COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS, AGENCIES AND GROUPS:

SIGNIFICANCE FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS

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Child and youth development is influenced not only by families and schools, but by an endless variety of community organizations. Some involve youth directly; others effect neighborhood changes that affect youth and families. This chapter focuses on community organizations, be they formal organizations or informal groups, and the relevance of these community-based entities for youth.

Community Organization versus Community Organizing

An important distinction from the outset is between community organization and community organizing. Community organization may be thought of from a broader, community perspective, i.e., what are the organizations that compose a community? This structural orientation considers a community's social ecology – the number and variety of organizations throughout a community and the relationships among these organizations. Community organizations are most often non-profits – in particular service agencies – which are located in, and provide services to, neighborhoods and communities. Community organizations may include parent-teacher organizations, sports clubs, church groups, block or neighborhood associations, 4-H clubs and the like.

In contrast, community organizing is conceptualized more as a process – the process of developing leadership among individuals and the process of building power for collectives – both with the goal of creating change. Community organizing is best described as seeking empowerment, both as a process and an outcome (Mondros & Wilson, 1994; Rubin & Rubin, 2001; Speer & Hughey, 1995). Significantly, community organizing, as a process, is practiced in community organizations, but not all community organizations practice community organizing. Organizations that practice community organizing, then, are a subset of the total number of community organizations within a community outlined above. Many community organizations, whose goals are not community organizing but rather service provision, have expanded the services they provide to include community organizing. So, along the spectrum of community organizations, some organizations exclusively exist to practice the process of organizing, other organizations

engage in some organizing and other community organizations practice no organizing.

The distinction between community organization and community organizing is made because the terms are sometimes used interchangeably. While the junction of these terms is sometimes appropriate and sometimes not, it is important to understand the historical relationship between these two terms, the fact that this relationship has changed dramatically over time, and that both have relevance for children and teens.

History of Community Organization

Community organizations developed rapidly after the Civil War as charitable agencies to lend assistance to those displaced, disabled or impoverished by the war (Brager, Specht & Torczyner, 1987; Schaller, 1966). Many of the organizations were progressive in philosophy, even by today's standards, and provided services to, or activities for, children and teens (Levine & Levine, 1970). The rise and spread of the public school system in the late 1800's is well known. But hundreds of orphanages, hospitals, and later, settlement houses and other charitable services were also created in this period. Due to the rapid rise of such organizations and a lack of government oversight, however, the distribution and coordination of services became problematic. The term community organization was coined by social workers in this era to address the problem of coordinating charitable services, thus reflecting the structural perspective of community.

The next phase in the evolution of community organization stressed cooperative planning among privately-run community service agencies (Brager, Specht & Torczyner, 1987). Community organization efforts were geared toward specialization of services and centralization of decisions regarding these services. By the late 1940's, community organization became professionalized in the field of social work. Community organization theory stressed organizing as a process where a professional organizer worked with communities in the role of enabler to help develop leadership within a community.

In the 1960's, new realizations about the context of American communities – the vast social and economic underclass, coupled with the inability of the welfare bureaucracy to adequately address the needs of the poor – influenced the orientation of community organization efforts to deal more closely with community organizing – the process of developing capacities in individuals and collectives. It was during this period that the concepts of community organization and community organizing became more

interconnected. The emphasis on <u>organizing</u> rather than <u>organization</u> led to an emphasis on citizen participation and empowerment.

In the last twenty years, community organizations have expanded to the point of being referred to as a movement (Boyte, 1989) and the process of community organizing has expanded into many community organizations. One struggle that has emerged in this period is the awareness of power shifting from local communities to regions, nations and international corporations (Fisher, 2002; Orfield, 1997). The process of globalization has raised new questions about the efficacy of local organizations in addressing problems with causes in such large-scale economic forces.

<u>Types of Community Organization</u>

Categorizing community organizations is difficult in that they may range from voluntary organizations to professional service agencies to informal groups. These organizations are often considered to include churches, unions, schools, health care agencies, social service groups, fraternities and clubs. Community organizations are predominantly conceptualized as nonprofit, but broader conceptions of community sometimes include all organizations, including for-profit enterprises. Service agencies are frequently termed "community-based" agencies because their service has shifted from centralized institutional settings to dispersed geographical locations providing greater access to residents (Chaskin & Richman, 1992). Social service agencies receive criticism because although their geographic placement has improved resident access, their hierarchical social practices retain social and cultural access barriers (McKnight, 1996).

