

Northcote Child and Youth Development Project

A LITERATURE REVIEW:

Effective Youth Development Practice, Sustainable and Collaborative Approaches and Participatory Action Research Methods

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A Literature Review: Effective Youth Development Practice, Sustainable & Collaborative Approaches & Participatory Action Research Methods.

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Current government efforts to enhance child and youth development are faced with a number of challenges. These include: defining the scope and reach of youth development; the need to take account of the environments within which young people grow and develop; and the need to engage multiple community and government stakeholders and sectors to improve outcomes for children and young people.

This review explores literature that has particular reference for the Northcote Child and Youth Development (NCYD) project. The main areas covered are: the importance of neighbourhood environments as key factors for positive youth development and well-being; importance of intersectoral collaboration; and the use of Participatory Action Research (PAR).

Positive Youth Development

- Key factors influencing positive youth development outcomes include: stable environments which young people perceive as theirs and feel safe in; access to basic care and appropriate and affordable services; high quality instruction and training; opportunities to develop sustained caring relationships with adults; cultures of peer support; high expectations; and challenging experiences
- Research on youth development has shifted from a focus on individual resilience to the importance of social environments that are generative of youth well-being
- There is a growing body of research providing evidence of the social and environmental determinants of health and well-being

Building Supportive Environments

- There is a need to improve the quality and availability of supports, services and opportunities within neighbourhoods so that they are effective, accessible and sustainable
- Increased levels of participation in social and civic life are found in locations where residents have a positive impression of the area arising from the availability of multiple and varied opportunity structures
- A positive relationship has been found between the number of supports and opportunities children experience whilst growing up and increased success and decreased problems in adolescence
- Participation in decision-making can be an important vehicle for strengthening young people and their communities
- Young people need to be involved in all aspects of decision-making from programme and fund development to personnel and governance

Encouraging Participation

- Successful strategies and initiatives for encouraging child and youth participation include: clear objectives and boundaries; active steps to include children and youth not traditionally involved; broadcasting benefits widely and responding quickly to children and young people's requests; and informing them of outcomes and consequences

Youth Leadership

- The aim of youth leadership development should be to equip children and young people with a set of practices that enable them to lead others over the long term

Sustainable Positive Youth Development

- Recent research suggests that positive outcomes for children and young people can only be achieved through true collaborative effort between government agencies and communities
- Benefits of collaboration include: the incorporation of multiple perspectives into planning; creating opportunities for bridging connections between local communities and external policy development; fostering sustainable development through combining effort and resources, information and expertise; and making better decisions
- A number of factors may inhibit multi-agency, collaborative approaches. These include: conflicting organisational priorities; deep-set, professional ideologies; resource constraints, both human and financial; competitive funding environments; lack of budget flexibility; and unsupportive policy environments
- Factors that support the success of collaborative partnerships include: a clearly articulated purpose, based on shared values and interests of partners; political support and a public policy environment that supports collective action; engagement and investment in relationship building; focus on achieving concrete objectives and specific, visible results; shared leadership and accountability; and the development of frameworks and procedures that facilitate collaboration

Participatory Action Research (PAR)

- PAR focuses concurrently on creating action (or change) and research (or understanding) and includes an action research cycle of planning, action, observation and reflection
- Practitioners of PAR claim that it can help individuals to become more aware of their circumstances and equip them with the skills to cope with and change their world
- The use of participatory techniques can enable children and young people to talk about the issues that affect them and can also address power balances and disparities between children and adults
- Children and young people can be involved in all stages of the research process and this involvement can lead to the development of new skills, increased knowledge and confidence
- There are a variety of fun ways for engaging young people in research including: drawing; drama; photography; stories; videos; and songs

- Ethical considerations include the need to: evaluate ‘traditional’ research methodologies for use with children and young people; consider the context in which the research will be conducted; make it clear that children are under no obligation to participate; and have prior conversations with adults to identify sensitive topics or issues
- PAR is not just a set of tools for gathering information but can lead to broader individual and institutional reorientation along with capacity building and fostering sustainable development
- Research directly involving children and young people is not always appropriate. It is also important to provide novice researchers with training and support

Conclusions

- The literature review highlights the importance of neighbourhood environments for the health and well-being for families and children
- The more supports and opportunities available to young people will create more pathways to success
- Sustainable youth development requires multiple inputs from multiple sources over the long term
- Collaborative relationships are essential for positive child and youth development and it is important to address the challenges to effective collaboration
- The inclusion of young people is central to any youth development initiative
- PAR is a key method to facilitate the engagement of children and young people and can create opportunities for young people to present their views to the wider community, key stakeholders and policy makers

Introduction

The principles of youth development are encapsulated in the Youth Development Strategy of Aotearoa (Ministry of Youth Affairs 2002). Together with the Agenda for Children (Ministry of Social Development 2001), both strategies seek to enhance the wellbeing of children and young people by:

- building a common understanding of what is needed to support their healthy development
- promoting a broad whole person approach to addressing their issues and needs
- raising their status and profile in government business
- encouraging a multi-sector response by government

These objectives highlight the challenges within the youth development field in terms of defining the scope and reach of youth development, the need to take account of the environments within which young people grow and develop, and the acknowledgement that the engagement and participation of multiple community and government stakeholders and sectors is required in order to achieve wellbeing for all children and young people. This literature review will combine the different strands of research in these fields to provide an overview of the potential of these approaches to contribute to the increased wellbeing of children and young people.

