as envisioned initially, seemed to require more maturity in the participants, and more experiences and skills that could allow them to take advantage of the full participatory methodology. This would include understanding of the learning process, and the writing and reading skills necessary to engage in research with the community. In contrast, the kids in my project required more entertainment and play, showed much lower literacy skills than I had anticipated, and lacked discipline in a classroom setting. It was difficult to keep their

attention on the project's tasks for the length of the program, even though, at one point or another, most of them showed great commitment.

In their self-evaluations, all the kids expressed their enthusiasm for work. Kaija's scores in this area were high, and Cristina's initial score was also high. Charlie, Daquan, and Maria said they liked to work sometimes. And, while Charlie's score remained the same at the end, Daquan and Maria's improved; they said they liked to work always. Cristina, however, said she only liked to work sometimes at the end. Similarly, all the kids considered themselves to be hard workers, but, at the end, Kaija lowered her score from all the time, to only sometimes.

Not only did the kids like to work, they also showed good capacity to execute tasks. In my observations, Kaija, Daquan, Maria and Charlie had high scores, while Cristina was less consistent, but improved at the end. Maria also stabilized more at the higher end of the scale towards the end. All the kids completed their tasks in the project, and these results are compatible with the kids' generally high scores of self-efficacy. They all believed they could reach all of their goals. They all agreed that they could do many things, although Charlie's score lowered in this sense; he slightly disagreed at the end. And the kids also believed that they could do things as well as most other people, even though Cristina's scores were intermediate in this regard.

As reflected in the above results, the kids were enthusiastic about work; their scores are high to intermediate in most areas, and even when there appeared lower scores at the end, they were never too low.

As mentioned earlier, the kids were tired at the end, but, for the most part, maintained their motivation for learning, even after we finished the second project.

Interestingly, and perhaps contradictory to my fears of working with a younger population, it was the younger kids, Daquan, Maria, and even Cristina (especially at the end), in my group, who appeared to be the most engaged in the learning process throughout the program, whereas the older ones, Kaija and Charlie, already entering adolescence, were engaged in some areas of the project and not others, and required more time for themselves. Many times, the older ones showed more interest in other areas of their lives, such as friends and going out, and not as much in the process of learning and creating. They had a harder time sticking to all the activities of the project, whereas the younger ones always wanted more, to learn more, and do more, even though the learning curve was steeper for them.

Charlie, Kaija, and Daquan showed capacity to focus for long periods of time on their work. Maria was also able to focus for extended periods of time for much of the program, but especially towards the end. Cristina, on the contrary, struggled very much with this throughout; it was her biggest challenge overall. Again, Daquan and Kaija showed ability not only to focus on work, but also to produce relatively consistently. Maria improved and Cristina tried much harder to concentrate towards the end, thus increasing her production as well. Although Charlie showed great capacity to work and produce, his scores lowered at the end, when he disengaged from the program. At the same time, even though most of the kids could engage in work with relative consistency, they also tended to go back and forth between work and other activities of interest, such as drawing, playing with their phones, or talking to each other. Of all the kids, the most consistent in maintaining his exclusive engagement in work was Daquan, but only with intermediate scores. Cristina was always engaged in other activities besides work, and



while Kaija was a great worker, she also enjoyed doing other things, although she increased her concentration at the end. Charlie and Maria, however, seemed to be less able to engage in work exclusively.

Not surprisingly, Daquan reported enjoying greatly having a routine. Cristina, Charlie, and Maria said they liked having a routine only at times, while, again, Kaija improved in this regard; from an initial rarely to always at the end. The kids' scores match my observations to some extent. Daquan was able to maintain a routine, while Kaija, Cristina, and Maria seemed to have a hard time, while showing improvement at the end. Charlie was less able to maintain a routine towards the end. Thus the kids were able to concentrate on work, albeit not necessarily consistently.

**Imagining the future and setting goals.** Creativity, in the praxis dimension, also requires identifying problems and working to eliminate them; it is about the idea of improvement, about imagining new scenarios, a new and different future, establishing goals, and executing plans that affect a larger social group.

In this sense, according to my observations, the kids liked to talk about the future. Charlie, Daquan, and Maria also said in their evaluations that they knew what they wanted for their futures; Cristina did too in her final evaluation; her initial score is not available, and Kaija did not answer this question either. In the case of Daquan, his score lowered from an initial "strongly agree" to "slightly agree" at the end. Furthermore, all the kids said they knew how to get what they wanted, although there is no initial score for Kaija. In my observations, Charlie, Kaija, and Daquan showed abilities to establish goals for themselves throughout; Cristina's scores improved during the second part of the program. There are very few observations for Maria to arrive at any conclusions. Charlie

and Kaija's own evaluations in this area match my own records, but Kaija's scores lowered at the end. Maria reported high ability to set goals for the future; however, in the interviews with her it is clear that she did not know yet what or where she wanted to be in the future. Finally, all kids self-reported having plans to accomplish their goals, although Charlie's scores lowered from "strongly agree" to "slightly agree."

Although generally the kids appeared to be strong in imagining the future, and in making plans to achieve their goals, and this is also evidenced in the interviews, they still needed much work in improving their behaviors, in order to function within small and larger social groups. For instance, in my records, none of the kids appeared to be able to stay out of trouble. Charlie's scores are inconsistent, from low to high throughout. Kaija had a difficult start, but improved at the end of the program. Similarly, Maria improved at the end. Unfortunately, Cristina seemed to be unable to stay out of trouble again, with low scores throughout. Daquan was also not always able to stay out of trouble, and seemed to have had an even harder time at the end. However, in their own evaluations, Kaija and Maria said they did not like to get in trouble; Daquan's initial score in this area was neutral, but improved greatly at the end, going from "neither agree nor disagree" to "strongly agree;" and Charlie and Cristina's evaluations indicated that they did not like to get in trouble initially, but their scores were opposite at the end, changing from "agree" to the lowest scores, especially Charlie's.

At the same time, all the kids said they wanted to be better every day, and also believed they knew what to do to be better persons. In my observations, Charlie, Daquan, and Maria were recorded talking explicitly about their self-improvement goals. Cristina and Kaija's scores were not as consistent, but they increased at the end. Daquan's scores

dropped towards the middle of the program, but increased again at the end. Moreover, Maria said she knew how to fix things when she did wrong. Charlie, Daquan, and Kaija said they knew only sometimes, although Daquan's score improved at the end, from sometimes to always. In Cristina's case, her score lowered significantly, from most of the time to rarely. According to my reports, however, Charlie and Cristina tried hard to improve their performances, while Maria and Kaija began low but improved at the end. Daquan seemed to show interest in improving his performance, but more so at the beginning of the program.

Hence, the kids in general had goals for themselves and wanted to reach them. However, it was not necessarily easy for them to behave in appropriate ways that would open places for them in the larger society, in particular because the trouble they got into was usually for insulting each other, for disrespecting the classroom or the MH teachers and administrators, and for violating the space of others, or disrupting the activities they were involved in. This did not occur all the time, and there were many instances of the kids having "good days" as well, especially towards the end, when finally, after much negotiation, we determined certain strategies that helped them to control their actions more, and when they finally understood that MH instructors and administrators had an explicit educational task. As seen in the previous paragraphs, there were some important improvements at the end of the program, although also certain undesirable results as well. Kaija and Maria showed the most improvement of all kids, and even Cristina, whose scores tended to be low, and who also showed decline in some areas, appeared to have improved in other aspects, especially in my evaluations of her. Charlie's scores were intermediate at times, although he showed some high scores as well, and one area of

regression. Along with Cristina, Daquan also seemed to struggle greatly. Unfortunately, several of his scores dropped at the end, but he also showed a little improvement in one area.

**Problem-solving skills.** The kids had to practice problem-solving in different ways; in the topics they were investigating, and for which they were to offer solutions, but also of a technical nature, in the sense that they had to decide the best ways to narrate their stories and to deal with the obstacles that appeared during production, such as weather issues, lack of follow through of a crew member, timing issues, and so on. In addition, they had to observe themselves and their behaviors on a daily basis and decide how their work and attitudes could improve for the next session.

The kids, for the most part, showed good problem-solving skills. Cristina, Daquan, Kaija, and Maria knew that things could improve, and even though Kaija's score lowered, she still agreed that things could improve at the end. Initially, Charlie did not agree nor disagreed, but at the end he agreed. In my observations, Charlie, Daquan, Maria and Cristina were able to identify when things went wrong, and while Kaija's scores were less consistent, they were not necessarily low overall. Maria also reported ability to tell when things went wrong in her evaluations. Charlie, Cristina, Daquan, and Kaija's own scores were intermediate in this regard, but Daquan's score increased from sometimes to always at the end.

In her own evaluation, Maria also said she liked to fix problems, whereas Charlie, Kaija, and Cristina reported enjoying fixing problems only at times. Daquan, on the other hand said he rarely liked to fix problems, at the beginning, but switched to "most of the time" at the end. According to my observations, Daquan offered solutions to problems, as

did Cristina occasionally. Kaija and Maria did not seem to be as enthusiastic about this at the beginning of the program, but improved at the end. Although Charlie was mostly consistent at offering solutions to problems, his scores decreased to some extent at the end. In terms of actually offering to fix issues, Kaija showed some regularity in this regard, with only a few low points throughout. Cristina was again not consistent in this area, and Maria improved towards the end. Charlie was never completely consistent, but he showed great improvement before he lost focus on our work. Similarly, Daquan did not necessarily offer to fix issues consistently either, and his score was lower at the end.

In the same vein, all kids enjoyed working on solutions to problems, according to my reports. And Daquan and Kaija also showed ability in fixing issues. Maria, on the other hand, was not consistent, while Charlie seems to have decreased his ability at the end. In their own evaluations, Maria and Daquan reported ability to fix problems, while Charlie said he was able only sometimes. Kaija, on the other hand, changed her scores from rarely to always being able to fix problems.

Also important was that Kaija and Maria reported abilities to tell when things went right. Charlie and Daquan's scores were intermediate again, but Daquan's scores increased from sometimes to always. And, while Cristina said initially that she rarely could tell when things went right, she scored most of the time at the end.

While the evaluations in the areas of problem-solving involvement, enthusiasm, and capacity to address issues were not necessarily homogeneous, the scores are gratifying in the sense that they show increases and improvements at the end for some kids, and few lower scores. Daquan, Kaija and Maria showed much improvement, and to a lesser degree also Cristina and Charlie, whose scores were largely intermediate

throughout. Unfortunately, Charlie lost connection with the program, favoring other activities out of the MH at the end, but his abilities were never significantly low.

### **Self-Awareness and Self-Evaluation**

In this project, the kids had the opportunity to learn a variety of skills, and to practice others previously emphasized in other projects at MH. In addition to the technical skills, they also learned or practiced how to behave in public, how to deal with different people, how to relate to others, and of course, how to work, how to produce things, and how to self-evaluate. The latter item was emphasized throughout the project. It was crucial for me to teach the kids to learn how to evaluate their actions, how they affected not only their own performances but also the work and behaviors of others. This was very important in their ability to gain awareness of their lives in the context in which they existed and their own place in society.

One important lesson, for example, was that during the visualization and logging periods, the kids realized the need to be disciplined during the recording sessions, to maintain focus on the project, and to follow the planned schedule, so as not to waste time or have to repeat scenes. In these sessions, the kids noticed who caused trouble and hampered the production flow. Those responsible for having to repeat parts of our work felt self-conscious about their actions, thus reaffirming the wonderful tool that video can constitute in enhancing self-awareness, self-evaluation, and social responsibility. This can also be a double edged sword for if the child does not have a high self-concept in a particular area reflected in the video production, seeing themselves in an unfavorable position in video might reinforce their negative feelings.

For instance, in my observations, Charlie, Kaija, Daquan, and Maria expressed satisfaction with their own looks. However, when Charlie saw himself acting on-screen, he felt embarrassed with his image, and hid himself behind his arms and hands every time. Daquan did the same sometimes. The girls, on the other hand, loved seeing themselves in the videos. Charlie decided not to be an actor again in the second production; although he did not cease to see himself as good-looking, he became more self-conscious after being the main character in the first video. Charlie also realized that his disruptions during the recordings of the video caused us to waste much time and to make everyone uneasy and tired. Although he was extremely funny in the eyes of the other kids, and in that sense entertained them, during the visualization of the recorded video, they agreed that his disruptions were not appropriate. Additional behaviors were also discussed in these sessions after being presented in the uncut video.

Other data also help to analyze the kids' self-assessment abilities. According to my observations, for example, the kids were, in general, able to tell when they did right. Charlie, Cristina, and Daquan also reported in their evaluations ability to know when they did right. Maria's score lowered from an initial always to sometimes at the end, and Kaija said sometimes in her second report (the first one is not available). On the other hand, according to my reports also, Charlie and Maria could tell when they did wrong. Daquan also knew but appeared to have diminished somewhat his capacity towards the end. Kaija's scores were intermediate as well, while Cristina's score improved at the end. All the kids but Kaija, said in their own evaluations that they knew when they did wrong; Kaija said she only knew at times.

Thus, it appears that of all the kids, Kaija was the one who was less sure of her capacity to recognize the impact of her actions, with a majority of her scores appearing in the intermediate areas. The other kids' scores were not homogeneous, but none of the kids showed or reported negative scores in this area, and only Cristina showed improvement in knowing when she did wrong.

**Discipline and self-control.** In addition to the expectations and demands of the cultural praxis methodology, and video production itself, we worked within the context of an organization. Thus the setting, the previous relationships of the kids with the organization and with me, and the objectives of the organization, all impacted the participatory process and the kids' productions. The kids were required to be aware of the norms of the organization, to respect them and to abide by them.

As an educator, my role was to modify the kids' meanings and actions into more widely socially accepted behaviors. Discipline and self-control were not only MH objectives that allowed us to run our programs effectively, but they were also part of the expectations that the Sulphur Springs' families appeared to have for their kids; even the kids appreciated learning such norms and skills at one point or another, especially at the beginning of our work at MH, when chaos was rampant and when we were just beginning to understand and work with them.

As an educational institution, and in conjunction with the community's expectations, MH had the obligation to teach its kids how to better function in the larger society. The kids needed guidance in acquiring discipline and self-control. It was necessary to observe and analyze the conditions of their minds as well as the level of their physical comfort, and deal with their needs before engaging in any other task. In that



way, the cultural praxis process in which we were immersed had to be tied to the overall goals and structure of the MH, plus the general developmental needs of the kids. Any organization that seeks to bring about certain outcomes in its programs with consistency, must link the latter to its larger structure and objectives, as well as the population's needs.

In this sense, it was crucial to engage the kids in a learning process that was controlled. They could not have been allowed to participate in all the decisions that were made, although a great effort was made towards this. It was expected that they would behave with respect, responsibility, order, and discipline, and they were asked to concentrate and work diligently on the tasks at hand, if not automatically or immediately upon the start of the program, then eventually through the conditions of participation. We had learned that even a participatory and non-traditional educational approach requires certain pre-established conditions and skills in order to be effective (Murray 2009:25).

For example, at MH, organization and planning eventually became part of the kids' tasks, involving them in taking care of the house, and in watching each other's actions, as well as their own, helping with ideas for new programs, and so forth, at the same time that the families' perspectives, and the views and actions of other members of the community, were part of the planning and delivery of programs. But it was the task of administrators and instructors to ensure the maintenance of order in the house; otherwise, very little could be accomplished, as we found out during the first months of work at MH. In general, they were aware of what was good and not good for them, but they did not automatically, or always, make the best choices for the larger group, and this affected the results of our work together.