One of the distinctions useful in understanding community organizations is that between volunteer and professional organizations (Cunningham & Kotler, 1983). Volunteer organizations often have professional or paid staff, but volunteers perform the vast majority of these organizations' efforts. Frequently, these organizations are advocacy-oriented – applying community organizing strategies to accomplish their goals. In contrast, professional organizations are usually staffed by experts who provide services with little or no volunteer input. These service-oriented organizations usually have greater resources relative to volunteer organizations and they interface with residents based on professional norms and standards with a clear status differentiation whereas volunteer organizations have a more egalitarian orientation.

Another type of community organization is the informal group. These groups are represented in informal networks of friends and neighbors that exist

throughout communities. The growth or decline in the number of these groups has recently been debated. While some argue that informal groups, such as bowling leagues, are declining (Putnam, 2000), there is also evidence that other groups, such as self-help or small support groups, have proliferated (Wuthnow, 1994). In either circumstance, informal groups are numerous and most important for understanding community.

Ecological Perspectives on Community Organizations

          To understand the role of community organization in the lives of children and teens, it is important to understand these organizations from the perspective of the ecology of community life. There are numerous perspectives that may be considered ecological or structural, and we will review several here.

          Robert Park first studied an ecological understanding of community in Chicago. His ecological orientation viewed community not as a collection of streets and buildings, but as a psychological and sociological orientation based on customs, traditions and organized attitudes (Park, Burgess & McKenzie, 1967). Park understood community organizations, agencies and groups to be critical in the shaping of this psychological and sociological orientation.

          Extending this work to the functional patterns of community, Norton Long understood community as the product of interactions among powerful entities in a community (Long, 1958; Reitzes & Reitzes, 1987). For Long, community functioning is the result of competing and complementary interactions by those with power – usually groups and organizations operating in their own self-interest. He conceptualized this dynamic pattern of interactions as an ecology of games. The community's social structure is a by-product of sets of "players" who compete to achieve their goals and "win". Each "player" (a group or organization with power), defines their own "game" (the goals and objectives of that particular entity). A community's social structure, then, is composed of multiple groups and organizations geared toward reaching their organizational objectives. As different issues arise for "players" in the community, different allies and enemies are generated among the "players". Alliances and oppositions are based on the objectives of each player regarding that particular issue as defined by each "game". Patterns of community functioning are the product of powerful entities interacting, not the result of functional necessity or rational decisions.

          In an application of this ecological orientation to the life of children, Roger Barker studied the diverse settings embedded in communities and the

constraints and opportunities those settings provided for children in their development. His research established that different children in the same place behaved more similarly than the same child in different places (Barker, 1968). He concluded that settings exert a great deal of control over behavior – more so than personality or intrapsychic variables.

Barker's subsequent research focused more on settings, organizations and schools and less on individuals in those settings. He came to scrutinize "behavior settings" as the unit of analysis that he was most concerned about. Behavior settings are small scale social systems composed of individuals and their immediate environments that are configured such that they shape a pattern of behaviors or what is called a "routine program" of actions, including specific time and place boundaries (Barker, 1968). Barker delineated three components to a behavior setting: physical properties (size of a room, arrangement of chairs); human components (roles or niches within an environment that individuals can fill, i.e., chairperson, observer); and the setting program (the patterned sequence of transactions among actors in an specific environment).

In a study of big schools and small schools, Barker & Gump (1964) compared the number of behavioral settings and the number of students in the two high schools, finding that the ratio of settings to students was much higher in the small school than the big school. The result was that students in small high schools participated in a broader range of settings; they were more likely to be involved participants than passive spectators; and they had greater competence and cooperation when working with peers.