The literature explored in this review draws on both international and New Zealand-specific material and is selected on the basis of having particular relevance for the Northcote Youth Development Project. An update is provided on the “Youth Development Literature Review: Building Strengths” (McLaren 2002) that focuses on current and emerging literature on neighbourhood environments as key factors in positive youth development and wellbeing. The importance of intersectoral collaboration for sustainable youth development activities is another key literature area and this includes discussion on the tensions and processes required for effective collaboration. Finally there is a discussion of Participatory Action Research (PAR)

as an effective tool for facilitating youth engagement in the information-gathering and decision-making processes of their communities.

Positive Youth Development

'Youth development' is a broad term that is used simultaneously to describe both the process of general physical, emotional, social and educational development and the development outcomes for young people. It is also used as a descriptor for the programmes that focus particularly on non-academic outcomes and operate in non-school hours (Pittman, Irby et al. 2003). Several studies have identified a set of recognisable outcomes which go beyond academic or cognitive competencies to reflect development across areas such as increasing young people's character, competence, confidence, connectedness and contributions (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine 2001; Pittman and Ferber 2001; Catalano, Berglund et al. 2002; Pittman, Diversi et al. 2002; Pittman, Irby et al. 2003).

Particularly significant in informing youth development approaches is research undertaken by Catalano et al (2002) on evaluations of positive youth development programmes. The study reviewed seventy-seven programmes in the US and closely examined twenty-five that were judged "effective" on a range of rigorous evaluation criteria. Evaluated programmes included mentoring programmes, school-based or church congregation-based health promotion and skills building programmes, programmes to link schools and families in promoting youth development and skill acquisition, and community service programmes. Despite variations in programmatic structures, the youth development programmes resulted in a wide range of positive outcomes. Nineteen of the twenty five projects resulted in positive changes in behaviour, including improvements in "interpersonal skills, peer and adult relationships, self-control, problem-solving, cognitive competencies, self-efficacy, commitment to schooling and academic achievement (Catalano, Berglund et al. 2002:7)".

Twenty-four of the twenty five programmes showed improvements in reducing "drug and alcohol use, school misbehaviour, aggression, violence, truancy, high risk sexuality, and smoking" (Catalano, Berglund et al. 2002:7). Successful strategies included strengthening

social competencies and self-efficacies, enhancing communication about appropriate youth behaviour from family and community, improving healthy bonding across the age spectrum, expanding opportunities and recognition for positive behaviours, and providing consistency and stability in youth programme delivery. It is also relevant to mention that, while in general, the programs evaluated in this study were shown to be effective in producing significant changes amongst the youth participants, Catalano et al (2002) note that these results, and the state of the evaluations conducted, did raise several areas of concern. These included:

- a relatively low frequency of follow-up studies in the field. Only about half the 25 reviewed programs used follow-up methods to track long-term youth outcomes.
- concerns about the type of measures used in the evaluation and the suggestion that a more comprehensive and standardised outcomes framework be developed. For example, rather than having an outcomes framework that tracks problem behaviours more often than positive ones, Catalano et al (2002) suggest that it would be more beneficial to have a outcomes framework that had one set of measures to track indicators of positive youth development constructs, another to track positive behaviours outcomes, and another to document the prevention or decrease of problems.
- the need for more comprehensive information from the evaluations. This included more complete descriptions of the programs; detail about the implementation process; specifics about the youth development constructs and the youth outcomes measured the use of proven evaluation methods.

Similarly, a meta-analysis of fifteen youth development programmes targeting low-income urban youth found that these programmes were effective in promoting positive changes in young people's behaviours, attitudes, or both. It concluded that programmes that reached young people early and provided continuity of services over time were more successful than programmes that had shorter duration. Programmes that reached more of the settings in which young people were found were also more successful in achieving positive outcomes for young people (Roth, Brooks-Gunn et al. 1998).

A scan of the literature on factors influencing positive youth development outcomes suggests the following key ingredients:

- young people need stable environments, which they perceive as theirs and where they feel safe
- access to basic care and services that are appropriate and affordable
- high quality instruction and training

While youth-oriented settings, services, instruction and training frame the resources that communities can offer youth, it is the quality of support and opportunities offered in these settings that are critical. Young people require opportunities to develop sustained, caring relationships with adults along with a culture of peer support, high expectations and challenging experiences. These opportunities need to be appropriate to local people and their communities in order to arrive at satisfactory solutions to community based issues, diverse and sufficiently intense for self-direction, participation and contribution within organisations and the wider community (Conway 1987; Chambers 1994; Pretty, Thompson et al. 1995; Schwab 1997; Larson and Verma 1999; Zeldin, Day et al. 1999; Connell, Gambone et al. 2000; Larson 2000; McLaughlin 2000; National Research Council and Institute of Medicine 2001; Park 2001; Gambone, Klem et al. 2002; McGarchie and Smith 2003; Pittman, Irby et al. 2003; Zeldin, Camino et al. 2003; Zeldin and O'Connor 2005).