In their self-evaluations, for instance, Daquan and Maria expressed that they always knew what was good for them, while Charlie, Kaija, and Cristina said they knew only sometimes. In my reports, Cristina, Maria, and Daquan also appeared to seek beneficial experiences with some consistency. Kaija seemed to have improved in this area at the end, while Charlie showed less interest in the benefits of our project at the end, but the scores were never too low. However, the kids demonstrated the need for much guidance in other ways. For example, they had a much harder time in regards to the importance to understand and respect rules. Charlie, Cristina, and Daquan's self-evaluations indicated that they did not like rules. At the end, Kaija showed some improvement in her scores, going from sometimes to always, and Maria showed even more improvement, from the lowest to a high score. In the same vein, according to my reports, Daquan was able to respect rules, albeit inconsistently; Charlie, was even more inconsistent in this sense, while Maria, Cristina, and Kaija began low in this area but seemed to have improved by the end. Interestingly, in her evaluations, Kaija said she respected rules most of the time. Charlie's reports matched mine, while Maria showed improvement again, going from intermediate to the highest score. Cristina and Daquan's self-evaluations, however, indicate that they did not respect rules at the beginning or at the end.

Evidently, at least in my records, the kids showed some important improvements in their regard and abilities to respect rules, especially Maria and Kaija. Although Daquan and Cristina's self-evaluations are low, in my observations they do not reflect a complete disregard of the rules, especially Daquan, but Cristina showed at least some

improvement. Charlie's scores are intermediate and they match to a great extent my own observations.

The kids' attitudes towards rules were a site for constant struggles with administrators and instructors at MH, and even for the kids who were more sensitive to the importance of having rules and to respect them, this was not easy. Improvement in this area came only after much work and negotiations with the kids, both during and after our program.

Discipline and respect, which were central to the MH rules, were not the only sites of contestation and sources of frustration. A much deeper issue, and perhaps the source of much of the kids' inability to function constantly in a regulated form, was their lack of emotional control. I learned that it was crucial to center the kids, to bring them to balance before we could produce any significant work. This, of course, is not a unique characteristic of MH kids, but of any human being. However, it was evident that the kids' ages and their development (Santrock 2011:357), in addition to the stressful environment and conditions in which they lived, compounded their emotional responses and reactions. Many times they arrived to MH upset, tired, hungry, sad, or overexcited and ready to have fun, and we needed to work a great deal in controlling and balancing their emotions, thoughts, and actions, before engaging in our work.

In my evaluations, I recorded the kids' abilities to self-control in terms of being calm and thoughtful, and in their evaluations the kids' were also asked to rate their abilities to think before acting and to control their actions. In my observations, and in his own reports, Daquan appeared to be the only kid able to control himself consistently, with high scores in his evaluations throughout, and less consistency in mine. In both his

and my evaluations, Charlie showed intermediate ability to control himself and his actions; even though in his final self-evaluation, he reported some improvement, this was not evidenced in my records. Kaija reported mostly high scores at the beginning and at the end, and although she exhibited important improvements in my observations during the second part of the program, my scores were not as high as hers. Maria also reported improvement in her self-evaluations; however, again, this does not necessarily match my observations, which show low scores for her throughout the program, with only slight improvement towards the end. On the other hand, Cristina reported improvement, and showed some improvement in my observations as well. There were no significant negative changes in the kids' scores at the end of the program.

It appears then that the kids' and my perceptions of their abilities to self-control are not necessarily compatible all the time, and this is important. My expectations from the kids, and therefore the values of my observations, are different from the kids' own measurement values, and this makes many of our evaluations incompatible to some degree, and again, calls for the importance to triangulate data in this type of project.

### **Communication Skills**

**Expanding self-expression and interaction with others.** In addition to the areas evaluated above, another aspect that was important to develop throughout the program was that of general communication skills. At MH, before this program, we had worked to teach the kids not to scream or yell at each other, to use less obscene language, and to dialogue instead of fight in order to resolve conflicts. In our project, the kids had to write a great deal, and constantly asked how to spell words, because they had to write them on

the board or on a piece of paper that they knew would be read by someone else. They practiced their literacy skills, and learned new concepts, meanings, contexts, and spelling, while also practicing speaking and listening skills.

Communication skills were linked to other areas that we worked to correct, such as self-control and general management of emotions, particularly their aggressiveness and anger. They were also linked to the kids' abilities to build relationships with different people inside and outside of their neighborhood; we wanted them to learn how to interact with others in appropriate ways, and they had already begun building these skills. We had rules, and the kids helped to spell them out and sometimes to enforce them, but they also chose to ignore them when they felt like it. Thus, there was still much more work to be done in the area of communication skills, in the more intimate forms, as well as in relation with the larger social environment.

According to my reports, all kids were consistently able to express their wants and speak what was in their minds. Daquan and Maria reported expressing their thoughts, while Charlie and Cristina's self-evaluations were intermediate, and Kaija's scores improved. In my observations, Daquan was able to think before speaking to a great degree, whereas Maria and Charlie needed more work. Kaija and Cristina's scores were low, but Kaija's improved at the end, as did Cristina's to some extent.

According to my records, all the kids were able to make convincing arguments. Charlie, Kaija, Daquan, and Cristina were clear in their communications, in general, and Maria improved by the end of the program. Daquan and Maria believed other people could understand when they spoke. Charlie and Cristina said people understood when they talked at times, and Kaija reported improvement in this area. Furthermore, all the

kids believed it was important to listen to others, and Kaija's score improved at the end. In my observations, Charlie and Daquan showed ability to listen to others, even if they did not always do so. Kaija and Maria had a hard time listening to others, but their scores improved at the end. On the other hand, Cristina's scores appeared to be low throughout.

In my evaluations, I recorded Charlie, Kaija, Daquan, and Maria's abilities to understand when others talked to them. Cristina had a hard time with this, but improved at the end. Likewise, Charlie, Kaija, and Daquan (only initial score available for him) reported being able to understand others. Maria's initial score was intermediate, but improved at the end. Unfortunately, Cristina's score lowered significantly, from most of the time to rarely. Again, this does not match my observations, where I recorded improvement for her.

Thus, as demonstrated above, the kids' communication skills were not terribly low, but they were not as high either. Daquan's scores were some of the highest and the most constant in this regard; although Charlie scored high in some aspects, he also had several intermediate scores. Kaija had some low scores but she seemed to have improved according to my and her evaluations. Maria had high and intermediate scores, and showed improvement in several areas in both of our reports. Cristina had some intermediate scores as well, but the lowest scores were recorded for her; however, she exhibited some improvement too. Although Cristina could communicate clearly, she had an extremely difficult time listening to others and paying attention to what was going on in front of her. This seemed to be a problem for her at school and at home as well, according to her own accounts and to my conversations with her mother. At the end of this program, she still needed much more work in this area. In general, all kids needed to

work further on their listening skills, and in their abilities to pay attention to others when they spoke.

**Relationships with others.** My scores indicate that Charlie, Kaija, Cristina, and Maria liked to play with others. Daquan did too, but his scores are less consistent. This information is not entirely reflected in the kids' evaluations. This is so perhaps because I observed their group and family relations as well as those with people outside of the group, while the kids might have only considered people outside of their family group in their evaluations. Although it is not possible to tell at this moment, I include these data in the analysis for they still can provide important information.

Maria said she liked to play with others, while Charlie, and Kaija said they liked it only at times. For Daquan, the score changed dramatically, from rarely to always. On the contrary, Cristina's score changed from most of the time to rarely. Similarly, according to my observations, Daquan and Cristina were friendly, in general, while Charlie, and Maria were friendly to others sometimes. Kaija, on the other hand, was not always as friendly, but her scores were higher at the end. However, in their evaluations, Cristina and Charlie reported being friendly only at times, while Daquan and Maria did not consider themselves to be friendly. Initially, Kaija reported being friendly sometimes, but at the end changed her score to never, contrary to my observations. This information contrasts with the kids' answers to other questions. For example, Charlie, Kaija, and Maria, reported having a lot of friends. Daquan did too, but only his final score is available. Initially, Cristina reported having a lot of friends, but this changed at the end, perhaps because of the change of neighborhood. In the interviews, the kids reported having many friends, and loving to play with them. The mothers agreed that their children were

friendly and sociable, but their perceptions were that the kids had only a few very good friends

In their evaluations, Daquan, Maria, Cristina, and Kaija reported knowing many different people, while Charlie's scores were intermediate. In my observations, Charlie, Kaija, and Cristina appeared to be often surrounded by other kids. There were few observations for Maria in this regard, but her scores were higher at the beginning of the program. Nonetheless, she reported liking to be surrounded by others. Charlie, on the other hand, reported the opposite, as did Kaija, but only her final score was available. Initially, in my records, Daquan appeared to be constantly surrounded by other kids, but this changed at the end, when he seemed to prefer to be by himself, perhaps when Charlie was not around as much anymore. This is reflected in his evaluation too, but not in the interview. In the evaluation, initially, he said he liked to be surrounded by others, but the score changed at the end, from an initial always to rarely. In the first interview, he expressed that he did not like to be around too many people, but preferred to be on his own and he did not trust others, mainly because he appeared to be bullied sometimes at school and in the neighborhood. During the final interview, Daquan recognized that he had a lot of friends, but only some of them were his best friends. This is reflected in the mothers' final interviews as well, when they thought the kids' best friends were within the family. The kids' interactions with others, according to the evaluations, were not always as positive. Charlie and Maria expressed that people could count on them, while Daquan and Cristina said they could do so only at times. Kaija's score changed from always to rarely. In a similar vein, Daquan, Charlie, and Cristina said they made fun of people sometimes, while Kaija and Maria said they did so in general.



Nonetheless, the kids exhibited having good relationships for the most part. Maria said for example that she liked most of the people she knew. Charlie and Cristina neither agreed nor disagreed. Daquan, on the other hand improved his score, from slightly agree to strongly agree at the end. Kaija expressed that she did not like most people she knew. At the same time, Charlie said that he got along with people but only sometimes. Maria's scores improved in this area from sometimes to always at the end. Daquan's improvement was even more dramatic, from rarely to always. On the contrary, Kaija's scores, again, lowered from sometimes to never, and Cristina's also changed from most of the time to rarely.

According to my records, Kaija, Cristina, and Daquan seemed to be open to different people and things, while Maria seemed to be more open at the end. On the other hand, at the beginning, Charlie showed openness towards different things and people, but at the end seemed uninterested. In my evaluations, Cristina, Daquan, and Maria were open to interacting with new and different people, while Charlie seemed to enjoy it only sometimes. Kaija, on the other hand, was not always open to interacting with new or different people, and her score actually lowered at the end. Maria indicated in her reports that she liked meeting new people, but Charlie, Kaija, and Cristina said they liked to meet new people only at times. Daquan's scores improved at the end, from sometimes to always. All the kids were excited about visiting new places, according to my observations. And Charlie, Kaija, Maria, and Daquan also reported liking to visit new places, while Cristina's score changed from most of the time to rarely.

These evaluations show some conflicting results; in my observations, the kids appeared to be friendlier and to have better relationships with others than they reported.

In the interviews, Cristina and Maria's responses show intermediate levels of friendliness and interactions with others, Daquan and Charlie's responses appear to be more positive at the end, from their initial intermediate scores, while Kaija's are in general good. In my records, Cristina's scores appeared to be high; Daquan's were mostly high, with a lower score as well at the end. Maria's initial scores were intermediate, but she showed some improvement. Charlie also showed intermediate scores, but one of them lowered. Kaija improved in one area also, but most of her scores declined greatly at the end, from initial intermediate levels.

Maria's own scores are high throughout, however. And, in their reports, Charlie, Kaija, and Cristina had several intermediate scores, particularly Charlie and Cristina. The most dramatic improvements are seen in Daquan's self-evaluations in several areas, although he had a declining score as well, and he, like Maria, did not consider himself friendly, either at the beginning or at the end. Charlie also had a lower score at the end, while Kaija and Cristina had several lower scores, especially Kaija. Kaija, as well as Maria, also reported making fun of people consistently.

It appears that the kids needed much more work in this area. Although in the interviews some of them show improvement (Daquan and Charlie), and Kaija's regard for others appears to be good, in the evaluations they seem to have less regard for people in general, and to be less open to others. Daquan improved a great deal, but even he showed need to learn to appreciate others more. Kaija seemed to need to work on this more than the other kids, according to her evaluations and my observations, which show declining abilities to relate to others.

## **Political and Civic Consciousness**

**Beyond the self, caring for others.** Although MH encouraged play and diversion, all activities were bound to express educational outcomes that ultimately sought to have a positive impact on the personal lives of the children, and also on their society. It was necessary for the kids to be confronted with their own behaviors and areas that needed further improvement, so that we could teach them to interact with others and function in public settings. Thus they were also confronted with questions about and evaluations of their political consciousness, measured in terms of their moral and ethical values of solidarity and compassion.

In this view, my records show that all the kids exhibited clear moral values at one point or another, questioning and correcting each other's behaviors, and even my own, although Charlie's scores were not as consistent as those of others. They all considered themselves to be responsible persons, and also believed they could be good examples to other kids, albeit only at times.

All the kids showed solidarity with their relatives when something upsetting happened. And all self-reported feeling bad when something happened to the people they loved more generally. My observations for Cristina matched her observations as well, and Kaija's self-reported score lowered from strongly agree to slightly agree at the end. According to my observations, all the kids were helpful to their friends. In her evaluations, Maria reported always enjoying helping her friends. Cristina, Kaija, and Charlie's scores were intermediate, but Kaija's increased considerably, from sometimes to always at the end. Daquan's report shows even more improvement, from a low score to the highest at the end of the program.

According to my evaluations, Kaija, Daquan, Cristina, and Maria also seemed to be able and willing to recognize the good work of other kids (no observations were recorded for Charlie). And all the kids' self-evaluations indicate that they enjoyed when those they knew did well too. In this case, Daquan's scores increased from slightly agree to strongly agree, and Kaija's decreased from strongly agree to slightly agree. Cristina's scores actually decreased to a more neutral score. Charlie, Kaija, and Daquan also showed capacity to share with others, even if they did not do so regularly, while Cristina, and Maria were even more inconsistent. Charlie, Cristina, and Maria reported enjoyment for sharing, but only sometimes. Kaija, on the other hand, lowered her scores, from always to sometimes, and Daquan said he did not like to share.

Thus, the kids appeared to have regard for others and their wellbeing, and exhibited some levels of compassion. Charlie and Cristina's scores were intermediate, especially Charlie's, indicating a need to reinforce this area for them. Kaija's scores were never low, but they tended to be lower towards the end, whereas Daquan's improved in some areas. Maria's scores were for the most part high, in her and in my own observations. The lowest scores in this area appeared for the kids' abilities to share. It was obvious to me, and the kids' scores confirm, that they needed to learn more how to share with others.

### **Sense of Place**

By the end of this project, the kids would call me on almost a daily basis; they asked me to pick them up, to take them to MH, to work with them on another project, to get them out of the house. Every time I saw them, they asked me to take them with me

wherever I went. One day one of the girls, Cristina, hugged me when she saw me, and repeatedly said “take me with you, take me with you.” Other kids, Kaija, Daquan, and Maria did the same, especially right after we finished our project, and when they knew there would be no more monetary rewards for our work together. The oldest boy I worked with, Charlie, had detached already, but I know he appreciated the work we did and he also told me he wanted to do capoeira with me, a Brazilian martial art I began teaching the kids formally a few months later.

Not only the kids who participated in my project exhibited this need to have a place to have fun, and play, and learn, and be taken care of. Many other kids in the neighborhood asked me to take them with me to MH whenever they saw me. They were bored at home and on the streets; there was little to do there. Even riding in the car, from home to MH and back, was a source of pleasure. I was quite playful with them too, whenever I was happy with our interactions. Otherwise, my levels of tolerance were low and I could not give anymore. Even during those moments, I could feel the kids’ love, their concern for my own wellness and happiness. They loved having the opportunity to learn, to play, to be together with their friends, to create new things, or exercise. The kids cared for us, they protected us, and I am sure they would have done anything for us. But this did not happen immediately. It was a process of establishing trust, and the relationships of care and love for each other.

MH provided a space where such relationships could be created. And, in this sense, the kids’ attachment to the MH was evident in many ways. They had been integral in helping to renovate, organize, maintain, and exhibit the organization. Before our summer project, they had already learned to care for the MH and be a central part of it.