An explicit examination of the role of a community's ecology on human development has been made by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979). His work examines the successive ecologies that youth are embedded in and their influence on development. At the most minute level, microsystems are the settings in which an individual participates – they are comparable to Barker's behavior settings. Mesosystems are the interactions and relations between microsystems. For example, the relationship between the education and law enforcement systems will impact the opportunities and constraints an individual encounters that will have an impact on their behavior and their personal safety. Bronfenbrenner articulates other ecologies, but these two represent our greatest interest here. These two ecologies, the microsystem and mesosystem, play an important role in the development of children and teens.

The organizations that compose a community have been termed mediating structures (Berger & Neuhaus, 1977). Local community

organizations provide a common ground for residents to share problems and resources. Organizations thus serve to mediate between seemingly powerless individuals or families and the large institutions of mass society. They include PTAs, school-community partnerships, churches and voluntary associations, among others. Mediating structures are "people-sized"; that is, they are small enough to reflect the values and realities of individual life, yet large enough to empower individuals so as to influence the broader social structures (e.g., large schools or school systems, government bureaucracies, large local corporations or chain enterprises, mass media) that may be the target of social change efforts. Additionally, mediating structures represent contexts through which an empowerment process unfolds for individuals, organizations and communities (Berger & Neuhaus, 1977; Rappaport, 1987). Community organizations are one type of mediating structure. They function as mechanisms through which individuals can address their collective self-interests, particularly regarding the issues and problems impacting their families and communities.

As a field, community psychology has been at the forefront of research on supportive and empowering community settings for human development and the prevention of social and mental health problems. Much of this work has been done in religious, self-help/mutual aid, or block and neighborhood organizations (Maton, 1989; Maton & Rappaport, 1984; Maton & Salem, 1995; Perkins, Brown & Taylor, 1996; Speer & Hughey, 1995). Although clearly impactful settings, small-scale voluntary associations such as these are often suspicious of professionals and researchers and so difficult to study or evaluate.

Together these literatures, as applied to community, suggest that the assemblage of local organizations, agencies and groups serve as a critical determinant of behavior and development. The implication for children and teens is that youth will be assisted in their development to the extent that the organizational landscape within communities is structured by numerous settings that involve and engage youth in healthy and appropriate developmental challenges.

Finally, *social capital* is a concept that has become very popular in recent years with relevance to community organization. Social capital is most commonly understood as the accumulation of trust embedded in the norms and networks that exist in community. Some authors have emphasized informal networks, whether in or outside organizations (Putnam, 2000). Others have emphasized formally organized networks (Hughey & Speer, in press) or both (Perkins & Long, in press). Yet, community organizations are, by definition, networks of civic engagement. Here our descriptions of community

organization become important – agencies that serve residents without developing relationships or building enduring activity and participation – are not accumulating social capital. In contrast, community organizations such as block groups, neighborhood associations, sports clubs, school-based organizations and the like, the "mediating structures" noted above, often embody the associational glue that social capital represents. When the norms and dynamics of these organizations include trust and reciprocity the capacity for individuals within such groups to act for mutual benefit is great. So, social capital may be understood as the norms of trust and reciprocity that exist both within and between the organizations, agencies and groups that compose the social ecology of a community (Hughey & Speer, in press).

Approaches to Community Organizing

It is important to examine community organizing – the process of empowering individuals and collectives. As noted previously, some community organizations exist to conduct community organizing exclusively, while others only somewhat and some community organizations do no community organizing at all.

Bases of Organizing

Kahn (1982) identifies four bases or origins of organizing: union, community, constituency and issue organizing. Union organizing is based in the workplace. Community organizing is based on location or geography. Constituency organizing is based on common individual characteristics (gender, language, ethnic background, etc.). Issue organizing is based on issues rather than common individual characteristics (taxes, schools, war, health care, etc.). These bases of organization, like all typologies of organizations, are not mutually exclusive, and there is no common agreement about dividing typologies (Kahn, 1982).

Types of Organizing

There is a great diversity in community organizing typology. The most commonly cited approaches are social planning, social action, community development, civic agency, electoral, and pressure group organizing (Boyte, 1989; Perlman, 1979; Rubin & Rubin, 2001; Wandersman, 1984). Again, this typology is not composed of mutually exclusive categories and the differences between types are often minimal. Perlman (1979) reduces these multiple categories into three types: self-help or alternative institutions, electoral groups and pressure groups.