Such findings highlight a paradigm shift in research on youth development from a focus previously on individual resilience (Rutter 1987) to recognition of the importance of the social environments of young people (Blum 1998; Resnick 2000). The power of this paradigm shift is that it broadens the goals of youth development to promote not only problem reduction but preparation of young people for adulthood. Therefore interventions which have traditionally been designed to change young people's behaviour have to be recast as interventions to change young people's environments (Pittman, Irby et al. 2000).

A growing body of research and theory now emphasises the significance of social and physical environmental determinants of health and wellbeing such as education, income, employment, housing, transport and access to health care. These underpin public health approaches to the wellbeing of populations (Marmot and Wilkinson 1999; Berkman and Kawachi 2000). Evidence of the strength of the effects of environments on health is steadily accumulating in diverse general and specialised fields. (Haan, G et al. 1987; Macintyre, Maciver et al. 1993; Kaplan, Pamuk et al. 1996; Kennedy, Kawachi et al. 1996; La Veist 1996; Polednak 1996; Shihadeh and Flynn 1996; Wilkinson 1996; Diez-Roux, FJ et al. 1997; Karvonen and Rimpela 1997; LeClere, Rogers et al. 1997; Roberts 1997; Howden-Chapman and Cram 1998; Dalgard 1999; Cohen, Spear et al. 2000; Witten, McCreanor et al. 2001; Ajwani, Blakely et al. 2003; Witten, McCreanor et al. 2003). There are increasing calls for further study of key environmental factors to enhance the promotion of health (Hawe and Shiell 1996; Yen and Syme 1999; Lawlor, Frankel et al. 2003).

Multiple studies emphasise the specific contribution of social and physical environments (Roth, Brooks-Gunn et al. 1998; Resnick 2000; Pittman and Ferber 2001; Libbey, Ireland et al. 2002) to youth health and development. It is argued that the most significant factors for adolescent health are found in the choices and opportunities for health promoting or health demoting behaviours that their environmental contexts provide (Call, Riedel et al. 2002). Blum's (1998:373) seminal review of this literature argues that for young people in particular, enhancing health requires serious investments in youth environments because "it takes a community to rear a child."

The importance of both social and physical environments for the wellbeing of young people in New Zealand, is highlighted in the 'Building Strengths' literature review (McLaren 2002). This calls for youth development approaches to move 'beyond programmes' and focus on environments. It sends a strong signal for the need to work for social change that produces environments that are in themselves generative of youth wellbeing (Pittman, Diversi et al. 2002). Two recent studies undertaken in New Zealand demonstrated that while most young people in this country are thriving and developing in strong and supportive environments,

young people with fewer resources experience difficulties that impact negatively on their health (Edwards, Jensen et al. 2003; Watson, Clark et al. 2003). These young people show a preponderance of issues with drugs and alcohol, exposure to unhealthy social and physical environments and emotional problems.

Building Supportive Environments

A key contribution that positive youth development approaches can offer is the focus on building supportive environments. Pittman et al. (2002) emphasises the need to improve the quality and availability of supports, services and opportunities offered within neighbourhoods so that they are effective, accessible to all and sustainable (Pittman, Diversi et al. 2002). This reflects the growing recognition in the literature that the neighbourhood in which one lives has important implications for the health and wellbeing of families and children (Macintyre, Maciver et al. 1993; Macintyre and Ellaway 1998; Caughey, O'Campo et al. 2001; Witten, Kearns et al. 2003; Field, Witten et al. 2004). A study by Ellen, Mijanovich et al (2001) concluded that neighbourhoods can influence and affect health outcomes in four ways:

1. neighbourhoods provide a stock of institutions and resources such as access to health care or opportunities for social interaction
2. as the origin of stressors in the physical environment such as pollution
3. stresses in the social environment such as exposure to crime and violence
4. neighbourhood-based social networks which may provide social support (Ellen, Mijanovich et al. 2001)

This is further highlighted in the work of Macintyre and Ellaway (2000) who argue that the contextual variables they call 'opportunity structures' – “socially constructed and socially patterned features of the physical and social environment — are crucially important to social interactions and relations that may impact directly or indirectly on the choices people have in

relation to their lives and health” (Macintyre and Ellaway 2000).¹ The places people can go to, the options available and the acceptance or connection they experience, influence a wide range of health-related behaviours. Furthermore, many studies have demonstrated that higher levels of participation in social and civic life are associated with locations where residents have a positive impression of the area, arising from the availability of multiple and varied ‘opportunity structures’ (Woolever 1992; Brower 1996; Ellen, Mijanovich et al. 2001). By contrast, in areas where there are comparatively few ‘opportunity structures’ there are less opportunities to participate in activities (Baum and Palmer 2002).