Although the kids still had to learn much, especially in interacting with others, in respecting the rules and each other, they already exhibited a great sense of place at MH. I had noticed their tremendous residential instability and heard from at least one of them how important it was to have a place to go that belonged to them. The evaluations reflect these feelings, although it is important to keep in mind that the MH operated very differently during our summer project from previous semesters, in that the kids were the only group at MH consistently during that time.

All kids reported in their evaluations that MH was one of their favorite, if not their favorite, place to be. In my observations, Daquan, Cristina, and Kaija, expressed that MH was their favorite place some times; there were no records of this for Charlie or Maria. In addition, all the kids came consistently to MH, according to my reports and to the kids' own evaluations; however, Charlie ceased to attend regularly during the last week or two. Additionally, all kids were extroverted at MH, and they all seemed to be able to relax there, according to my impressions, but they reported this as well (Kaija's scores improved, from rarely to always, at the end). Kaija, Cristina, Daquan, and Maria were observed expressing feelings of safety at MH (there was no record on this for Charlie). And they all reported that MH was safe, and that they were happy there. Maria and Kaija expressed being able to be themselves at MH regularly, while Charlie's scores were intermediate. Cristina, in her second report also had intermediate scores, but in the first one she reported improvement, from sometimes to always. Daquan reported the same as Cristina's first report. Likewise, Maria, Daquan, and Cristina (first report) agreed that MH reflected their personality. In this case, Charlie's scores were neutral; while

Cristina, in her second report, dropped her scores, from an initial agree to disagree at the end.

In my records, Daquan, Maria, and Cristina appeared to miss MH when they were not there; Charlie missed MH sometimes, and Kaija appeared to miss it more during the second part of the project. In their evaluations, Daquan and Kaija reported missing MH as well, although Kaija's score was lower in her final report, going from agree to slightly agree. On the contrary, at the end, Charlie reported missing MH more than initially, changing his score from slightly disagree to slightly agree. Cristina said in both reports that she missed MH less than before, with scores changing from "agree" to "disagree," but, again, this was not evidenced in my reports.

Charlie did not agree that there were better places than MH in the neighborhood, while Maria's scores were neutral in this regard. Daquan said at the beginning that there were better places than MH in the neighborhood. At the end, he did not believe there were, changing his score from strongly agree to strongly disagree. On the other hand, Kaija and Cristina began to believe that there were better places than MH in the neighborhood, Kaija's score went from disagree to agree, while Cristina's changed from strongly disagree to slightly agree in the first report, and from strongly disagree to strongly agree in the second report.

In my reports, Kaija, Cristina, and Daquan were observed taking care of MH. Cristina and Maria did too, but particularly during the second part, and the end of the program, respectively. Charlie showed ownership for MH, taking care of it in many occasions, and in different ways; however, after observation 25, his scores dropped down, and remained low until the end, marking his absence. All the kids said they wanted to

make MH better, and Daquan's scores actually improved at the end. Kaija, Daquan and Maria also believed they knew how to make MH better. Charlie's score was neutral in this regard, while Cristina's scores improved from strongly disagree to strongly agree. In my observations, Daquan expressed feeling that MH was like his house. In their own evaluations, Daquan, Maria, Kaija, and Cristina also agreed that MH was like their house, while Charlie did not agree.

As can be seen, the kids had built a strong relationship with MH before our project. This relationship changed in different ways because the MH was different during our summer project. There were no other projects running at the time, except the garden, in which the kids in my project did not often then participate. Thus the kids in my project had almost the entire MH space to themselves. In some cases, this was advantageous, but the kids also missed their friends, especially Charlie, which was one reason he withdrew at the end. He asked me a few times whether his friends could come to MH while we worked, but I declined because I was the only person working there regularly.

Even though the kids' relationships with the MH changed in several ways during the project, it was evident they needed a place like it in their lives. Even a year and a half later, the kids continued to participate in the few activities offered by the organization. The drawings below the kids made at the very end of our summer project, which speak to their relationships with MH, with Lance and with me.

In the next chapter, I discuss some of the most important implications of the cultural praxis project and the above evaluations.





**Figure 13. Daquan's Feelings About the MH.** Daquan is the kid who created the strongest bond with the MH and with us. He was always there, for every activity we offered. He said repeatedly that he wanted to live at MH.



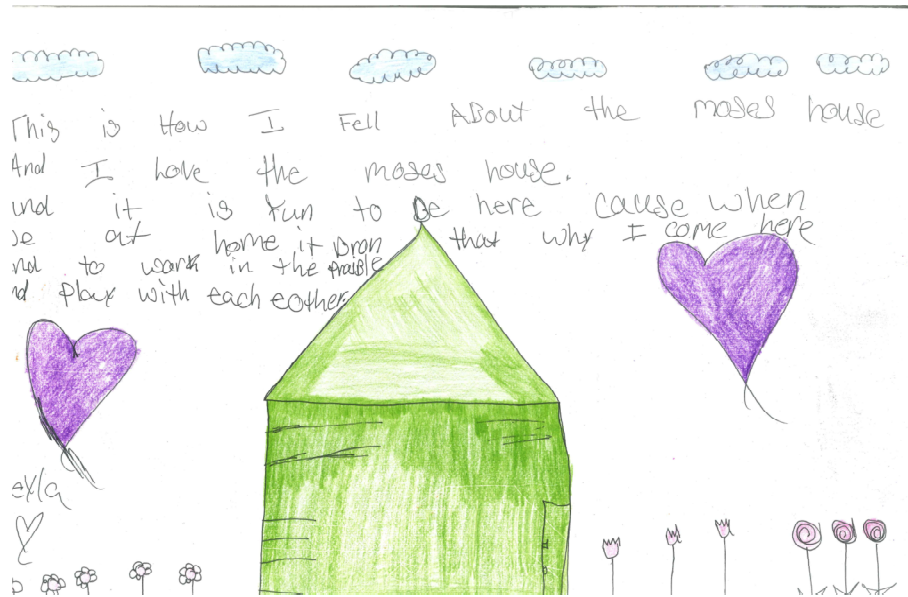
**Figure 14. Cristina's Feelings About the MH.** Cristina loved the MH, but she also liked to play outside with her friends. She created a strong attachment to MH, but not as strong as that of other children.



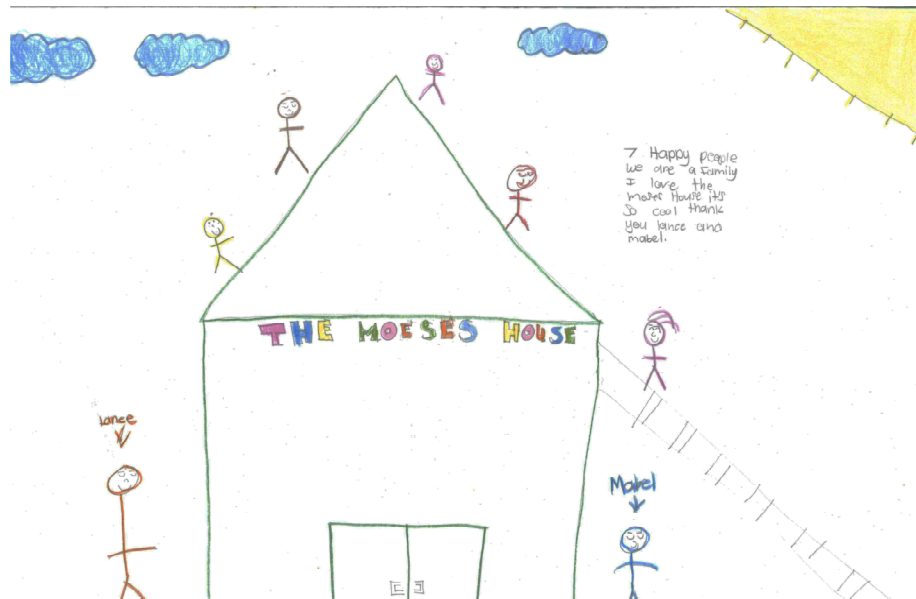
**Figure 15. Karla's Feelings About the MH.** Karla also made a drawing of the MH, even though she did not work on the project full time. Karla liked to be at MH, and participated in many programs, but she could not take advantage of it as much because of her disciplinary issues.



**Figure 16. Kaija's Feelings About the MH.** Although Kaija liked the MH, she was never as attached to us as other kids. She liked to do her own thing, and especially be on the computer interacting on the social networks. She participated in many programs, but could detach easily whenever she felt like it.



**Figure 17. Maria’s Feelings About the MH.** Maria generated a strong bond with the MH and its volunteers. She attended most of the programs we offered and always wanted to be there. She said she missed the MH repeatedly when she was not there.



**Figure 18. Charlie’s Feelings About the MH.** Charlie liked the MH when his friends were able to participate in the programs as well. He loved working in the garden and playing sports in the back. He had a strong bond with Lance and with me, but detached from MH when the majority of programs faded away.

## **Chapter 11:**

### **Lessons from Cultural Praxis**

#### **Confronting Cultural Praxis**

Although the kids greatly enjoyed their involvement in the production of the videos, learned many new things, and practiced already acquired skills, it was not easy to maintain a work routine without a great deal of control. They were highly motivated, but it took a great effort to involve them intensively and efficiently in the project. The kids left to their own devices could not have learned the important techniques required in video production, a complex medium which requires teamwork, and learning many skills, and that demands certain things of children that they do not naturally think about. Hence, the complexity of the medium, in addition to the developmental needs of the kids, and the setting in which this work occurred, impacted the participatory process, the production and its outcomes as well. There were wonderful gains but also confusing and even problematic aspects in our work.

Although we had many good days, we also had days where the kids and I could not communicate as well. For the most part, it was one or two of them at a time who needed more attention or who rebelled, while others observed and laughed at their jokes, and sometimes also asked them to quiet down. It took a great deal of patience and work, but eventually we developed a good routine and the kids themselves began to monitor

their own behaviors, replicating techniques that their schools had adopted. In this sense, it was of great importance to have discovered that for the most part the kids did not consider MH as an educational institution, but as a recreational or “babysitting” facility. One girl, Cristina, expressed that had she known that we were there to teach them, she would have had a completely different behavior throughout all of our programs. Thus, the issue of clarifying objectives for the children and their families is crucial. Once they understood our roles as teachers, the dynamics changed significantly.

The kids explained that they were aware of the disciplinary issues, but they chose not to abide by the rules. On one occasion we talked about their inability to cooperate sometimes. They expressed that at MH we were too nice to them and that if we changed our behaviors to more aggressive disciplinary forms (yelling and kicking them out, for example), they would behave better. Of course, Lance and I explained to them that it was not our objective to be rude, to yell, call them names, or to treat them like objects, throwing them out of the house. We did not want to change our kind approach, but the kids saw that as an opportunity to disregard our authority. They were used to harsh and aggressive disciplinary techniques and responded to those. This aggressiveness permeated their lives.

As seen before, the kids also showed some important levels of care and compassion for other people, and this concern for others probably fueled their enthusiasm for creating videos that would teach them to protect themselves from deleterious activities. The kids chose to make a video about fighting because, along with the issue of drugs, it was a topic that interested everyone in the group, but also their mothers, and other members of the family, as well as the kids’ friends. It was, without a doubt, one of

the most pressing issues for many in Sulphur Springs. Every single person interviewed discussed the violence in the neighborhood, as well as the problem of drugs. All interviewees wanted to eliminate these issues, damage individuals, the community, and society more generally.

The kids were enthusiastic about those topics and were quite engaged in the processes of developing their stories. They were imaginative, and knew to a great extent how the problems played out in the neighborhood. They enjoyed producing the videos, even though the process of production was overwhelming to them, particularly during the second project, when we were on a tighter schedule, and the kids were already tired. They had to learn, think, and work hard. But when they saw the final products they felt proud of them, and more so of the second video, on fighting. For them, the quality was higher, the theme more fascinating, and the story more compelling and exciting. They loved the fighting scenes, and were quite happy with the end results.

Nevertheless, the kids were extremely conflicted about the fighting video. With the first one, on drugs, there was no question that hard drugs were bad, and that they would never want to fall into them. With fighting, however, the kids had a love-hate relationship. It was a huge issue for them, but at the same time a source of enjoyment, and they were not shy about expressing either of these views in the interviews for the video and during our conversations about the project.

The kids grew up among fights; their family members and friends often taught them how to fight, according to the kids' own accounts. Yet everyone resented the fighting and violence in the neighborhood, and the mothers mentioned it as a factor in their desires and decisions to move out of Sulphur Springs. All the kids interviewed in the

video, even the little ones (Andrea, Damon, Daniel), 5, 7, 8 years old, fought, and in some cases constantly. Some kids said that fighting released their anger, and that even if they did not like fighting, they would do it if others pushed them around. Aggressiveness was pervasive among these kids; fighting was used as a survival technique, but also constituted a source of entertainment and joy.

One of the points of this video, for me, was to have the kids reflect on different ways to solve conflicts, and to have them recognize that fighting could actually make the issues worse, rather than solving them. Initially, some kids said they thought fighting worked to resolve issues, but as the analysis went on they recognized that it could bring about more problems, and this is reflected in their video narrative. It was important for me to have the kids think about these things in depth, because during the first months at MH we experienced the kids' aggression and intense fighting. This brought them trouble, not only at MH, where they were reprimanded and in some cases suspended, but also with others in the neighborhood and even the police. The kids were constantly hitting, insulting, and yelling at each other. It was extremely stressful for us, but more so for them, because they lived constantly in such an environment.

At a personal level, the issue of fighting was important for me to discuss because one of my major research interests has always been violence. I grew up in a violent environment, a country in an eternal civil war, a neighborhood where kids fought constantly. The fights were so harsh that a group of kids I knew killed someone in a fight, and they all went to jail. Even in my family I experienced violence; my brothers and I grew up in a very stressful environment that haunts me to this day. In fact, I believe my interests in martial arts, and in sports in general, come from a need to release this

aggressive energy. I have trained in fighting techniques, capoeira, kick boxing, and even attempted to dance with fire. This is never with the intent to harm people or myself, but it is certainly an important release of energy. However, I do not enjoy watching people being beaten up or killed, even in movies. The MH kids, on the contrary, did. They enjoyed greatly the spectacle of violence, and this was extremely troubling for me. Maria, for example, said she enjoyed watching the fights in the neighborhood, as I believe all the kids did. They always ran towards places where people were fighting and cheered for the one they liked the most. They also watched fights on the computer, although we did not authorize them to do so at MH. Sometimes we found them watching street fighting videos on YouTube. I have found other more relaxing techniques to control my energy and began to teach those to the kids, once I realized how delicate the issue of violence was for this population, and how thoughtful community artists must be in this type of situation.

Unfortunately, during our summer production, I became concerned that the kids' exploration, research and expanded awareness of the fighting and violence in the neighborhood could trigger their desires for fighting, rather than inviting them to resolve conflicts in other ways. Charlie, for example, who became disengaged from the project during the final weeks, engaged in a fight during that time. He had already shown aggressive behaviors at MH, and had gotten in trouble with the police after beating up a kid on the street with one of his friends. However, my hope was that all the kids would begin to show less aggressiveness, but it was apparently not the case with him.

In addition, during the production of the video, the girls were extremely excited about staging a fight, taking it so seriously that they seemed to be really fighting for a



moment. We stopped the recording at that time, and when confronted about what was going on, the girls denied any intention to fight. We shot a few other less realistic scenes after that, but even the mothers expressed their concerns about this situation.