Self-help community organizing includes three specific classifications of organizing: social planning, civic agencies and community development organizations. Social planning is geared toward technical problem solving, especially with regard to the delivery of goods and services to people in need (Wandersman, 1984). Civic agencies are characterized as providing services for those in need. Social change is not an issue for civic agencies, in fact, these organizations sometimes must avoid social change as change is politically difficult due to the support for civic agencies by the existing social structure. Community development organizations most often emphasize the development of the built environment and only secondarily stress social change (Gittell & Vidal, 1998). The technique which community development organizations employ to achieve improved community environments is that of consensus-building – conflict is avoided (Wandersman, 1984). All three types of organizations incorporate professionals or experts in a variety of fields who work together to develop ideas and plans for specific programs. Historically these approaches involved very little community input, but the engagement and participation of citizens has increased in recent years.

Electoral organizing, often called political participation, involves the attainment of power through the electoral process (Boyte, 1980; Perlman, 1979; Wandersman, 1984). The activities of the electoral approach include voting, campaigning for candidates and supporting or opposing specific issues. Involvement in the political process, while requiring the participation of many people, reflects the value of leadership in that the social problem or issue being campaigned for is ultimately placed in the hands of the elected official. The elected official, it is believed, can quickly and effectively deal with the issue.

Pressure groups are referred to by many names including social action organizations (Perlman, 1979; Wandersman, 1984), social influence associations (Knoke & Wood, 1981), instrumental voluntary associations (Jacoby & Babchuk, 1963), power-transfer organizations (Mondros & Wilson, 1994) and empowerment-based organizations (Speer & Hughey, 1995). The goal of social action organizations is to develop power in an effort to pressure social systems and institutions to respond to the needs of disadvantaged communities. Any differences between pressure group typologies is more a matter of degree than substance; all share the value of citizen participation. Inherent in the pressure group approach is the belief that citizens are best able to know what their communities need and both view the community organization as merely a mechanism to enable citizens to address those needs.

Although with different approaches, the key issue in community organizing is the development of power in individuals and organizations. Different approaches vary in the directness with which they address issues of power. For example, some organizing efforts settle for the empowerment of individual members and do not seek to build power capable of making community change (Zimmerman, 1995). Nevertheless, the power issue is usually at the base of any understanding in community organizing efforts.

Process of Community Organization

The process of building a community capable of acting to improve their circumstances is called community organizing. Organizing involves building relationships across networks of people who identify with common values and ideals, and who can participate in sustained social action on the basis of those values. Community organizing represents the entire process of organizing relationships, identifying issues, moving to action on identified issues, evaluating the efficacy of those actions and maintaining a sustained organization capable of continuing to act on issues and concerns (Speer & Hughey, 1995).

One tension around the process of community organizing is between empowering individuals who participate in organizing and building power for organizations where organizing is practiced. This tension is between organizing as a process or outcome. For some organizations, efforts which develop in individuals skills, consciousness, knowledge and confidence are sufficient to be labeled empowerment. In contrast, others note the need to address the causes of much human suffering in institutional relationships in the broader community and society through empowering communities of people capable of changing their circumstances (Riger, 1993; Robinson & Hanna, 1994; Swift & Levin, 1987; Speer & Hughey, 1995).

Applications for Children and Teens

Community organizations with a youth focus have been around a long time. Church-based activities for youth have existed at least since the mid-nineteenth century and the early-twentieth century launched the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, 4-H Clubs, Junior Achievement and Junior Red Cross (Brown & Theobald, 1998). By the middle of the twentieth century, school became more dominant than work as the major activity for youth. This resulted in greater time after school and, relatedly, more organizations to serve youth.

Of the many historic and recent community organizations that provide services and activities for youth, few organizations have worked to

engage youth in active, participatory ways. Service-oriented efforts, rather than participatory empowering activities, represented in the principles of community organizing, have been the norm. However, this interest in altering the standard or traditional pattern of interacting with youth is changing. Increasingly, organizations and agencies are incorporating organizing principles and strategies into youth work. Additionally, youth organization's are considering ways to alter the community ecology so that it is supportive of youth.