The positive relationship between the number of supports and opportunities children experience while growing up and the increased success and decreased problems they have during adolescence is now well documented (Blum and Rinehart 1997; Resnick, Bearman et al. 1997; Roth, Brooks-Gunn et al. 1998; Connell, Gambone et al. 2000; National Research Council and Institute of Medicine 2001). In particular, numerous studies have validated the need for increasing the availability of organised youth activities in communities, (Marsh 1992; National Research Council and Institute of Medicine 2001; Zaff, Moore et al. 2001; Morrissey and Werner-Wilson 2005) to provide the opportunity for young people to learn how to act in the world around them – to explore, earn, belong and influence (Roth, Brooks-Gunn et al. 1998). The more positive features a community has, as well as a diversity of programmes and opportunities available in each community, the more likely it is for that community to be able to support broad adolescent development and attract the interest of and meet the needs of a greater number of young people (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine 2001).

Research on youth development increasingly emphasises the importance of participation as a vehicle for strengthening young people and their communities (Pittman 1991; Flanagan and Faison 2001; National Research Council and Institute of Medicine 2001). Mounting

¹ *Although beyond the scope of this particular literature review, it is relevant to mention there has been an increased local focus on ‘social capital’ research resulting in a plethora of New Zealand and Australasian centric studies now available. Thank you to our reviewer for this information.*

evidence suggests that young people who take active roles in organisations and communities have fewer problems and better skills (Irby, Ferber et al. 2001). Positive youth development is triggered by engagement and a recent review suggests that some youth development organisations have begun to operate on the principle that young people should be given more meaningful choices and roles in the activities in which they are involved, shifting from receiving knowledge to creating knowledge and from being service recipients to being program planners and deliverers (Pittman, Irby et al. 2003). Therefore, the commitment to young people must be reflected in the commitment of organisations to involve young people in all aspects of decision making – from programming to fund development to personnel to governance.

Encouraging Participation

The Sustainable Development for New Zealand: Programme of Action (2003:26) recognises that the Government is only one player in a complex set of relationships between various Government departments and other players who influence child and youth development outcomes. It also indicates that a whole-child or youth development approach, with service packages customised to suit the development needs of particular individuals is required and that “children and young people themselves should be involved in decisions affecting their future welling (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet 2003).

Gray (2002) provides a comprehensive literature review that examines the legal, social and organisational reasons for involving children, young people and young adults in decision-making. Participation can take place at several levels, ranging from manipulation or tokenism to full involvement of children and young people with a high degree of power sharing by adults. There is a cautionary note:

Putting two or three young people on an adult board may teach them about board functions and lend a youth perspective, but it doesn't provide young people with authentic decision-making power or influence” (Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development 2003:9).

One key element that Gray (2002) identifies is the need for organisations themselves to review their commitment to and belief about such involvement. Jamison and Gilbert (2000) point out that until children participate in the policy development processes impacting on them, decision-makers do not have the benefit of:

- understanding children's perspectives of the problem
- hearing children's suggestions about how the problem might be solved
- receiving information from children about the impact that each suggested option for solving the problem may actually have on children
- knowing what children think should happen

Gray (2002:12) also outlines the following as successful strategies and initiatives for facilitating participation by children, young people and young adults:

- have clear objectives
- have clear boundaries about how much power and decision-making will (or can) be shared with children and young people
- treat children and young people as individuals and acknowledge that not everyone will want to get involved
- take active steps to include children and young people not traditionally involved
- prepare well by carefully considering the different options for meeting their objectives
- involve adults in a supportive or advisory capacity
- broadcast the benefits widely
- link general policies and strategies with particular projects and initiatives
- avoid looking for a single solution or quick fix
- involve children and young people at the earliest stage possible
- constantly evaluate and learn from experience
- respond quickly to children's and young people's requests and demands and prioritise, informing them of outcomes and consequences.

Thus, respect for children's participation in the decision-making processes of their communities recognises them as subjects rather than objects of research, who 'speak' in their own right and report valid views and experiences (Hill 1997). Evidence also suggests that the use of participatory methods and techniques with children and young people can produce outcomes that are more consistent with policy intentions. This methodology addresses issues of sustainable development within communities, fostering positive youth development and creating an awareness around whole of government and whole-child approaches (Baldwin 2001; Bhatt and Tandon 2001; Brydon-Miller 2002).

Youth Leadership

Youth Leadership Development has been identified as a key strategy for promoting healthy adolescent development (Armistead and Wexler 1997; Burgess 1998; Zeldin and Camino 1999). Zeldin and Camino (1999) conceptualise youth leadership as a type of youth development programme that is grounded in the principle that 'youth are capable of far more than what society typically expects' and that such a programme should aim to equip children and young people with a set of sustainable practices that allow them to lead others over the long term.