In their evaluations, the kids' aggressive feelings are also reflected. They all reported feeling anger towards others; Kaija, Charlie, and Maria said they felt anger sometimes, while Daquan and Cristina reported more frequency of these feelings. Of all kids, the only one who reported improvement at the end was Maria, who said she never felt anger towards others anymore. When asked whether they did things to harm others, Kaija and Daquan said they never did, while Charlie, Cristina, and Maria said they did sometimes. Their reports did not change at the end. Initially, Charlie, Kaija, and Cristina also said they engaged in fights sometimes, while Daquan and Maria said they engaged in fights more often. At the end, Daquan was the only one who reported improvement, saying that he now rarely engaged in fights. Unfortunately, Kaija and Cristina said they engaged in fights always this time. Kaija, Daquan, Maria and Cristina also said they liked fights, and their views did not change at the end. For Charlie, however, the scores were more negative. Initially, he slightly disagreed that he liked fights, but at the end he agreed.

Thus, the kids were markedly aggressive, and although there were areas of improvement for some kids, Maria and Daquan in particular, there were also areas that appeared to have worsened. The most problematic aspect was the kids' enjoyment of fights, which they all shared. During the final focus groups and interviews the kids said they would fight less after having reflected on the topic during the video production, and they said they would avoid fighting if they could. However, their messages and actions

were still conflicting. They still thought fighting was “fun,” and they were not certain that their videos could help to transform others, even though they said it had helped them to some extent.

Initially, the kids believed that they could contribute to the improvement of their neighborhood through their work because, as Kaija said, “a lot of people could see the video and make it like why should I do that?” Cristina also said they could contribute “...by showing... by like telling them like stop all the fighting and cursing they do, and all that and show it to them, and maybe they will improve what they have been doing lately...” Some of these views changed at the end, however, when some of the kids were not sure anymore that the projects could make an impact.

The kids’ mothers, on the other hand, from the beginning did not seem to agree on the capacity of the children to influence their reality. Katia, for example, said:

The kids? I don’t think they could do nothing... That’s my honest opinion, what can the kids do? ...I don’t think they could do nothing. It is up to us, adults, to do something about that, to make it better for them, they really, honestly, they can do nothing about it... They can probably... yeah, they can do an awareness video, yeah, but the boys who are doing it bad, they stay in the corner, so they might not see it.

Another mother, Lana, thought the kids could do certain things to improve the neighborhood, but not necessarily through art or media. For her, the kids could help in things such as “clean up teams... [and] reporting crimes;” and during the last interview she said “by being successful one day and helping others.”

At the end of the project, the kids had changed to some extent their views about their ability to improve their neighborhood. Sometimes, they were sure that they could influence other children’s behaviors, but others they were not.

Towards the end of the project, I also had one-on-one editing sessions with the kids. At the end of each session, we did evaluations and I asked questions I had not asked before in order to assess their views of the fighting video, which was in the final stages of post-production at that time. Daquan's thoughts about the video were: "ah, it's good cause, I think we got a story to tell... tell people that fighting is not good." His favorite part was when he had to find the new song for the video (he did the search online). Of the entire video, however, his favorite part was "the fighting part... cause it got more entertainment." For him, the interviews were funny, "the ones with Charlie." He made suggestions to improve the video, which we used later on. I asked him for the one thing he learned the most in this project; he replied: "I don't remember everything... how to edit and..." I asked if he would try to not fight as much. His response was: "Aha, I am... I don't fight... I don't fight... When I have to I will but... I fight, but not like that." I asked if he would show the video to his friends and family. He said, "to my family, but not my friends... cause... they don't care what they do... they are not going to listen." I asked him if he thought there was a way to tell kids not to do bad stuff. He said: "Don't do it around them [he meant teach them by example]."

Kaija said the project was "coming out good. Everybody is having fun with the project." She thought this one was more fun than the other one "cause we got to fight." Her favorite part of the whole project was the fighting part. She said she liked fighting "sometimes." She said she learned mostly about the camera, and her favorite job in the project was to act. I asked her if she showed the video to other kids in the neighborhood, and whether they would think about fighting differently, or if they would do the same thing. Kaija said, "they probably won't care... because they are so bad..." She did not

think there were many good kids in the neighborhood. For her, most of them were bad. She said she enjoyed editing the video. At another point, Kaija said she liked the drugs video, but not as much as the one on fighting, “cause it was kind of lame.”

Cristina said her favorite part of the video was “when Kaija raps, I like that rap, it’s better than the last one.” She said she liked the video, “...when you all changed it around, let it make pretty good sense... Now, that’s a story... good, good... that’s what you call a story, you switch it around and all that, that’s what you call a story.” In describing the one thing she learned the most, she said, “mostly, let’s say editing and logging the video.” Her favorite part was “working with the camera and the sound.” She believed she could now teach someone how to do those jobs. I asked if she thought that other kids in the neighborhood would like the video. She responded “yeah, but I don’t think they are going to stop fighting.” I asked whether she would stop fighting so much. Her answer was: “no, cause if someone steps up to my face, I’m gonna fight.” She said she would try to ignore them first. She would “try her best.” I asked her if she had anything else to say at the end. She responded:

I had a really good time with this, working with the editing and all that... I never had this much fun with no body... My family is not fun... cause every time they go out to eat or something, they don’t like to take us... But they do like taking us to the pool and all that...

During the final interviews, when I asked the kids whether they thought the videos we made during the summer could help to change anything in Sulphur Springs, Charlie said “probably.” At some other point he said: “Yeah, cause more kids won’t do drugs.” Kaija expressed: “They [the kids] can stop fighting and not get killed.” She was not sure, however, that the kids would stop fighting. She said she would think fighting is

bad if someone showed her that video, and had she not participated in it. Daquan said: “Some people might listen, others might not.” Maria, on the other hand, said that she did not think they would help to change anything. She said people would “probably” continue doing the same things.

During the second focus group, I asked the kids the same question. Daquan thought they [the videos] would probably not have an impact: “some people might listen, others might not listen.” Kaija said, “yeah... they will think more about fighting before fighting...” About the community drugs video, Daquan said: “they might stop being crack heads.” Cristina said “yeah.”

Once again, the conflicting thoughts about fighting were evident, and this was the case throughout the project. The kids liked it, yet they thought it was not good; their video could be useful, they said sometimes, but at other times, they were not so sure anymore. They did not want to fight as much, but they would if they had to, and fighting was “fun.”

In the fall of 2011, I began teaching the kids capoeira, a Brazilian martial art I started practicing several years before, because they showed great interest in it when I introduced them to it. It is a beautiful martial art, a dance fight, and there is much energy in the game. But, because of my experience with the fighting video in the summer, I was always concerned about them learning fighting techniques with the intention of harming others. Therefore, I decided to introduce martial arts theory and history in our classes, emphasizing always that martial arts are a great source of self-esteem and confidence, but that their purpose is now more spiritual than anything else, and that the best fighters are not those who engage in physical fights, but those who avoid them, using their minds to

defeat their enemy. I believe this was a great lesson for the kids, but like everything else, the program was not long enough for me to ensure that they learned it and applied it in their daily lives.

The issue of violence and fighting in the neighborhood deserves much more attention, and research. It needs to be treated with care, since research focusing on it can backfire and motivate kids to fight more, not less. But it is also necessary for kids to engage in activities that release their anger and teach them forms of relaxation and emotional control, which they can use on a regular basis without incurring unaffordable expenses. Community programs need to be created to target these issues that are of great interest in populations like those living in Sulphur Springs, while recognizing that violence is engrained in many of the kids and their families' ways of life, and it is part of their social relationships.

The story I created with the kids certainly heightened their awareness about the issue and the repercussions of it as well. It also allowed them to think about healthier alternatives to conflict resolution, ones that could actually help to solve the issues. However, the treatment of these projects requires care and follow up, so that kids remain aware of the dangers and are not fueled by their experiences, making the treatment into a source of entertainment.

**Determining levels of personal growth.** At the end, it was not clear whether the kids would change their most deleterious (in their own views) behaviors, such as fighting. This was not because they did not want to, or because they did not understand the problem, but perhaps because of a larger, uncontrollable environment that promoted their behaviors. Personal change is a complex process that requires paying attention to and

working on many fronts in a sequence involving awareness and understanding of the problem, engagement with it, preparation for the constitution of a new self and a new reality, action, maintenance, and habituation to a new form of being in the world. This involves time and a variety of strategies, including education, environmental controls, external support and so forth (Prochaska 1994), none of which the MH kids had in abundance. All we could offer to the kids in this project was information and increased self-awareness, in some ways what Freire called *conscientization*. Although it seemed as if it could be possible for the kids to change some of their conditioning during the process of our projects, whether the new learning would stick was not possible to determine. The kids' own responses were ambivalent and inconsistent. They appeared to be somewhat concerned about their behaviors, and while there is some evidence of improvement, other data are contradictory. Maria and Kaija in particular felt less guilt about their negative behaviors at the end. However, evidence of improvement can be found in the interviews with the kids and their mothers. For example, during the final focus group, I asked the kids whether they thought their behaviors had changed in any way for the better. Maria said "yeah, because I don't yell no more and I ignore people when they say things." Daquan also said "yeah, I stopped laughing at people's jokes." Kaija said, "...I stopped being bad... I don't know how I stopped being bad." Cristina admitted, "I don't catch an attitude sometimes." And Karla, who worked with us as a project assistant, said, "I stopped being so loud."

I asked if the project had changed their lives in any way. Charlie agreed, and explained: "I will not start fighting for no reason... And I will never do drugs..." Kaija also agreed: "I don't fight no more... I don't do drugs." Cristina said her life changed

also, “I’ve been a good girl lately at home.” She was also happy because “sometimes I had to wear uniform, but this time I get to wear anything I want to school.” She said she would buy not just clothes, but also “I’m gonna get a diary... In my diary, I’m gonna write what I’m gonna do when I grow up, so I can have a plan.” Daquan said his life changed “a little... because I had stopped helping doing stuff around the house, but I am back to doing it.” He stopped because “it was a whole bunch of people, and nobody do nothing but me, Charlie, my mom and my grandmom, so I stopped and then went back to doing it.” He said the project helped him make that decision “cause I helped out here, so I should help out there.”

At the end of the project, I asked the mothers whether their kids changed at all from being at the MH and working with me in the summer. Diana said, “I think when she [her daughter, Tatiana, also a project assistant] started hanging out in there [Sulphur Springs] more, her attitude got worse... I think she’s easily influenced and I don’t like that, but when she got to the MH, she got way... I’m gonna say more, more responsibility about herself, and more confidence... Yeah, she’s more mature.” Tatiana, in particular, was affected by her constantly negative behaviors during the fall of 2010 and the spring of 2011. Because of her lack of cooperation and complete disregard for the MH rules, I did not recruit her for our project in the summer, and only allowed her to work as an assistant because she asked me so many times to allow it. According to my conversations with her and her mother, Tatiana learned a lesson. She realized that her attitudes could close doors for her, and limit her opportunities to grow and learn. She seemed much more humble at the end.



Another mother, Marsha, said about her kids: “Cristina is a lot more cooperative... yeah, cause she used to be more bad attitude all around. But, she has calmed a whole lot. I ain’t got no call from school yet. I know it’s still early, but nobody has said that she had no bad attitude, cause last year she was just all messed up, all messed up, with bad attitude. So, I see a lot of improvement.” She explained that Cristina’s bad attitudes were like that in “the fall and the spring, throughout the whole last year of school. I ain’t got no good reviews from her, but over the summer, she started to change. She started to take some time to think before she do stuff...” Marsha also mentioned that Cristina “wants to do more... sometimes she asks momma do you want me to wash the dishes or sweep or stuff?” I told her I like things clean and organized and she expressed: “Yeah, they was telling us about it... They said: She’s so neat, her paperwork is so neat.” When asked what she thought the kids learn from the project with me, she said: “I hope that they learned to respect each other more, that’s one of the things I hope, I know it’s gonna take time, but you know what I’m saying? They still young, so, I know they cooperate more, now; they are getting better, I know that.”

About Charlie, Marsha expressed:

...And Charlie, I don’t know about him, he’s starting to focus more on his... you know what I’m saying, on what’s important, but as far... cause he’s still running around, he’s a wild child...

And Karla:

...I don’t really have no trouble with her, but she, I can see improvement in her as well... Yeah, she has grown up a lot, she starting to grow up, cause she wanted to join in and she is changing...

During this interview, I explained to Marsha that Karla, like her cousin Tatiana, knew early in the spring that I was going to run this program, but their attitudes were so

bad I decided I could not work with them, and the girls ended up resenting their positions.

Marsha agreed,

Yes, that's what happened with Karla, she really wanted to be [in the program]... That's what I told her, it's not her [Mabel's] job to teach you how to act, you should already got that and respect her, and know what to say and know what to do, so she can deal with all of you. But, I have been talking to her.

Over the course of the summer, after realizing that she was missing out a good opportunity to learn and to have fun, Karla decided to change her attitude and become more cooperative and less destructive. She still had ways to go but definitely turned around for the better.

More generally, about the MH impact on the kids, Ms. Norma said:

I know it taught them a lot of things. Cause I watched them how you had them doing the little drawings, and painting; they sit down teaching the little kids how to do it... I notice Maria, every day; she'd sit with Andrea for a couple of hours, if she does not draw well, she teaches her how to do it well. So, yes, it was a very good program... Maria do, she takes great time with Andrea.

And Kaija...

Well, I think she learned a lot how to adjust herself, yeah, she learned a lot, because she understand if she don't be disciplined, and she don't obey, she's gonna miss on a lot of things in life. So, yes, it did help her a lot.

Kaija was suspended from the project indefinitely in the summer, after she showed extreme aggression towards me. Although I took her back when she demonstrated willingness to follow the rules and to behave appropriately, I made sure she also understood that her negative attitudes could result in loss of opportunity. She changed a great deal at the end of the program, mostly for the better, and she seemed to

have assimilated the lesson that respect towards others was important to succeed in society.

Ms Norma also talked about Daquan:

Oh, well, to me, Daquan is excellent... I don't know what Daquan do when I'm not with him, but Daquan is excellent. I always tell him, please don't ever change. You know, he's not... I can't say he's my favorite, but I put him above the rest, because even when we are not watching him, or not observing him, he don't do bad things. He makes the right choices. Like, you know Charlie got friends, Daquan won't hang out with them, he will not. And I'm not saying that nobody got no bad friends, cause we are not supposed to judge nobody, we're not supposed to judge their friends, but Daquan does an excellent job at picking his friends. Okay if he think these boys are going to do something, he will not get with them, and he don't have a lot of friends. He might go out and play football, or he might not. Daquan prefer to play his games, prefer to keep to himself. I don't know, but I don't think he's gonna change.

Ms. Norma appreciated greatly Lance's work with the boys at MH, his guidance and role model figure. She believed that Lance's conversations with the boys helped to guide them in their lives. She had Daquan in high regard as well. For her, Daquan was a great role model for other children and she hoped that others would grow as well as he was doing.

Ms. Norma then expressed her views about Maria:

She loves to try to motivate little kids. She'd sit down with Andrea, and say, come on, Andrea, do your homework. But the only thing is that Maria is a little devilish. Sometimes, she'd say things or do things that aggravate people. But, it's not meanness. She's not mean. I think it's because of some of the things that might be troubling her mind. She plays too much, and we try to talk to her about that, you know. We try to tell her, okay, Maria, you might not keep up with Daquan, but you can act like him, be smart like him, be obedient like him. But, other than that, she's not bad, you know, she's not bad at all... She's another one; she doesn't have to get under punishment. She don't... And she works very hard to try to reach her goals.

And I also asked her about Charlie:

Well, you know, I don't observe Charlie too much cause he's an outside person, he might be in the house for a little while, but Charlie loves the outside, he loves to hang out, play ball, he be with his friends. They like to just walk around the mall, so I don't get to observe Charlie that much... I watch him when he's in the house. He's a good child when he's in the house, but I don't know too much him, because he don't give you a chance to observe him, you know. And his mom don't have no problem with him being outside with his friends, because he loves the outside, and he knows how to handle himself.