Historically, organizations that involved youth in participatory activities consistent with organizing emerged in the 1960's. One such example is the Mobilization for Youth Program (MFY) in New York City. This was a program funded by the National Institute for Mental Health to a settlement house on the lower east side of Manhattan and has been acknowledged as a precursor to community action programs in the War on Poverty (Cazenave, 1999). MFY is an important effort historically because it demonstrated many of the challenges in bringing organizing processes to youth in settings that had traditionally provided services.

MFY was designed as a program to address juvenile delinquency and was based on the premise that the lack of constructive opportunities in one's environment lead to delinquency (Cloward & Ohlin, 1960). Specific delinquency prevention efforts targeted jobs for teenagers, local neighborhood service centers, employment programs for neighborhood residents, and mobilizing residents to take action on issues of common concern. Mobilizing residents for organizing activities became the locus of bitter controversy when groups organized by MFY attempted to alter their local ecology by protesting against the police, schools, and welfare department. Local politicians and established institutions retaliated against MFY. Because MFY had federal funding, they were able to survive organizationally. However, the tremendous pressure applied by the local establishment caused MFY to abandon their organizing efforts and return to the service-oriented agency it had been prior to their organizing efforts (Cazenave, 1999).

This experience parallels that of many organizations throughout the US that attempted to bring community organizing processes to traditional service-oriented agencies. Despite these experiences, both organizing processes and the ecological understandings of community have been accepted by many organizations as directions for working to improve outcomes for youth.

Current Trends in Community Organizing for Youth

        In the last twenty years, there has been an increased interest in bringing community organizing principles and understandings of community ecology to organizations and agencies that work with youth. Often, the links to community organizing and community ecology are implicit, but the emphasis on the active participation of youth and the attempts to reshape the community ecology to be supportive of youth are the hallmarks to many current efforts.

        Many of the efforts linking children and teens to communities stems from concerns about the quality of public education. These approaches use schools as the base of community support for youth. Most popular among these approaches are collaborations between community agencies and schools such that agency services are provided in schools (Dryfoos, 1994). In contrast, some argue against service provision in schools and instead urge integration of community services in multiple neighborhood locations (Chaskin & Richman, 1992). The placement of integrated services in diverse locations throughout a community is believed to allow for greater resident involvement in shaping service planning and tailoring service delivery to diverse population needs.

        The most popular framework around which these activities take place is called youth development. Youth development programs are guided by several principles. First, the emphasis is on assets or strengths inherent in all youth, rather than a traditional approach which focuses on deficits (Wynn, Merry & Berg, 1995).   Second, the level of intervention is often the community rather than individuals (Jarvis, Shear & Hughes, 1997). With this orientation, youth development is aligned with a community organization or ecological approach – it emphasizes the breadth of organizations and the connections between organizations that compose a community. Third, youth development approaches seek the active participation of youth in program design and implementation (Pittman & Wright, 1991). This participatory element parallels the process of community organizing.

         Organizations and agencies that apply a youth development approach are numerous. They include, for example, a broad range of organizations including the National Crime Prevention Council, 4-H clubs, the United Way and federal agencies, such as the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

        As noted, youth development efforts incorporate both community organization and community organizing approaches.   However, other

activities also fall under the rubric of youth development, including community service (Yates & Youniss, 1998; Youniss & Yates, 1999), mentoring and social services (August, Realmuto, Hektner, & Bloomquist, 2001).

Learning in Community Settings

There has been special attention paid in recent years to learning that occurs in communities and community organizations. The formal and informal networks of community, in all their social and organizational complexity, are essential, yet often overlooked, vehicles of learning – from intergroup and intragroup learning of cultural norms and displays, to civic learning and the adaptation of people and populations, to information, referral and mutual assistance within groups and organizations, to social change in individuals, families, organizations and society. These processes are part and parcel of what may be called "learning communities."