According to Zeldin and Camino (1999) this makes youth leadership development distinctive in three ways. Firstly, it takes into account key contributing factors that shape children and young people: identity, relationships with adults, leadership opportunities, community involvement, safety and skill-building, as well as grounding itself in the social causes and injustices that pervade the everyday lives of young people. Second, it seeks to promote a relatively narrow and explicit set of outcomes, specifically those that allow young people to engage in collaborative action. And third, the programme incorporates not only instruction and action, but equally important, membership and modelling:

Leadership, within a civic activist context, is not so much about individual achievement as it is about learning how to participate in group processes, build consensus, and subsume personal interests and ideas to those of the collective. This dimension of leadership has not been fully explored within the youth development literature” (Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development 2003:7).

When working effectively, the results can be a powerful contribution to the positive youth development field and can influence key agencies and funders to value and adopt similar, participatory forms of decision-making in other programmes and functions (Park 2001). Such approaches can also be linked to strengthening and connecting youth development initiatives with local communities, local government and nationally based government agencies i.e. ‘whole of government’ approaches (Park 2001; Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development 2003).

Sustainable Positive Youth Development

The notion of ‘whole of government’, intersectoral collaboration and ‘joined up’ thinking have become common elements of global health and social policy discourses, recognizing that collaboration between government and community is necessary to improve social outcomes for whole populations (Wilkins 2002; Scott and Thurston 2004). Indeed, a review of relevant literature in New Zealand suggests that positive outcomes for children and young people can only be achieved through true collaborative effort between government agencies and communities (Dovey 2003).

This is emphasised in New Zealand by a review of the State sector which indicated that in order to meet the needs of both the government and the public, improvements in three areas are necessary: integrating service delivery across multiple agencies; addressing fragmentation of the State sector and improving its alignment; and improving the systems by which public servants are trained and developed (Ministerial Advisory Group 2001). Collaboration

between stakeholders, including government and community organisations, is needed to ensure that multiple perspectives are incorporated into planning (Greenaway, Milne et al. 2003).² Involvement of multiple stakeholders also increases opportunities for ‘bridging connections’ to be formed between the community and external social and political institutions which have the potential to influence external policy developments on communities (Scott and Conway 2005).

Research in this field increasingly emphasises the importance of partnerships as a mechanism to achieve sustainable development (Frame and Taylor 2005). Since 2002 legislative changes and re-orientation of policy directions in New Zealand, particularly the Local Government Act 2002 and the Sustainable Development Programme for Action 2003 (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet 2003) have required central and local government agencies to take a sustainable development approach that addresses economic, environmental, social and cultural wellbeing (Graham 2005). This recognises that sustainability is achieved through coordination, integration and implementation of a wide range of policies at local, regional and national levels (Blowers 2002).

The need for multi-agency partnerships is spelt out in the principles of the Sustainable Development Programme of Action (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet 2003) which establishes a conceptual framework for sustainable development and sets out four priority action areas: water, energy, cities and youth development. Partnership is identified as the heart of the sustainable development approach. The purpose of the partnership approach for sustainable development is to: combine efforts and resources towards common aims; share information and expertise; understand different points of view; make better decisions and create more win-win outcomes (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet 2003:10).

² For an update and comprehensive literature review of collaboration within the state sector see Debi Majumdar’s ‘Collaboration among government agencies with special reference to New Zealand: a literature review’ Ministry of Social Development. Thank you to our reviewer for notifying us of Debi Majumdar’s work.

Although several studies emphasise the potential of multi-agency partnerships for integrated, holistic and innovative outcomes (Poxton 1999; Kinder, Halsey et al. 2001), a growing body of literature in both the 'sustainable development' and 'whole of government' fields outlines a number of factors which inhibit a multi-agency approach clearly indicating that the main challenges are not technical but organisational in nature. The challenges, noted throughout these studies can be summarised as:

- conflicting organisational priorities whereby organisations have their own internal dynamics, priorities and audiences which can make it difficult to put the partnership objectives high on individual agenda
- the organisational structure of agencies and government tend to ensure that all problems are considered primarily through a range of distinct and differing departmental lenses
- deep-set, professional ideologies that drive certain agendas
- resource constraints in terms of both human and financial support – often the time and effort required for agencies and individuals to establish positive working relationships in order to build up team trust is not recognised as a legitimate work role where agencies are only funded for specific contractual outputs
- pressures of competitive bidding for funds
- lack of budget flexibility
- unsupportive policy environments

Additionally, organisations work to externally imposed criteria and success may be determined by aspects of performance which can be reduced to quantifiable measures. These often marginalize longer term, less quantifiable factors such as the quality of sustained intervention (Geddes 1997; Pearce and Hillman 1998; Cochrane 2000; Craglia and Signoretta 2000; Nedovic-Budic and Pinto 2000; Taylor 2000; Chatterton and Style 2001; Gerwitz 2002; Signoretta and Craglia 2002; Stewart 2002; Evans, Percy et al. 2003; Milbourne, Macrae et al. 2003; Frame and Taylor 2005).