About Cristina, Ms. Norma stated:

...She is a good kid, she obeys, and I think this program you are all helping her with is also, you know, it helped motivate her too, and I have observed her, and I think she'll do good in life, I have observed her a lot... I'm gonna tell you that, because I don't observe her like I do Maria and Kaija, I don't work that close with her, and that's because I don't be around with her that much, but I think you all played a good part in their lives.

Lana (Maria, Kaija, and Daquan's mother), also said she had seen the kids' behaviors change over the summer: "In behavior, positive attitudes... They listen more." She also agreed that they were more helpful, and cleaner "they are more neat... They are interested in stuff... care for stuff... keeping order." In a second conversation, Lana expressed, "Daquan does more housework... Kaija is trying to control her attitude... Not doing it as much... not getting mad as quick." In terms of Maria: "She is still telling it... but a little bit less." We both agreed that Maria is the one still having more trouble adjusting, and that she has a strong will and likes to do her own thing.

Overall, both the mothers' and kids' responses during interviews were more aligned with my evaluations of the kids than their self-reports. The kids seemed to neglect positive behaviors more on paper than in reality, although I am sure that some of their answers matched their feelings precisely. Nevertheless, the kids appeared to have

grown a great deal from our work, even if we were all conscious that there was still much work to be done.

**Final thoughts on cultural praxis.** During the second set of interviews, the kids talked about their learning in our project. Charlie said he learned about “Timecodes, interviewing, [and] evaluations.” He agreed that he had learned how to evaluate himself, even though the process of the evaluations was reportedly boring to him, as well as all to other kids. He also agreed that he knew better how to learn, how to ask questions, and create a story. He believed that he could now put a story together. Kaija learned “not to fight, not to do drugs... how to work on the computer, and stuff like that.” Cristina said she “learned how to edit, log, shoot the video...” She agreed that she got to practice her reading and writing “and my drawing.” Daquan said he “learned... mostly how to edit... [and] how to put together the camera, the microphone, digitizing... I liked learning about everything, how to set up the stuff... And how to do white balance.” Maria learned mostly “Editing... how to put the stuff in the computer... how to use control and in and out [sic].” She agreed that she learned to cut clips and to put them in the timeline.

Evidently, during the final interviews, the kids had the editing process fresh in their minds because we had just finished the video. In their daily evaluations the kids always focused on their present activities, and this is another reason why it is so important to evaluate the kids’ actions and thoughts from different points of view, and at different times during projects like this one. Without the triangulation of data, this program evaluation would have been inaccurate. Not only could the kids’ evaluations change significantly from one moment to another, but also my own perceptions of the kids’ work and behaviors were subject to change according to my own states of mind in a

particular day. The fact that I can compare the different datasets, my perceptions of the kids' work, their mothers', and their own perceptions of their work, makes a great difference in these analyses.

When asked what they had contributed to the projects, Charlie said he contributed by "asking questions... When we were doing the interviews, I was being more specific." Kaija contributed her "editing, acting [and] rapping" talents. She was an "actress, rapper, and editor;" she said she contributed her "acting, and interviewing." Cristina said she contributed "my acting... my face... I brought into the project." She thought she had been a good actress. Daquan said he "brought everything... I brought me, camera, microphone," all the things that he learned. During the second focus group, Daquan said he brought his mind into the project. Maria said, "I brought my mind..." and said she also set up the camera by herself. Cristina also claimed that task, and she "hooked the sound into the camera" too.

At the end of the program, I also asked the kids whether they liked the work we did during the summer. Karla said, "yes, cause it was fun; the fight acting." Maria also said "yes, fun! And [the] fighting part, and Kaija's [her raps], and [we] got away from home." For Maria being at home was "boring... nothing to do." She liked going to MH to work on projects, playing, and making some money. She said she liked making money and it was fun. Daquan stated that he liked it "cause we learned new stuff, and learned something new...all kinds of stuff." Cristina said "yes, I liked doing the fighting scenes, the way Kaija made her raps." Kaija said: "I liked everything." I asked her if she liked the evaluations as well, and she replied "too long. I like writing but not evaluations." I asked

them whether they thought they had learned to evaluate themselves. Maria, said simple “yeah.” Kaija said “I did not, I don’t know what that means.”

They also expressed what they had not liked. Kaija said “writing.” Maria said “sometimes evaluations cause when you write a long paragraph on the board and you said, what did you learn? You would go on and on and on and on and on.” Cristina said, “it is like an hour long speech.” I told Cristina, “it’s called teaching.” After a very funny interaction, I asked the kids again what they had not liked. Cristina said, “that’s so hard, cause I like writing... nothing...” Karla said, “when we had to keep stopping [she meant repeating the scenes many times]” Cristina added, “yeah, we had to repeat everything in this video.” I asked them if they wanted to have a good project. Cristina said, “I got stuff on my face, and again, I got stuff on my face, and again.” I asked them whether they thought they would have had enough with the first shot. Karla said “yes.” Daquan’s answer was “overboard.” Kaija said she did not think the first shots would have been enough “cause, they were messed up.” I asked if they thought the video looked good then. Cristina said, “yeah, especially the fighting video.” I reminded them that we had made those videos together. Cristina replied: “Whoever created it, I’m so proud of you, I’m so proud, I’m so proud!” Karla said, “I like the girls video.” Cristina said, “me too.” And Kaija followed, “yeah I like the girls video.” This is the video we made two semesters before, about the girls and their lives.

I also wanted to know whether they preferred working with a group or alone. Daquan said “on my own, I get way more work done... with group, keep stopping and all that.” Karla said, “by myself cause I get my work done, and people are loud and laughing, people, like more individual.” Later, during another interview, she said “groups

cause I might need help...” Maria expressed, “sometimes I like working in groups but if I am by myself, I get a lot more work done. Cristina said, “individually, cause I can’t concentrate with people around.” Cristina, during the final interview, said she liked to work with others “...sometimes... cause some people that are working with you, they aggravate you... and they talk too much...” But she liked working with other people “on my happy days, when I’m excited about an event that’s going to happen.” Kaija said “with people... [my] friends... I like working with nerds... cause I can get help from them... not on my own... I might need some help.”

I asked whether they liked this group specifically, composed of siblings and cousins. Maria did, while Cristina said “[I] don’t like working with Daquan and Maria,” but she did not know why. Karla liked to work with Maria, and Daquan liked to work with Charlie, he said the others “are goofy, they are just... f’d up.” Kaija said she did not like working with them because they were “loud and ignorant, embarrassing, loud.” Maria did not like working with Cristina “cause she’s always goofing around and complains.” Karla added, “she’s laughing at people, and gets mad about the chair, pencils...”

During the final interviews their answers to this question were more positive than during the focus group, which suggests again that working with children is delicate. Their perceptions and feelings change continuously, according to the situations and the environments in which they are immersed at a particular time. Charlie said he did “cause we was laughing and playing, and fighting.” Kaija did not like it because “they play too much.” However, she would work with them again “if they don’t play.” Cristina, on the other hand, liked working with them “cause we got to have fun and record, and all that



stuff.” She would work with them again. Daquan liked working with them “most of the time... cause [sometimes] we had to keep stopping... for me too, but... nobody would pay attention...” He would like to work with them again, nonetheless. Maria said she liked working with them sometimes “cause they are bad... I’m good... I don’t fight a lot... I yell at people.” But she would like to work with her siblings and cousins again.

From these responses, I gathered that the kids believed their work was affected by the relationships in the group; they got easily distracted and they resented having to work harder when they interrupted each other or the flow of the work.

In general, the interviews gave me a much better feeling about the results of the program than some of the kids’ self-evaluations, especially Cristina’s, might show. They learned, and enjoyed themselves greatly. I witnessed important changes in their behaviors, although I am also aware that these changes may have been temporary, since there was very little opportunity afterwards to reinforce the lessons of our program. In my final chapter I offer some conclusions and detail the implications of my study, as well as offer some recommendations for future programs.

## **Chapter 12:**

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The main purpose of this study was to analyze the role and potential of community arts programs and organizations in improving the lives of disadvantaged African American youth, through the creation of a participatory video project and the internal evaluation of the same, using applied anthropological methods, and following the recommendations of expert community arts programs evaluators. In addition to conducting the program design, implementation, and evaluation, given my extensive involvement with MH, I was able to investigate in some depth the lives of the kids participating in this project, their relationships with MH, as well as the general organizational environment in which we were immersed. In this process, I was able to establish the complexity of community arts work and of any educational enterprise with disadvantaged children.

It is possible that a community arts program within an organization can help to offset the subjection of African American youth to marginality and improve their lives, by providing the space, freedom, and resources necessary for them to think, imagine, and create. This allows them to learn about themselves and appreciate their individual and cultural identities and values, and to communicate and work with others in processes that will contribute to changing the realities that negatively affect them. It may protect them

from engaging in deleterious behaviors and promote more accurate discourses about and representations of their lives. I believe the results of my work point to that potential.

However, some necessary conditions need to be met to this effect.

A community arts organization does not require much money to run good programs, but if it is to be effective, it requires a long-term strategy that links realistically the organization's resources to the needs of the population, and the potential of community arts. It needs prepared instructors, administrators, and volunteers with a holistic vision of wellness (or what it means to live a good life), as defined by the communities with which they work. In the U.S., a contemporary and holistic vision of wellness involves "the integration, balance, and harmony of mind, body, spirit, and emotions, where the whole is... greater than the sum of the parts" (Allison 2001:25). This perspective is different from the more prominent Western conceptualization of health, which is based on Cartesian principles that separate the mind from the body, and regard the body as a machine, whose parts can be treated separately (25). An anthropological perspective can help to determine the wellness goals of a particular population and therefore the best practices in the design, implementation and evaluation of community arts programs, as well as of any other community activity that seeks to improve the lives of participants.

Taft and Harold Richardson offered in their own way holistic programs at MH, involving neither the creation of art for art's sake nor the kinds of measurable behavior changes that arts programs typically seek. Rather, their goal was an integration of work, spiritual practice, emotional, mental and physical balance, as well as fellowship with others and the environment. For them, emphasis needed to be put on the spiritual self,

however, in order to develop creativity and to counteract the materialistic forces of the world; they hoped MH children would develop this connection with their inner selves, and in that way find constructive paths to follow. This is what the children in the neighborhood needed to shield themselves from the effects of marginalization, criminalization, and their resulting violence and self-destruction to which they are exposed continuously. The Richardsons learned to live better lives themselves in this fashion, reaching high levels of spiritual maturity that allowed them to tap into their creative powers with a mission of service and compassion for other human beings, especially children. Through their art, they expressed and shared the messages and guidance they received from God, their inner Higher Power.

Through prayer, or a special kind of meditation with God, and self-awareness and understanding, the Richardsons sought to become one with their spiritual powers, and to connect in that way with humanity, dedicating their lives to the alleviation of the suffering of others. They understood their calling as one of “resurrection,” and re-creation of life, of transforming death into life, and of the ugly into beauty. This was their notion of creativity; the translation of a new vision of life into aesthetic forms that communicated the depth of their messages and ethics to the world. However, the Richardsons understood that spiritual beliefs were a personal choice, and did not impose their notion of God, or the spirit, on the children or others. They believed that what was important was for the kids to find meaning in their lives other than the notion of materialistic success as defined in our societies. This was possible by self-reflection and self-awareness, and in that exploration finding one’s own personal and cultural identities,

determining goals and visions of a better life, and materializing those ideas in the world for the benefit of all.

Unfortunately, the Richardsons were victims of the non-profit industrial complex (INCITE! 2007). They did not have the knowledge, or perhaps the interest, to deal with bureaucratic processes that would keep them away from their work. They wanted to offer their skills and knowledge to the world, but their vision and mission were incompatible with the hegemonic forces and bureaucracy of the NGO and development world (more on the Richardson's and MH struggles in Arney nd).

Dr. Susan Greenbaum and Lance Arney have attempted to play the non-profit game, in the Richardsons' name, taking advantage of the few opportunities available to fund and create an infrastructure for MH, using their knowledge and privileged memberships in society so as to generate the conditions necessary to fulfill the Richardsons' mission. However, their efforts have only temporarily been successful, and the fate of the organization is once again underdetermined. A few grants have allowed the creation of important projects, but there is not enough to hire permanent staff, necessary to run effective programs.

Without a regular influx of material resources, and without full time personnel to create and implement coherent and sustainable programs, the survival of MH is questionable. Small grants are not enough to sustain the organization, and foundations are often not interested in funding programs that address the problems that affect populations such as that in Sulphur Springs (Burrowes 2007:232) and that derive from the market economic system, namely poverty, criminalization, and more generally marginalization and discrimination in the form of a systematic exclusion of African American children

and youth from advantageous policies that serve their growth and development. Non-profits require continuous adjustment to the politico-economic realities of foundations in order to fulfill their goals, which compromises and in many ways impedes the full development of their objectives. Additionally, a major contradiction for an organization like MH, with a social justice intention, is the dependency on funding provided by foundations that may be politically and economically compromised, and which represent the interests of the forces that are responsible to a great extent for the issues the organization is attempting to change in the first place (Grugel p. 34; Mayta p. 110).

Although MH was able to build some success for the length of time it had economic stability and influx of material and human resources from USF, once such resources and the funding ran out, it was impossible to maintain regular operations. MH was reduced to one or two programs (with appeal to foundations) during the summer in which I developed my program with the kids, and it was difficult to find additional funding for different programs after that. As Feliu (2003) recognizes, “the fundamental limitation of NGOs’ work is that their actions are not sustainable: they disappear when the subsidy disappears” (64).

Hence, at this point, MH appears to be in need of financial strategies independent from the non-profit industrial complex, perhaps self-funding activities and a business enterprise, in addition to grant monies and partnerships (Burrowes 2007), as well as less diversity in its programs, in order to maximize the organization’s resources. Trial and error and continued effort and hope are necessary until MH is able to establish itself in a sustainable way.

Nonetheless, it is clear to me that the potential of an organization like MH in improving the lives of disadvantaged African American children is enormous, once it reaches economic solvency. This is especially true if the organization pays attention not only to the ideas and strategies that others (professionals, charitable helpers, and volunteers) bring from the outside, but more fundamentally to the needs of the children and their families in the community, as well as their native strategies for wellness. At MH, even though we were still learning, our participatory and anthropological approaches helped us build important relationships with and understand the needs and resources of MH participants and the neighborhood.

During my tenure at MH, I learned that the design, implementation, and evaluation of community arts programs require awareness of human development, sociocultural and historical processes, in addition to artistic mastery and pedagogical intention. The objectives, rules of engagement, and participation must be absolutely clear for all those involved in the programs, while allowing for improvisation and revision of clauses according to the needs of all those involved. The results of the evaluation presented here may help to determine best practices at MH, and hopefully other community organizations.

Specifically, in my anthropological work I show the complexity of the lives of disadvantaged African American youth and children, what is important to them and their families, their needs and assets, and the roles that community arts programs and organizations can play in their lives. I advocate for long-term strategies, collaborations, and an interdisciplinary approach. Programs can help the kids to gain access to the world outside their community, by developing their communication skills and increasing their

awareness about their lives and the context in which they live. The kids also need a stable place to develop their capabilities and where they can feel appreciated and cared for. They need a place to learn how to create and contribute positively to society and the improvement of their own lives, understanding the enormous challenges that face them and defining possible solutions.

In addition to the need to design and implement programs based on in-depth understanding of the community participants' lives, assets and needs, and their native strategies for wellness, my work demonstrates that program evaluations are fundamental, for they are the tools that can help community arts programs and organizations to achieve excellence. Regardless of the needs of funders (outcomes, quantitative analyses, results, etc.), and the complexity of evaluation research, managers and instructors must engage in constant self-evaluation to ensure that they fulfill their objectives while maintaining the integrity and autonomy of the populations with whom they work. While they may not be able to engage in extensive research as I did at MH, they can still incorporate regular interactions with the kids' families, and continuous dialogue with the children, eliciting feedback and ensuring that everyone's needs are met. It is easy to make assumptions about the benefits of participation in community arts, but it is not as easy to determine the specific ways in which our work may impact the lives of participants. Without clear objectives, resources, contextual understanding, and constant self-evaluation, programs are likely to fail.