Community service-learning, the testing and illumination of curriculum through participatory student projects that address local needs, has become an extremely popular pedagogy. Service-learning is more than simply experiential or vocational learning. By explicitly focusing on a local community's social problems and getting involved in their solution, it links classroom learning to the development of a sense of community, civic responsibility, and greater understanding and awareness of political, economic, and other root causes of the problems observed. Service-learning takes the idea of a "learning community" literally in exploring concrete ways to bring students, local government officials, community development practitioners and researchers, and community residents and leaders together to learn and benefit from each other. It adds reality and relevance to the curriculum by bringing to life dry classroom materials, by showing how social processes really work, by giving students skills, experience, and connections that often lead to employment opportunities, and by providing tangible effects of students' efforts (whether planting trees, cleaning a park, building a playground or house, or simply seeing improvement and joy in a tutored child).

Service-learning is thought to be a "win-win-win-win situation." The winners are (1) the instructor, whose teaching is brought to life and made more relevant through application to the "real world;" (2) the students, who almost unanimously report getting more out of the course, not only practical skills and experience, but also in terms of theory application and testing; (3) the clients of the host organization, who usually get more personal attention and energetic bodies to help with their problems; and (4) the host

organizations, who get unskilled, semi-skilled, and even skilled labor and a chance to test the performance of possible future workers, both at little to no cost.

How effective is service-learning? Its salutary effect on students' social development is well established, but its impact on learning and cognitive development has been debated for years (Eyler, 2000). Similar to many of the community programs in which they volunteer, anecdotally, service-learning tends to be very popular among the students, instructors, and agency staff who participate. What may be least known about service-learning is its actual impact on community organizations and conditions (Cruz & Giles, 2000; Ferrari & Worrall, 2000).

The Role of Community Organizations in Strengths-based Youth Interventions

This attention to the role of community organizations in child and youth development is consistent with several recent national trends. Many of these trends are loosely coalescing into the growing movement to promote a *strengths-based* approach to psychological theory, educational and social service practice, and public policy over more traditional deficit and victim-blaming models. This movement favors a variety of positive psychological and intervention concepts that are thought to operate on both the individual and community levels (and often the family and organizational levels as well). These include empowerment, development, resilience, competency-based prevention, health/mental health promotion, community psychology, positive psychology, ecological theory, asset-based community development, social capital, networks, diversity, and multiculturalism.   The American Psychological Association has commissioned a group of scholars to explore the implications of this strengths orientation for policies affecting children, youth, families, and communities (Maton et al., in press).

The APA volume compiles a range of policy recommendations, many of which aim to support particular strengths-based youth and community development programs.   These community-based programs address such adversities as divorce, child or adult domestic violence, parents' alcoholism or mental illness, pediatric illnesses, teen pregnancy and parenthood, school transitions, school failure, negative peer influences, minority status, community violence and other community-level economic, social, environmental, and political adversities. (Ironically, it is testament to the pull of deficit thinking that even this volume on strengths approaches was organized around problems.) Most of the recommended programs may be locally planned to be culture and context-specific. Some are necessarily

government run, some are non-profit, more and more represent public-private partnerships, all recognize the key role of both public support and community involvement (Perkins, et al., in press).

The APA group identified four strategic goals that are fundamental to strengths-based research and social policy: 1. to recognize and build upon existing strengths in individuals, families, and communities; 2. to build new strengths at each level; 3. to strengthen the larger social environments in which individuals, families, and communities are embedded; 4. to engage individuals, families, and communities in a strengths-based process of designing, implementing and evaluating interventions that are collaborative, participatory, and empowering. "It has been increasingly recognized that the larger social environments in which individuals, families, and communities are embedded substantially influence, and limit, intervention efforts to bring about positive change; importantly, without influencing these larger environments our very best social policies and programs have relatively limited potential to make a substantial, sustainable, positive difference" (Maton et al, in press).

These examples make it clear that education and human development do not stop at the schoolhouse door or the end of the family driveway. The integration of community organizing and community organization approaches, along with community learning and more traditional service-oriented activities, appears to hold promise for children and teens (August, Realmuto, Hektner, & Bloomquist, 2001; Wynn, Merry & Berg, 1995). Fundamental to the movement toward community organizing and community organization has been a shift away from viewing youth as objects to be served to a view of youth as participants with assets and skills to bring to a developmental process. In addition to a new perspective on youth themselves, a broader analysis entailing an ecological understanding of community has altered the nature of many youth-focused organizations to develop new partnerships and innovations that seek to modify communities to become youth-enhancing environments.

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