Partnerships are strengthened by acknowledging these challenges and by developing strategies to support relational practices at the outset of initiatives. Although there is no single way to develop and sustain a partnership, gaining clarity and consensus among partners regarding the meaning, purpose and operating principles of the partnership is fundamental (Scott and Thurston 2004). It is generally accepted that conditions for success include:

- a clearly articulated purpose, based on shared values and interests and alignment of purpose of the initiative between partners. This can be gained if there is consensus on information about the nature and magnitude of the issue to be addressed
- a supportive policy environment in both local and central government. This is largely dependent upon political support and a public policy environment that facilitates collective action
- engagement of key players and potential partners at the very beginning of the process is a cornerstone of the success of any intersectoral initiative. This requires both horizontal collaboration and vertical linking
- investment in the relationship building process
- focus on achieving concrete objectives and specific, visible results
- shared leadership and accountability; team building and supports. In successful collaborative initiatives, leadership is almost always more a case of guidance, facilitation, mediation, coordination and integration rather than of control
- development of frameworks and procedures which facilitate and promote collaboration (Hackman 1990; Weick 1995; Ball 1999; Haynes, Atkinson et al. 1999; Kimberlee 2001; Ross and Wright 2001; Ciborra 2002; Wilkens 2002; Evans, Percy et al. 2003; Milbourne, Macrae et al. 2003; Graham 2005).

A number of intersectoral programmes have been developed to improve the sustainable health and wellbeing of communities by addressing the broad determinants of health using a sector wide approach to health and although these have not been well-documented to date in New Zealand there are increasing reports available (Conway, Adams et al. 2003;

Henwood and Adams 2003; Henwood 2004).³ The following New Zealand example highlights some of the ways that these have been enacted.

Case Studies

The Glen Innes Health Project was established in May 2002 by the Ministry of Health and Auckland City Council to facilitate intersectoral and inter-agency collaboration to promote community health and wellbeing, and developing innovative action around social determinants of public health in Glen Innes. A Working Group was established to develop links between social service workers, to discuss health priorities for Glen Innes and to facilitate collaborative approaches to addressing health determinants. The Working Group is the key operating force of the project and has achieved considerable success in facilitating intersectoral and inter-agency collaboration.

Key factors of success include:

- regular meetings which provide a useful forum for networking, information exchange and identification of community needs as well as the starting point for the development of collaborative initiatives
- development of a model for initiatives based on community development approaches with a focus on sustainable programmes
- ongoing engagement of community as well as building community capacity and cohesion
- strong Maori participation from the outset in all aspects of the project and building excellent working relationships with Pacific communities

³ Some interesting and wide-ranging recent work in this area in New Zealand is being undertaken by the Wellington School of Medicine in conjunction with Otago University. Two programmes of particular note that look at the interplay of social and physical environments to the well-being of people, in general, and as this relates to children and young people are: Dr Mary McIntyre's work in the Ecology and Health Research Centre and the soFIE longitudinal study directed by Tony Blakely. Similar work is also being undertaken by Karen Witten at Massey University's Social and Health Outcome Research Centre and Jamie Pearce at the University of Canterbury.

- An environmental back-yard clean-up initiative linked to healthier housing, a popular community exercise programme linked to the Green Prescription GP scheme and involvement by young people with the production of a community newsletter have been some of the features of this project (Scott and Conway 2005).

The New York City Beacons initiative is an international example of a partnership between government and community organisations in the United States that has focused on young people. Using a positive youth development approach, the Beacons created a web of school-community-family partnerships, coordinated through community centres and located in public school buildings. Funded by the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development, this programme offers a range of activities and services to participants of all ages before and after school in the evenings and on weekends.

Individual Beacons are managed by community-based organisations and work collaboratively with their host schools, community advisory councils and a wide range of neighbourhood organisations and institutions. The main objective is to improve community support for young people by increasing the number of safe and stimulating places for young people to go, things to do and people to talk to in the neighbourhoods.

Although within individual Beacons there are a number of short-term, targeted activities, these are embedded within an ongoing organisation committed to building relationships and engaging young people with ample opportunities to contribute and benefit. Community ownership has been paramount from the beginning as organisations and institutions committed to broad-based development were consulted and partnerships formed with young people and their families, schools, community based organisations as well as the various government departments, social services, child welfare, law enforcement, councils and health services within each neighbourhood. Young people and their families were brought in at the beginning to shape the programmes. They were regarded as critical to ensuring that there

was an effective mix of engaging activities and opportunities for participation and leadership both within Beacons and throughout the community.

Individual Beacons offer children, youth and adults a wide range of recreational programmes, social services, educational enrichment, and vocational activities in four core areas: youth development programmes, academic support and enhancement, parent involvement and family support, and neighbourhood safety and community building. Schools provide space, community-based organisations provide the staffing and basic programmes and the Department of Youth Services provides management and funding. Initially targeting neighbourhoods most in need, the Beacons opened the doors to all members of the community so that the neighbourhood rather than the school was the focal point, thus making the centre available to all youth regardless of background.

The Youth Development Institute at the Fund for the City of New York acts as the convener of ‘collaboratives’ (e.g. monthly meetings of the Beacons directors), capacity builders (technical assistance and professional development activities for Beacons staff as well as linking to resources such as funding and staff training opportunities as well as other youth development organisation networks) and as an advocacy organisation (advocating that public agencies foster collaborative relationship with Beacons). As such, they assist the partners in the public and private sectors to develop sustainable infrastructures as well as strengthening of their delivery systems.