Through my comprehensive work, I determined that the MH kids are most certainly affected by their position in the social structure, which generates conditions of poverty and disengagement from "mainstream" society, limiting their possibilities to



develop holistically, and instead promoting the kids and adults' unwanted and deleterious behaviors, including violence, drug consumption and trafficking, and other illegal practices. Although there is potential for community organizations to offset some of the conditions in which disadvantaged African American youth live, this is only possible if the organizations themselves are able to secure their own sustainability and provide continuity and coherence in their programs.

For example, during its period of solvency, MH was able to provide a sense of place for children who suffered from residential instability, as a space to have fun, rest and release tensions from their crowded and noisy households, as well as the aggressive settings in which they were immersed. With a participatory framework that took into consideration the views of the kids and the community in the organization and the development of its programs, the kids created a sense of belonging to and of appreciation of the MH space as theirs. At MH, we attempted to create a similar ecology to that created by the Richardsons at previous locations, and the importance of such relationships with the environment appears to be paramount.

As I discuss elsewhere (Sabogal nd), the MH elders were able to create what I like to think of as an "ecology of freedom." Freedom, in this view, is a "positive freedom," in Greene's (1988) words; the possibility of reconstructing culture and its values for the wellbeing of all, not only for personal gain (121). In freedom, human beings can act and choose (63), opening spaces of possibilities to improve (104), collectively. This view is somewhat similar to Gauntlett's (2011) idea that through creative practice, through which social relationships are formed, and in the recreation of the world and culture, there is freedom (55). Holloway (2005) called this "power-to," as stated in an earlier chapter, the

ability to work, to create and to do, which is co-opted by the dominant ones, thus eliminating the freedom of the marginalized to create and re-create life, and the world in which they live. The MH space offered the qualities necessary to reclaim this freedom, to envision and subsequently to re-create life, culture, and the world. In that way, it was a place of resistance, against the domineering forces of society, a place created with the intention to shelter some of the most vulnerable members of society, and reconstitute their wellness. It was an educational place, and in a way, therapeutic, fulfilling spiritual and other instrumental functions (Stokols 1990).

In my project, I attempted to reconstitute the freedom of creation and of fellowship with others through cultural praxis, in which the children were able to reflect a great deal about their lives. They engaged in a critical exercise, identifying, analyzing and tackling problems that affected them and their community directly, and in that way participating in the improvement of their lives. At the end, there was still much work to be done, and many questions remained to be answered, especially the problematic relationship they had with violence in the neighborhood.

Through cultural praxis, it is possible to promote new and different visions of life and the world, and to begin the process of transforming it, by analyzing our role in society, our position, and ability to work for a collective good. The creative process, in general, but especially in cultural praxis, is in itself a holistic process, requiring self-knowledge and awareness, a strong sense of identity, mental and physical capacity, communication skills, space and resources to imagine and create, as well as awareness of others. Through this methodology, sustainable community arts organizations with long-term strategies have the potential to influence the lives of participants in positive ways.

In the short term, my cultural praxis project had some effects in the lives of the kids, but it is difficult to assess whether any changes were sustained. It is likely that some of the deleterious behaviors that we worked to address at MH resurfaced in the kids afterwards, because without environmental controls and maintenance of the new behaviors, there cannot be lasting change (Prochaska 1994). What seemed to have remained were the kids' connections with MH and the most dedicated volunteers and instructors there. The kids were infused with a desire for learning and for creating in particular ways, and they asked repeatedly for other similar experiences, including cultural praxis projects, months, and even years, after having ended our project.

It is hoped that the lessons learned through our experiences will serve the future design, implementation, and evaluation of other MH programs and even of other organizations. As expressed throughout this paper, these lessons include, the importance of understanding the kids' needs and lives in their complexity, through research; the need to design programs that are coherent and sustainable, and to determine large and specific goals that can be systematically evaluated and that correspond to the realities of the kids and the potential of community arts programs; the need to use participatory methodologies that are age appropriate and that take into consideration the kids' abilities to understand problems and make decisions with a sense of agency; and, finally, to address issues with an interdisciplinary and holistic lens that considers the entire human experience and needs.

In this view, it is important to emphasize that the needs of the Sulphur Springs families and children, as described earlier, cannot be fulfilled by small and under- or unfunded organizations like MH. In a democracy, it should be a societal obligation to serve

all of its citizens and to secure their wellness. The current goals of success as defined in our society are also not within reach for all, creating frustrations and lowering people's self-esteems and expectations of themselves (Sapolsky 2004:3-11; Santrock 2011:482). Although the kids I worked with had not started to feel such societal pressures yet, still showing satisfaction with their lives, it is likely that with time they will begin to feel the frustration that their mothers felt due to their inability to secure jobs and to provide stability and basic resources for their children. The mothers blamed themselves, believing that had they made different choices, they would now be able to do more for their children. However, restrictions on African American poor people are enormous, so even with the best intentions (motivations to learn and to work hard, and to contribute to society), such goals are difficult. The kids wanted to have what people on TV have, yet unless they could succeed in school and sports, or perhaps engage in lucrative illegal activities, the likelihood of them being able to achieve their notions of success seems low.

At the most basic level, what an organization like MH can do for children, even if unfunded or underfunded, is to make them aware of their lives, of their socioeconomic and other environments, and motivate them to work for change. In addition to self-awareness and motivation, we also offered the children examples of how to succeed through academic excellence through our own experiences, and as role models, pushing the kids to stick with school and do their best. The kids knew our backgrounds, and that being successful students has been a vehicle for upward mobility for us, and now we are able to apply our knowledge helping others. We distracted them from the street life and indicated other possible paths. Some of the kids understood and began a process of maturation in that sense; others did not.

Another important area that seemed to have been successful was our emphasis on work. For me it was extremely important because, ultimately, it is through work that we can concretize our ideas in the world. The kids had had some experiences with little jobs at MH, including the garden and the wedding tabletops. In the cultural praxis project, they were engaged with a rigorous schedule and specific tasks to be accomplished within a set period of time. The kids were able to influence in many ways the conditions of the project, but they understood this as part of their job as well, and they were compensated for their responsibility, commitment, and participation in all the aspects of the project. This was very satisfying and rewarding for them, and an incredible learning experience as well. But more time and resources are needed to determine the long-term impacts of such an approach, as well as the attainment of other outcomes.

The problem of *projectism*, as described earlier, was very clear in my work. It was obvious to me that single short programs cannot offer a real solution to any problem, although they may teach some skills and entertain the kids. However, for sustained and deep impact, a series of short programs seeking the same outcomes, or a continued, long-term, program with clear objectives and strategies, might very well be of great help. Again, this requires organizational sustainability, willingness, and knowledge on the part of instructors and volunteers. And there must be a continuous process of evaluation in order to perfect techniques and strategies, and to address the many problems that may arise in the programs.

In this evaluation I attempted to correct some of the issues found in community arts programs evaluation research, as identified by Putland (2008), Matarasso (1996), Kay (2000), and others. This was an internal evaluation versus an external one, thus

perhaps contributing more to the work of small organizations and/or single artists running community arts programs, although it can also be helpful to larger programs and organizations interested in internal evaluations before engaging in external audits. Some issues described by Putland (2008), such as lack of resources for short-term projects, and small samples will continue to exist in the less affluent settings, and therefore it is crucial for community artists to learn to evaluate their own programs without expecting the availability of external agents or ample resources, or even the use of statistical analyses, which on their own would not be sufficient for a deep analysis anyway. Certainly, having research skills is important and I advocate for the use of an anthropological perspective, as stated already elsewhere in this work, in order to truly understand the needs and assets of the participant populations, to define and understand their notions of childhood, kinship relationships, wellness, their expectations and values, as well as those of any other stakeholders in the program.

Here, the evaluation was integrated into the program for maximum coherence. I identified potential outcomes, and chose indicators that could measure the program objectives; I also attempted to quantify my observations graphically, as well as the kids' own evaluations, in order to counterweight the more narrative data gathering techniques. A mixed methods approach was used in order to compare various types of datasets and determine their strengths and shortcomings in this setting. The theoretical framework, methodology and data collection techniques have been made available for further scrutiny. The available resources, inputs and outputs, as well as the end results have been reported with honesty, and in a critical way, and possibilities for improvement have been stated as well.

In my evaluation, the goal was to determine the important outcomes for the Sulphur Springs kids, and also the best strategies to achieve such outcomes and to evaluate success. I determined the fundamental need for a mixed methods approach in the work with children, but potentially with adults as well. One instrument is likely to give incomplete and even inaccurate results. The evaluation must be multidimensional, looking at as many factors affecting the kids' lives as possible during the project's time, and conversing with families, teachers and administrators as well as the children. Triangulation is fundamental to achieve the maximum accuracy possible, and therefore usable results.

In this case, of all the instruments utilized, the most problematic seemed to have been the kids' self-evaluations. They appeared to have given the most discrepant information, while my observations, the mothers' interpretations, and even the kids' interviews seemed to be more aligned with each other in several cases. I was able to discover how inaccurate the kids' self-evaluations can be if used in isolation from other data collection methods. The most striking example was the difference between two versions of the same evaluation, filled out twice by mistake, by one girl, the same day. Some of the scores are similar but many are different. But also my own observations and the interviews can be equally inaccurate on their own. I noticed that my mood and my emotional states in general could have an impact in my assessments of the kids' behaviors and my interactions with them, and how much my own life affected the course of a day of work with the kids. In addition, many factors affected the responses of the kids during the interviews: If they were playful, and happy, their responses had a certain tone and depth, and if they had interactions with certain people immediately before, the

tone of their responses also changed. None of this is to be underestimated. Hence, only by looking at the places of intersection and of discrepancy in the various datasets can we attempt to make some accurate interpretations, and even then, because of the short length of the program, it is extremely difficult to arrive at specific conclusions about the achievement of outcomes. The latter point is clear and crucial in this evaluation. The individual differences of the children involved in the program, and the lack of opportunities to follow up, or reinforce, the kids' progress in the achievement of the program goals made the more "objective" assessments futile on their own. Without the gathered qualitative data, and the longer-term ethnographic research, it would have been impossible to arrive at any conclusions in this evaluation. The more "objective" instruments were helpful to me, in conjunction with the other methods; they added otherwise obscured information, even though they can use some refinement (they could be perhaps shorter, written in an even simpler language, and administered at different times for each outcome sought).

One problem between the kids' and my evaluations may have been that our values and expectations about behaviors were different; even our definitions of concepts may have been different, although the language of the questionnaires was tested and reviewed before administration with the help of a child, in order to ensure clarity and understanding. Nonetheless, what can be seen in the evaluations is that some kids' scores improved or deteriorated in certain areas and not in others, while for some kids the scores remained the same, from beginning to end, highlighting the need to work individually with each child, and not regard them all as a homogeneous mass with the same needs and



assets. Each child in the Carter family was a different universe, as is any other child in the world as well.

In sum, I believe this project has helped to move the community arts field forward in attempting to determine the attributes that affect the effectiveness of a community arts program and its evaluation, as well as their potential impacts on a group of disadvantaged African American kids. Many factors affect the abilities of these programs to fulfill their missions, and the task should not be taken lightly. In general, the kids can learn and enjoy much in community arts programs, but their learning depends on the organizational structure and objectives, the capacities of instructors and volunteers, and the pedagogical approach used. Ultimately, what the kids need is a holistic approach to their education and health. In this view, a community arts organization requires an interdisciplinary approach, including counseling, anthropological, artistic, and educational resources available in order to produce the most beneficial effects.

It is obvious to me that the MH kids participating in the cultural praxis project, as well as others who participated in other programs, were talented and that what they needed were resources that allowed them to create and participate in society in a productive way. They needed better education, not punishment and hate (i.e. criminalization). They were not pathologically deviant, but they lacked basic resources. They needed a less stressful environment and tools to communicate with and relate to others in a less aggressive way. They were capable of learning everything, but they needed social investment in their future, as much as any other child in our society does.

An anthropological perspective has been fundamental in uncovering the intricacies of community arts, because this approach aims to understand the realities of

the children's lives in Sulphur Springs, rather than focusing only on what happens in the program. It is this holistic perspective, focusing on a small number of children, that sets my research apart from more quantitative work that seeks to measure behavior change among a large sample. Whether MH will have the opportunity to create, implement, and evaluate other cultural praxis programs remains to be seen, but I believe my recommendations will be of help in the further development of the organization, as well as to scholars and practitioners attempting to develop the most effective approaches to community arts programs. There is still much to be learned about disadvantaged African American youth's developmental processes and the potential of their participation in community arts to contribute in such processes.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Changfoot 2005, Kinloch 2007, LeGrone 2002, Mills 2005

<sup>2</sup> Hutzell 2007, Campbell 2001, Neelands 2010, Matarasso 2007

<sup>3</sup> Kinder 2004, Holloway 2001a, Ulbricht 2002, Tunks 1997

<sup>4</sup> Hawkes 2002, Phillips 2004, U.S. Department of Justice 2000, Meade 2007, Bird 2005, Barbosa 2002, Cleveland 2002, Congdon 1998, Blandy 1988.

<sup>5</sup> Coggan 2008, Lowe 2000, Clover 2000, Carey 2004, Holloway 2001b, Krensky 2001, Mattingly 2001, de Roeper 2009, Kay 2000.

<sup>6</sup> Hamilton 2003, Matarasso 2001, 1996, 2003, Newman 2003, Ramsey-White 2005, Putland 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Matarasso 2001, Heath 1998, Stanziola 1999 (this work is not limited to the work of organizations, but it is an important theme in it).

<sup>8</sup> Putland 2008.

<sup>9</sup> Ethnographers include de Roeper 2009, Mattingly 2001, Krensky 2001, Lowe 2000 (all project evaluators), Hutzell 2007 (artist/scholar reporting on her own project), Bird 2005 (reporting on a particular project), and Kinloch 2007 (describing a project based on previous ethnographic research).

<sup>10</sup> Bird 2005

<sup>11</sup> Heath 1998

<sup>12</sup> Krensky 2001, Clover 2000, Mattingly 2001, Carey 2004, Holloway 2001b, Kinloch 2007, Mills 2005, Hawkes 2002, Congdon 2010, Bird 2005, Neelands 2010, Hutzell 2007, Tunks 1997, Heath 1998, Matarasso 2001, Kay 2000, Estrella 2007.

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- <sup>13</sup> Matarasso 2007, Hutzal 2007, Carey 2004, Matarasso 2001, Phillips 2004, Mattingly 2001,
- <sup>14</sup> Campbell 2001, Hutzal 2007, Matarasso 2007, Holloway 2001, Bird 2005, Hawkes 2002, Phillips 2004, Matarasso 1996, Matarasso 2001, Coggan 2008, Carey 2004, de Roeper 2009, Krensky 2001, Lowe 2000, Mattingly 2001, Kay 2000
- <sup>15</sup> Neelands 2010, Hutzal 2007, Holloway 2001b, Krensky 2001, Heath 1998, Kinloch 2007, Kinder 2004.
- <sup>16</sup> Krensky 2001, Kinder 2004.
- <sup>17</sup> Mattingly 2001, Krensky 2001, Hutzal 2007, Matarasso 2007, Bird 2005, Kinloch 2007.
- <sup>18</sup> Hutzal 2007, Matarasso 2007, Krensky 2001, Hawkes 2002.
- <sup>19</sup> Holloway and LeCompte (Holloway 2001b) use Bourdieu's (1993) notions of symbolic action and symbolic violence, habitus, and socialization to describe how young women are socialized into narrow roles that restrict their possibilities in society. This forced narrowing of possibilities constitutes symbolic violence, and can be counteracted through symbolic action, "acting independently to create one's own meanings for and about oneself...[which] requires efficacy or agency on the part of the actor... [and] to speak out or give voice to his or her desires" (392-393).
- <sup>20</sup> Neelands 2010, Krensky 2001.
- <sup>21</sup> Neelands 2010, Hutzal 2007, Krensky 2001, Kinloch 2007.
- <sup>22</sup> Hamilton 2003, Newman et al, 2003, Putland 2008, Hawkes 2002, Ramsey-White and Rentschler 2005.
- <sup>23</sup> Lowe 2000, Hutzal 2007.
- <sup>24</sup> Carey and Sutton 2004; Krensky 2001; Kay 2000, Clover 2000, De Roeper 2009, Blandy 1988, Matarasso 2007, Heath 1998, Kinloch 2007.
- <sup>25</sup> Krensky 2001, Lowe 2000, Newman 2003 (Newman et al review various evaluations).
- <sup>26</sup> de Roeper 2009, Matarasso 2007, Bird 2005.
- <sup>27</sup> Lowe 2000, Kay 2000, Krensky 2001, Hutzal 2007, Matarasso 2007, Heath 1998, Bird 2005, Newman 2003 (Newman et al review various project evaluations).
- <sup>28</sup> Coggan 2008, Lowe 2000, de Roeper 2009, Kay 2000, Heath 1998, Matarasso 2007.
- <sup>29</sup> Lowe 2000, Krensky 2001, de Roeper 2009.
- <sup>30</sup> Ethnographers include de Roeper 2009, Mattingly 2001, Krensky 2001, Lowe 2000 (all project evaluators), Hutzal 2007 (artist/scholar reporting on her own project), Bird 2005 (reporting on a particular project), and Kinloch 2007 (describing a project based on previous ethnographic research).
- <sup>31</sup> Changfoot 2005, Kinloch 2007, LeGrone 2002, Mills 2005
- <sup>32</sup> Hutzal 2007, Campbell 2001, Neelands 2010, Matarasso 2007
- <sup>33</sup> Kinder 2004, Holloway 2001a, Ulbricht 2002, Tunks 1997
- <sup>34</sup> Hawkes 2002, Phillips 2004, U.S. Department of Justice 2000, Meade 2007, Bird 2005, Barbosa 2002, Cleveland 2002, Congdon 1998, Blandy 1988.
- <sup>35</sup> Coggan 2008, Lowe 2000, Clover 2000, Carey 2004, Holloway 2001b, Krensky 2001, Mattingly 2001, de Roeper 2009, Kay 2000, Hutzal 2007.
- <sup>36</sup> Hamilton 2003, Matarasso 2001, 1996, 2003, Newman 2003, Ramsey-White 2005, Putland 2008.

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<sup>37</sup> Matarasso 2001, Heath 1998, Stanziola 1999 (this work is not limited to the work of organizations, but it is an important theme in it).

<sup>38</sup> Putland 2008.

<sup>39</sup> Coggan 2008, Clover 2000, Carey 2004, Holloway 2001b, Kay 2000.

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**Appendix 1:  
Instruments to Answer Question 1**

How do disadvantaged African American youth define their place in society, their present contributions, and future possibilities? What do they want to change? What do they want to maintain?

These interviews and focus groups helped to answer other questions (2, 4a, 4b, 4c, 4d), and other exercises will help to answer this question as well.

**First semistructured interview with each participant of the project, and elicitation using maps**

1. How do you define art?
2. Do you like the arts? Why?
3. What types of art? Why?
4. What materials? Why?
5. Can you name and describe the distinct arts organizations in the neighborhood?

Using a map of the neighborhood:

6. Can you locate these organizations on the map?

Back to interview:

7. Do you know how long those organizations have existed for?
8. Who founded them?
9. Do you know the people who run them?
10. Do you like them? Why? How?
11. What do they do in those organizations?
12. Have you ever participated in their programs?

If yes, go to #13. If not, go to # 21

13. Do you like them? Why? How?
14. How often do you go there?
15. For how long have you been going?
16. What is your favorite activity in those organizations?
17. And the least favorite?
18. Have you had experiences with the arts in other places? Which ones?

## Appendix 1 (Continued)

19. Does your school teach arts too?

If so,

20. Are the classes different from the neighborhood organizations? How so?

Jump to #22

In the event that this is their first experience with an arts organization:

21. Have you had experiences with the arts before? Where? What kind?

All respondents:

22. Do you think community arts organizations are important in the neighborhood?  
Why?

23. What can community arts organizations do to help you reach your future goals?

Using the map of the neighborhood:

24. Locate the Moses House (if he or she has not done so yet)

25. Locate your house

Back to interview:

26. How do you get to the Moses House?

27. How long does it take you to get there?

28. Do you have any obstacles to get there? Which ones?

29. What would you like to learn at the Moses House?

30. What kinds of projects would you like to be a part of?

31. What can the Moses House do to help you reach your goals?

### **First focus group with the participants of the project**

This focus group will help to define the kind of project the group will engage in, and provide information relevant to this question and others.

1. How did you get to the MH today?
2. How long did it take you to get here?
3. Did you have any obstacles to arrive? Which ones?
4. What would you like to learn at the Moses House?
5. What kinds of activities do you want to do together? (Prioritize the preferences of the whole group)

## Appendix 1 (Continued)

6. What medium?
7. Do any of the neighborhood organizations offer that activity? Which ones?

### **First semistructured interview with the youth's parent/guardian, and elicitation using maps**

1. How do you define art?
2. Do you like the arts? Why?
3. What kinds? Why?
4. What materials? Why?
5. Can you name and describe the distinct arts organizations in the neighborhood?

Using a map of the neighborhood:

6. Can you locate these organizations on the map?

Back to interview:

7. Do you know how long those organizations have existed for?
8. Who founded them?
9. Do you know the people who run them?
10. Do you like them? Why? How?
11. Do you think those organizations are important in the neighborhood? Why?
12. Do you think they are important in children's lives? How so?
13. What do they do in those organizations?
14. Have you ever been there?
15. Are the activities for children only, or can adults participate too?

If yes to participation of adults, go to #16. If not, go to # 23

16. Do you like them? Why?
17. How often do you go there?
18. For how long have you been going?
19. What is your favorite activity in those organizations?
20. And the least favorite?
21. Have you had experiences with the arts in other places? Which ones?

If so,

22. Are the classes different from the neighborhood organizations? How so? Jump to 24

## Appendix 1 (Continued)

In the event that they are not friendly to adults:

23. Have you had experiences with the arts before? Where? What kind?

All respondents:

24. What can community arts organizations do to help your child reach his/her goals?

Using the map of the neighborhood

25. Locate the Moses House (if he or she has not done so yet)

26. Locate your house

Back to interview:

27. How do you get there?

28. How long does it take to get there?

29. Are there any obstacles to get there? Which ones?

30. What would you like your child to learn at the Moses House?

31. What kinds of projects would you like her/him to be a part of?

32. What can the Moses House do to help your child reach his/her goals?

33. What classes or programs would you like to see offered at the MH?

### **Final semistructured interview with each participant of the project**

1. Can you name and describe the distinct arts organizations in the neighborhood?

Using a map of the neighborhood:

2. Can you locate these organizations on the map?

3. After this project, what do you think about community arts organizations?

4. Do you think those organizations are important in the neighborhood? Why?

5. How do you define art?

6. Do you like the arts? Why?

7. What kinds? Why?

8. What materials? Why?

Using the map of the neighborhood

9. Locate the Moses House (if he or she has not done so yet)

10. Locate your house

## Appendix 1 (Continued)

Back to interview:

11. How do you get there?
12. How long does it take you to get there?
13. Do you have any obstacles to get there? Which ones?
14. What have you learned at the Moses House?
15. Would you like to continue participating in the future?
16. What would you like to learn?
17. What kinds of projects would you like to be a part of?
18. What classes or programs would you like to see offered at community arts organizations?
19. What can community arts organizations do to help you reach your future goals?

### **Final focus group with the participants of the project**

1. How did you get to the MH today?
2. How long did it take you to get here?
3. Did you have any obstacles to arrive? Which ones?
4. What have you learned at the MH?
5. Do you want to continue to participate?
6. What would you like to learn in the future?
7. Would you work in this group again?
8. What projects would you want to work together on in the future?
9. What can the Moses House do to help with those projects?
10. What can the MH do to improve its work? Its future programs?

Elicitation: At the end, the youths will be asked to choose an artistic medium through which they will represent the Moses House, and work on it in the room. They will explain their production. This exercise will help to answer this question, as well as question #4e

### **Final semistructured interview with the youth's parent/guardian, and elicitation using maps**

1. Do you think community arts organizations are important in the neighborhood? Why?
2. Do you think they are important in children's lives? How so?
3. How do you define art?
4. Do you like the arts? Why?
5. What kinds? Why?
6. What materials? Why?
7. Have you had experiences with the arts in the past months? Where? What kind?
8. What has your child learned from the project at the Moses House?

### **Appendix 1 (Continued)**

9. Would you like him/her to continue participating?
10. What kinds of projects would you like her/him to be a part of?
11. What can community arts organizations can help your child to reach his/her goals?
12. What classes or programs would you like to see offered at the MH?
13. What can the MH do to improve its work? Its future programs?



## **Appendix 2: Instruments to Answer Question 2**

How do these youth define and experience the role of community arts, and community arts organizations, in their lives and their neighborhood?

These interviews and focus groups will help to answer other questions (4a, 4b, 4c, 4d), and other exercises (participant observation (appendix 5, question 4a), imagination and creativity exercises (appendix 5, question 4b), will, in turn, help to answer this question too.

### **Semistructured interview with each participant of the project, and elicitation using maps**

1. How do you describe yourself?
2. What are you good at?
3. What are you not so good at?
4. What is your favorite thing about your life?
5. How is your family composed? Who do you live with?
6. Are you happy?
7. What makes you happy?
8. Do you feel safe? If not, why? If yes, how so?
9. How do you define freedom?
10. Do you feel free to do the things you want to do?
11. Do you think you can move around easily?

If yes, jump to #14

If not,

12. What constraints do you have to do things?
13. What constraints do you have to move around?

If yes,

14. What makes you feel free to do things?
15. What makes you feel free to move around?

All respondents:

16. If you could change something about your life, what would it be?

## Appendix 2 (Continued)

17. How could you change it?
18. What do you want to do in the future? Study? Work?
19. How are you planning to obtain your goals?
20. Do you have any obstacles to obtain them?
21. What do you need?
22. What do you already have to be able to achieve your goals?
23. Why do you want to work on this project?
24. What do you want to learn from it?
25. What do you think you can contribute?
26. Do you have a lot of friends? How many?
27. Do you like being with other people?

If yes,  
28. Doing what?

If not,  
29. Why so?

All respondents:

30. How do you describe Sulphur Springs?
31. What are the good things about it?
32. What are the negative things?
33. What is your favorite place?

Using a map of the neighborhood:

34. Indicate your favorite places
35. What do you do there?
36. Where is your school located?
37. Where do you play?
38. Where do you and your family shop?
39. Locate the best things about this neighborhood on the map
40. Locate the negative things about it
41. What would you change about your neighborhood?
42. What would you like to keep?
43. What do you think you can do to improve your neighborhood?
44. Do you think you can contribute to the improvement of your community through this project? If so, how?

Using a map of the city:

45. Do you know where Sulphur Springs is located on this map?
46. How do you describe the city of Tampa?
47. What kinds of people live here?

## Appendix 2 (Continued)

48. How different are you from those people?
49. How similar?
50. What would you change about the city?
51. What would you keep?

Using a map of the country, and the world:

52. Do you know where Tampa is located on this map (of the world)?
53. How different are you from other people in the country?
54. How similar?
55. Do you think this is a good country to live in? Why?
56. What would you change about the country?
57. What would you keep?
58. How different are you from other people in the world?
59. How similar?
60. Is there another country you would like to live in? Why?
61. What would you change about the world?
62. What would you keep?

### First focus group

1. Why do you want to work on this project?
2. What do you want to learn from it?
3. What do you think you can contribute?
4. Tell me about your lives in this neighborhood, do you like living in Sulphur Springs? Why?
5. How is Sulphur Springs different from other neighborhoods?
6. How is it similar?
7. What do you like about the neighborhood that you would want to maintain?

Using map:

8. What are your favorite places in the neighborhood? Why?
9. Where do you spend most of your time together?
10. What do you do there?
11. And the least favorite place? Why?
12. What do you dislike about the neighborhood that you would like to change?
13. What would you like Sulphur Springs to be like?
14. How do you think you can change the bad things?
15. Do you think you can contribute to the improvement of your community through this project? If so, how?
16. What rules of behavior do you think we should create for our project?
17. And, if we have a conflict, how could we resolve it?

## Appendix 2 (Continued)

### First semistructured interview with the youth's parent/guardian

1. How do you describe your child?
2. What is he/she good at?
3. What are the weaknesses?
4. What is your child's favorite activity?
5. How is your family? Who do you live with?
6. Is your child a happy child?
7. What makes her/him happy?
8. Is your child safe?
9. How do you define freedom?
10. Is your child free to do the things she/he wants to do?
11. Can your child move around easily?

If yes, jump to #14

If not,

12. What constraints does your child have to do things?
13. What constraints does your child have to move around?

All respondents:

14. If you could change something about your child's life, what would that be?
15. How can you change it?
16. What do you think she/he wants to do in the future?
17. How can he/she get there?
18. Does he/she have any obstacles to obtain her/his goals?
19. What does he/she already have to achieve them?
20. Why does your child want to work on this project?
21. What do you think she/he can learn from it?
22. Does your child have a lot of friends? How many?
23. Does he/she like to play with others?
24. How do you describe Sulphur Springs?
25. What are the good things about it?
26. What are the negative things?
27. What is your child's favorite place?

Using a map of the neighborhood

28. Indicate your child's favorite places
29. What does he/she do there?
30. Where is the school located?
31. Where does your child play?

## Appendix 2 (Continued)

32. Where do you and your family shop?
33. Locate the best things about this neighborhood on the map
34. Locate the negative things about it
  
35. What would you change about your neighborhood?
36. What would you like to keep?
37. Do you think your child can contribute to the improvement of the community through this project? If so, how?
  
38. How about the city, do you like Tampa? Why?
39. What don't you like about it?
40. How about the country, what do you think are the major problems here?
41. What do you like about it?
42. And the world, what would you change in the world?
43. What would you not change?

### **Final semistructured interview with each participant of the project**

1. How do you describe yourself?
2. What are you good at?
3. What are you not so good at?
4. What is your favorite thing about your life?
5. Are you happy?
6. What makes you happy?
7. Do you feel safe? Why?
8. How do you define freedom?
9. Do you feel free to do the things you want to do?
10. Do you think you can move around easily?

If yes, jump to #13

If not,

11. What constraints do you have to do things?
12. What constraints do you have to move around?

If yes,

13. What makes you feel free to do things?
14. What makes you feel free to move around?

15. What is your favorite place?
16. What do you do there?

17. If you could change something about your life, what would that be?

## Appendix 2 (Continued)

18. How can you change it?
19. What do you want to do in the future?
20. How are you planning to obtain your goals?
21. Do you have any obstacles to obtain them? What do you need?
22. How do you think you can resolve them?
23. What do you already have to be able to achieve your goals?
  
24. What did you learn from this project?
25. What did you contribute?
26. Do you think this project changed your life? If so, in which ways?
  
27. Do you have a lot of friends? How many?
28. Do you like working with other people?
29. Did you make any new friends in this group?
30. Would you like to work with them again?
31. In what kinds of projects?
  
32. How do you describe Sulphur Springs?
33. What are the good things about it?
34. What are the negative things?

### Using a map of the neighborhood

35. Indicate your favorite places
36. Locate the best things about this neighborhood on the map
37. Locate the negative things about it
38. What would you change about your neighborhood?
39. What would you like to keep?
40. Do you think you have contributed to the improvement of your community through this project? If so, how?

### Using a map of the city:

41. Do you know where Sulphur Springs is located on this map?
42. How different are you from other people in the city of Tampa? How similar?
43. How do you describe the city of Tampa?
44. What kinds of people live here?
45. Do you think their relationships are good?
46. What would you change about the city?
47. What would you keep?