Major findings from a qualitative study exploring how the Beacon initiative affected young people and their parents, the host schools, and the surrounding communities in six sites show that the centres offer:

- a safe place for young people to grow through, well-organized, challenging activities, caring relationships, and opportunities to contribute to the Beacon and their communities

- important services and activities (for neighbourhood adults as well) such as sports and physical activities, English-language instruction
- a bridge between schools and community members

Moreover they were regarded as valued local institutions which encouraged social cohesion within neighbourhoods (Warren, Feist et al. 2002).

Participatory Action Research (PAR)

The Whāriki/SHORE research team have been working with the Northcote leadership group to develop community-based strategies that help to generate knowledge about their communities through combining popular education, community mobilisation and organising strategies, and issue-based research. As part of the research team's strategy to empower and encourage participation amongst Northcote youth, the Whāriki/SHORE have drawn on a branch of research methodologies and techniques that have been shown to be particularly effective in helping youth to gain awareness about community issues and decision-making processes that impact on them.

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is often described as a methodology or part of a family of methodologies that concurrently pursues action (or change) and research (or understanding) (Dick 1999; O'Kane 2000). It differs from both basic and applied social science research in terms of people's involvement in the research process, timely integration of action research, and the practice-based nature of the knowledge that is being sought (Park 2001:81). In recent years PAR has gained currency as a significant research methodology with an ever increasing body of literature and practitioners (Abbot 1999:234). It has been strongly associated with emancipatory learning and Activist Participatory Research (APR) whereby people mobilise themselves to address common needs arising in their daily lives and, in the process, generate knowledge (Park 2001:81) to inform ongoing planning and development. It works from the basis of an action research cycle of planning, action, observation and reflection.

Particularly influential in its development was the renowned Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire (1972; 1974), along with Ivan Illich, and psychologist, Kurt Lewin. Their work, at its broadest level, focussed on developing individuals within communities and groups, relationships between those groups and relations between people and their physical environment with the ‘ultimate goal’ of using the ‘insider knowledge’ generated to arrive at satisfactory solutions to their problems without over-dependence on outside professionals (Conway 1987; Chambers 1994; Pretty, Thompson et al. 1995; Schwab 1997; Park 2001).

Empowering Children and Young People Through PAR

Research and program planning has traditionally been the domain of experts (researchers, planners, policy analysts) who used “extractive” practices whereby “experts” go to a community, study their subjects, and take away their data to write their papers, reports and theses. Participatory techniques, however, offer an alternative to these methods by providing the researcher and the researched with a framework which is responsive and has open-ended research goals (O’Kane 2000:156).

PAR, as a research methodology, is “necessarily participative” in that it requires the researcher to establish a more formal relationship with the ‘researched’ as well as allowing for closer intimacy with the research participants and the data collected (O’Kane 2000:138-139; Park 2001). John (1996:21) writes:

Developing research methodologies on the basis of partnership, which in turn involves a new role in the power structure for the researcher – a move from the plunderer of information to facilitator which enables the child to be an active part of voicing their concerns.

Given the right circumstances, practitioners of PAR also claim that it can help individuals to become more aware of their circumstances and equip them with the skills to cope with, and change their world (Rahnema 1990).

O'Kane (2000) writes that since the late 1980s there has been an increasing interest in listening to children's experiences and viewpoints, as separate to and different from adult carers, as traditional methods have often failed to account for the views and opinions expressed by children and young people (Schwab 1997). Such an undertaking has, however, necessitated the establishment of 'new paradigms' that moved away from traditional positivistic inquiries which focused on measuring, aggregating, modelling and determining statistically significant relationships, to a methodology that valued diversity of experience and provided a 'depth, richness and realism of information analysis. In addressing these issues O'Kane and Thomas (1998) offer the use of participatory techniques as one approach that can, at one level, enable children and young people to talk about the sorts of issues that affect them, and at another, address issues of power imbalances and disparities between adults and children (Hill 1997; O'Kane 2000:136). Thus, when given the right opportunities, support and respect, children and young people can bring new forms of collaboration and creative alternatives to authoritarian structures and traditional patterns of exploitation (Fals-Borda 1994; Schwab 1997). Alderson (2001:142) writes:

To involve children more directly in research can rescue them from silence and exclusion, and from being represented, by default, as passive object, while respect for their informed and voluntary consent can help to protect them from covert, invasive, exploitative or abusive research.

The scope of research about children could be expanded by involving children as researchers in many methods, levels and stages of the process. Children are the primary source of knowledge about their own views and experiences:

... young people are experts in their own lives (not “empty” vessels), and the starting place for all new learnings is their day-to-day experiences (Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development 2003:7).