### Using a map of the country, and the world:

48. Do you know where Tampa is located on this map (of the world)?
49. How different are you from other people in the country?

## Appendix 2 (Continued)

50. How similar?
51. Do you think this is a good country to live in? Why?
52. What would you change about the country?
53. What would you keep?
54. How different are you from other people in the world?
55. How similar?
56. Is there another country you would like to live in? Why?
57. What would you change about the world?
58. What would you keep?

### Final focus group

1. Did you like this project? Why?
2. What did you learn from it?
3. What did you contribute?
4. Would you like to do something similar again?
5. What other subjects would you like to investigate in the future?
6. Would you want to work together again?
7. Do you want to continue coming to the Moses House?
8. Tell me about your lives in this neighborhood, do you like living in Sulphur Springs? Why?
9. How is Sulphur Springs different from other neighborhoods?
10. How is it similar?
11. What do you like about the neighborhood that you would want to maintain?

Using map:

12. What are your favorite places in the neighborhood? Why?
13. Where do you spend most of your time together?
14. What do you do there?
15. And the least favorite place? Why?
16. What do you dislike about the neighborhood that you would like to change?
17. What would you like Sulphur Springs to be like?
18. How do you think you can change the bad things?
19. Do you think you have contributed to the improvement of your community through this project? If so, how?
20. Did our rules of behavior work?
21. Did everyone comply?

## Appendix 2 (Continued)

### Final Semistructured interview with the youth's parent/guardian

1. How do you describe your child?
2. What is he/she good at?
3. What are the weaknesses?
4. What is your child's favorite activity?
5. How is your family? Who do you live with?
6. Is your child a happy child?
7. What makes her/him happy?
8. Is your child safe?
9. How do you define freedom?
10. Is your child free to do the things she/he wants to do?
11. Can your child move around easily?

If yes, jump to #14

If not,

12. What constraints does your child have to do things?
13. What constraints does your child have to move around?

If yes,

14. What makes him/her feel free to move around?

All respondents:

15. What is your child's favorite place in the world?
16. What does he/she do there?
17. If you could change something about your child's life, what would that be?
18. How can you change it?
19. What do you think she/he should do in the future? Study? Work?
20. How can he/she get there?
21. Does he/she have any obstacles to obtain her/his goals?
22. What does he/she already have to achieve them?
23. What did your child learn from this project?
24. Do you think she/he would want to do something similar again?
25. Does your child have a lot of friends?
26. Does he/she like to play with others?
27. How do you describe Sulphur Springs?
28. What are the good things about it?
29. What are the negative things?



## Appendix 2 (Continued)

Using a map of the neighborhood

30. Indicate your child's favorite places
31. Where does your child play?
32. Locate the best things about this neighborhood on the map
33. Locate the negative things about it
34. What would you change about your neighborhood?
35. What would you like to keep?
  
36. How about the city, do you like Tampa? Why?
37. What don't you like about it?
38. How about the country, what do you think are the major problems here?
39. What do you like about it?
40. And the world, what would you change in the world?
41. What would you not change?
42. Do you think your child has contributed to the improvement of the community through this project? If so, how?

**Appendix 3:**  
**4a. Political Consciousness**

I used participant observation in every session of the project, focusing the field notes on the kids' relationships with others and their sense and expression of moral values. To evaluate the kids' relationships with others, the following indicators were used: Is friendly; is open to different things and people; is excited about visiting new places; interacts with new or different people; plays with others; is surrounded by others. To evaluate the sense of morality, I took note and analyzed data for the following behaviors: Asks for forgiveness when s/he has offended someone; feels bad when s/he has not been good and tries to make up for it; helps his or her friends; exhibits clear moral values; respects rules; shares; gets upset when something happens to one of her or his relatives or friends.

In addition, the kids self-evaluated these behaviors as well, and the interviews also helped to assess these aspects. These are the items the kids rated in their self-evaluations at the beginning and at the end of the program:

**Appendix 3 (Continued)**

**Table A1 Political Consciousness, Kids' Questionnaire 1**

<b>Questions</b>	<b>Never</b>	<b>Rarely</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Most of the time</b>	<b>Always</b>
I am friendly					
People can count on me					
I like to play with others					
I like to visit new places					
I like to meet new people					
I like to be surrounded by people					
I get along with people					
I am a good example for other children					
I like to share					
I like to help my friends					
I ask for help when I need it					
I like rules					
I respect rules					
I feel bad when I have not been good					

**Appendix 3 (Continued)**

**Table A2 Political Consciousness, Kids' Questionnaire 2**

<b>Questions</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Slightly disagree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>Slightly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
I have a lot of friends							
I like most people I know							
I know many different people							
I like it when people I know do good							
I get upset when bad things happen to the people I love							
It is important to ask for forgiveness if I have offended someone							
I feel bad when I do not do well							

In addition, I observed and asked questions about the neighborhood and whether the kids were interested in improving it. However, because the kids moved out of Sulphur Springs during our project, and they became part of both neighborhoods, claiming membership and relationships in both, I decided to discard those observations and questions, at least those in their self-evaluations, because I could not modify the question

**Appendix 3 (Continued)**

when they filled out the evaluation, although I did during the initial and the final interviews and focus groups.

**Appendix 4:**  
**4b. Stimulation of the Imagination and the Creative Capacity**

During the first and second focus groups, the youth were assessed in their ability to imagine the future. I used the arts in these assessments as well as verbal reports, asking the kids to choose a medium, one with which they felt comfortable working. They then thought of the future, and wrote down their ideas of it. Subsequently, they used the particular artistic medium to represent their ideas, and at the end explained it to the whole group verbally, indicating any difficulties they experienced in representing it. Their artistic skills were not assessed. My assumption was that their ideas of the future would become more sophisticated or more novel every time.

In addition, at the end of each session, students were asked to reflect about the day, first in an individual written report, then as a group. They answered what they learned, what problems they found, how they could resolve those problems, and how they could have avoided them. They thought of a plan to resolve the issues encountered, using the tools they possessed. They also discussed how their views of the situation being addressed in the project changed. Then, they shared their thoughts with the group, and made resolutions to address the problems. The assumption was that the individual and collective capacity to resolve problems increased in the analysis of their creative collective work appendix 8 includes the specific questions asked in the daily evaluation).

### Appendix 4 (Continued)

These exercises, as well as the interviews, tracked changes in the youths' critical thinking abilities, their capacities to recognize and react to collective problems, to identify their roots, and ways to avoid them, to imagine and produce solutions, and project to the future.

In addition, during participant observation, I took note of the kids' behaviors in terms of: Shows enjoyment while working on solutions to problems; is able to fix problems; establishes goals; identifies when things go wrong; produces innovative work; is concerned for the neighborhood improvement; offers to fix problems; offers solutions; stays out of trouble; talks about self-improvement goals; talks about the future; tries to improve.

The kids also self-evaluated these areas:

**Table A3 Problem-Solving, Kids' Questionnaire**

Questions	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Most of the time	Always
I can tell when things go wrong					
I can tell when things are just right					
I am able to fix problems					
I like to fix problems					
If I do wrong, I know how to fix it					

**Appendix 4 (Continued)**

**Table A4 Imagination, Kids' Questionnaire**

<b>Questions</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Slightly disagree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>Slightly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
I have goals for the future							
I have a plan to reach my goals							
I know what I want							
I know how to get what I want							
I do not like to get in trouble							
I want to be better everyday							
I want my neighborhood to improve							
I know what I need to do to be a better person							
I like to create new things							
I know things can improve							

In addition, I made observations of the kids' industriousness and they also evaluated themselves in this sense. My evaluations included the following indicators:  
 Asks for help; completes tasks at MH; engages in complex tasks, or adult work; works



### Appendix 4 (Continued)

hard to concentrate and produces a great deal; is constantly engaged in work activities; is able to focus on work for extended periods of time; is able to have a routine; works.

And the kids evaluated themselves in similar ways:

**Table A5 Industriousness, Kids' Questionnaire**

<b>Questions</b>	<b>Never</b>	<b>Rarely</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Most of the time</b>	<b>Always</b>
I am a hard worker					
I like routine					
I like to work					
I do the things that adults do					

**Appendix 5:**

**4c. Improvement of Communication Skills - Increment or Reinforcement of Self-Awareness - Increment or Reinforcement of Self-Esteem**

These aspects were tracked down during every session of the project, including the interviews and focus groups held at the beginning and the end of it, but also through participant observation and other activities. My observations evaluated the following indicators for communication skills: Listens attentively to other people; his or her messages are clear; is convincing in her or his communication; expresses what he or she wants; speaks his or her mind; thinks before he or she speaks; understands when others talk to her or him.

The kids' self-evaluations included the following components:

**Table A6 Communication, Kids' Questionnaire 1**

<b>Questions</b>	<b>Never</b>	<b>Rarely</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Most of the time</b>	<b>Always</b>
People understand when I talk					
I understand when other people talk to me					
I like to listen to what other people have to say					
I say what I think					

**Appendix 5 (Continued)**

**Table A7 Communication, Kids' Questionnaire 2**

<b>Questions</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Slightly disagree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>Slightly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
It is important to listen to other people							

To evaluate the self-esteem component, I used the following indicators: Enjoys being praised for good work; expresses good feelings about him or herself; is not afraid to engage in complex activities; praises his or her good attributes; is proud of her or himself; expresses pride in being intelligent; expresses satisfaction with her or his own looks; seeks beneficial experiences; considers him or herself to be responsible; says that he or she is smart; talks about his or her own good qualities.

And the kids' evaluations reflected these areas as well:

**Table A8 Self-Esteem, Kids' Questionnaire 1**

<b>Questions</b>	<b>Never</b>	<b>Rarely</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Most of the time</b>	<b>Always</b>
I know what is good for me					

**Appendix 5 (Continued)**

**Table A9 Self-Esteem, Kids' Questionnaire 2**

<b>Questions</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Slightly disagree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>Slightly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
I think I am a pretty good kid							
I like the way I look							
I like it when people give me compliments							
In most ways my life is close to perfect.							
I like my life.							
So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.							
If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.							
I like the things I do							
I feel good about myself.							
I feel I'm a person of worth							

### Appendix 5 (Continued)

**Table A9 Self-Esteem, Kids' Questionnaire 2 Cont.**

I am proud of my life							
I take a positive attitude toward myself							

Moreover, I included indicators about their learning abilities and enthusiasm. My evaluations included these aspects: Asks questions; expresses confidence in understanding things; desires learning new things; has an inquisitive mind; praises intelligence or being smart.

The kids' self-evaluations included the following components in relation to learning and academic ability:

**Table A10 Learning, Kids' Questionnaire 1**

Questions	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Most of the time	Always
I enjoy learning from other people					
I learn from other people					

**Appendix 5 (Continued)**

**Table A11 Learning, Kids' Questionnaire 2**

<b>Questions</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Slightly disagree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>Slightly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
I want to learn many things							
I am sure that I understand things.							
I enjoy learning new things everyday							

**Table A12 Academic Ability, Kids' Questionnaire 1**

<b>Questions</b>	<b>Far Below Average</b>	<b>Below average</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Above average</b>	<b>Far above average</b>
How do you rate yourself in school ability compared with those in your grade in school?					
How intelligent do you think you are compared to others your age					

**Appendix 5 (Continued)**

**Table A13 Academic Ability, Kids' Questionnaire 2**

<b>Questions</b>	<b>Not important at all</b>	<b>Not too important</b>	<b>Important</b>	<b>Quite important</b>	<b>Extremely important</b>
Compared to others your age, how important is it to you to be able to use your intelligence					

The kids' evaluations also included a self-efficacy component with the following indicators:

**Table A14 Self-Efficacy, Kids' Questionnaire**

<b>Questions</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Slightly disagree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>Slightly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
I can do many things							
I think I can reach all my goals							
I am able to do things as well as most other people							

In addition, the kids were observed for their ability to evaluate themselves, and they rated these aspects as well for themselves. The indicators in both cases were whether the kids could tell when they did things right and wrong.

**Appendix 6:**  
**4d. Space of Freedom for People to Imagine New Possibilities - Generate Feelings of a Sense of Place**

To assess the kids' sense of place and feelings of freedom, as well as changes in their responses to these themes, specific questions were asked during the initial and final interviews, and the focus groups. In addition, an elicitation exercise was conducted during the final focus group: The kids were asked to choose an artistic medium through which they represented the MH. They were asked to explain their ideas and production.

Furthermore, participant observation and the kids' self-evaluations included assessments of sense of place indicators. My observations focused on the following items: Comes to the MH; is extroverted at MH; expresses feelings of happiness at MH; expresses missing the MH; takes care of MH; participates in MH activities; relaxes at MH.



## Appendix 6 (Continued)

The kids' self-evaluations focused on the following:

**Table A15 Sense of Place, Kids' Questionnaire 1**

Questions	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Most of the time	Always
I go to the Moses House					
I participate in the activities at the Moses House					
I finish my work at the Moses House					
I can be myself at the Moses House					
The Moses House is safe					
I feel relaxed at the Moses House					
I feel happy at the Moses House					

**Appendix 6 (Continued)**

**Table A16 Sense of Place, Kids' Questionnaire 2**

<b>Questions</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Slightly disagree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>Slightly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
The Moses House reflects my personality							
The Moses House is one of my favorite places to be							
I miss the Moses House when I am away from it for too long, or when it is closed							
There are better places than the Moses House in the neighborhood							
The Moses House is like my house							
I want to help make the Moses House better							
I know how to make the Moses House better							
I know my neighborhood							
I like my neighborhood							

**Appendix 7: Other Items Evaluated**

Other items evaluated include the kids’ self control and the way others felt about them. In my evaluations, self-control indicators included: Exhibits self-control; is calmed and thoughtful.

And the kids’ self-evaluations included:

**Table A17 Self-Control, Kids’ Questionnaire**

<b>Questions</b>	<b>Never</b>	<b>Rarely</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Most of the time</b>	<b>Always</b>
I think before I act					
I am able to control my actions					

As for the other’s evaluations of the kids’ behaviors, my evaluations included the following: Other kids express love for him or her; family members praise her or him.

The kids’ self-evaluations focused on the following:

**Table A18 Others’ Appreciation, Kids’ Questionnaire 1**

<b>Questions</b>	<b>Never</b>	<b>Rarely</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Most of the time</b>	<b>Always</b>
My family likes me					

**Appendix 7 (Continued)**

**Table A19 Others' Appreciation, Kids' Questionnaire 2**

<b>Questions</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Slightly disagree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>Slightly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
My teachers like me							
My neighbors like me							

## **Appendix 8: Daily Evaluation**

1. Write your impressions about our day, today.
  - a. What did you learn?
  - b. What was good about today?
  - c. What was not as good?
  - d. How could you help to fix the problems?
  - e. How could the problems be avoided in the future?
  - f. Make a little plan to fix the problems found. What would you do, step by step?
  - g. Share your thoughts with the whole group

## **About the Author**

Mabel Sabogal is a native of Colombia. She moved with her family to the United States in 1999, where she has engaged in a variety of media production and research projects, mostly of educational nature. Her research is international and local, having worked in Cuba, Guatemala, Boston, and Tampa. She is an educator, a mentor, and fierce advocate of human rights and social justice causes. Her interests are in the areas of cultural diversity, holistic health and wellness, alternative education, adult and youth education, expressive art and movement therapy, political and structural violence, disadvantaged or other at-risk populations, community development, and advocacy media production. Mabel has received a number of academic awards throughout her career, including a Presidential Doctoral Fellowship from the University of South Florida; a McKnight Fellowship from the Florida Education Fund (declined offer); a Technology Grant from Lesley University; a Provost's Office grant for her undergraduate thesis project at Lesley University also; and University Honors and a Scholarship from her undergraduate institution in Colombia. She was also nominated for a Sally K. Lenhardt Alumni Professional Leadership Award at Lesley University.