Research with children in the early stages is likely to include selecting and setting up the research team that may consist of both professional, and/or child researchers, avoiding tokenism, working out team and power relationships and ways of resolving problems as they arise, jointly deciding the agenda, aims, methods and payments in cash or in kind. Follow up stages include publicity, and efforts to link the findings into policy and practice for the desired social change (Alderson 2001:144). Children and young people as researchers may utilise a wide range of methods, from selecting topics, questions, samples and observation sites through data collection to analysis and reporting, dissemination and policy discussion (Alderson 2001:146). Research reports may range from long typed reports to simpler poster or wall newspaper, a video or photographic exhibition, with reports and drawings by the whole team or smaller groups (Hill 1997; Alderson 2001:146). Research can also help children and young people to gain more skills, knowledge, confidence and promote attitudinal shifts that can help to overcome their disadvantages (Alderson 2001:151; Bhatt and Tandon 2001; Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development 2003). In this context, participants may be: informants; interpreters; planners; implementers; facilitators; co-researchers; or merely recipients of information (Dick 1997). On each of these dimensions, a range of involvement is possible.

PAR: Engaging Children and Young People in Research

Several authors (Lynch 1960; James 1995; Moore 1996; Hart 1997; Hill 1997; Schwab 1997; Thomas and O'Kane 1998; O'Kane 2000; Brinton-Lykes 2001; Park 2001) cite drawing, mapping, flow diagrams, play, matrices, drama, stories, photography, videos, camcorders, audio-tapes and songs as effective technical aids and mediums for engaging and communicating with children and young people. Participatory research methods are considered innovative, fun and suitable for the study of children. Through their

participation, children are enabled to take an active role and to talk about their needs (O'Kane 2000:139). Pictorial techniques, for example, can be 'fun' and also enable children to communicate who may lack the verbal skills to do so in conversation (Hill 1997:177). O'Kane (2000:140) also adds that PAR techniques are particularly effective at:

..... transforming the power relations between adults and children, enabling children to set the agenda and describe their own realities... With an emphasis on the visual representation of ideas they can be designed to work with children of different ages with varied literacy skills ...

PAR: Ethical Considerations

Thomas and O'Kane (1998; 2000:336) cite PAR as an effective methodology for addressing and resolving privacy and confidentiality issues that may arise when engaging with children and young people, especially as they relate to power imbalances between children and adults and issues of trust, consent and integrity of the research (Thomas and O'Kane 1998:341). Other ethical considerations may include:

- evaluating the appropriateness of more 'traditional' research methodologies and ethical positions, mainly designed for adults, for use with children and young people
- when and where interviews with children and young people are conducted: who is present, and who will be told. For example, in a school environment where responses are defined as correct or wrong answers it may be necessary to explain to the young people that there are no wrong or right answers (Thomas and O'Kane 1998:341)
- intellectual property issues must also be considered to avoid team disputes over ownership of data and publication rights (Alderson 2001:150)

Hill (1997:179) also states that it is good practice to make clear to children that they should not feel pressured to take part in research and may opt out or refuse to answer particular

questions. Prior conversations with adults can provide background information that contextualise what the child is saying and identify sensitive areas to be avoided (Hill 1997).

PAR: Sustainable Development, Positive Youth Development and Whole of Government Approaches

PAR is not simply a collection of tools for data-gathering but should be seen as part of a process of broader individual and institutional reorientation and transformation (Abbot 1999:231). Heron and Reason (2001:247) write:

It is widely recognised today that knowledge creation and learning have become keys to organisational competitiveness and vitality... community action research represents one approach to meeting these challenges.

Chisholm (2001) suggests that it is possible to integrate research with taking action and make considerable progress in developing an “interorganisational network from ‘scratch’ in a fairly short time period.” PAR provides a way to reach individual incubator goals and higher-level goals for regions by developing awareness about networks, how they share a common fate, and how they experienced similar problems. PAR can also facilitate shifts in thinking from an internal towards an external focus.

Action research can play a significant part in building capacity for sustainable development. It can help give a common language to many of the cross-sectoral initiatives that include people from different cultural and economic realms, and further, by using publication channels or through facilitating forums for public conversation (Bhatt and Tandon 2001; Brydon-Miller 2002). Organisational development-orientated action research can contribute to the fostering of sustainable development by facilitating forums that allow for a multiplicity of perspectives that can be used to inform policy and produce outcomes that are more in line with policy intentions (Baldwin 2001; Bhatt and Tandon 2001; Brydon-Miller 2002).

Critique

It should be noted that research directly involving children is not necessarily superior to or more desirable than other kinds of research. The value and appropriateness of any one method depends on the purpose of the research, so that for certain types of study it is entirely appropriate not to include the child's perspective, whilst in others it may be apt or practicable only to include that perspective indirectly (Hill 1997:172). Criticism has also centred on PAR for lacking rigour and that children and young people lack the professionalism, maturity and intellectual capacity to conduct serious research. Alderson (2001:150) states however, that such notions and the tendency to underestimate the capacities and capabilities of children and young people may be based on social constructions rather than an integral inadequacy in children and young people themselves (Alderson 2001:150; Wadsworth 2001). For example, critics have questioned the capacity of children to understand theories such as critical analysis or the politics of racism, yet evidence suggests that, with time and help, even young children are able to share in more 'complex' aspects of research like planning and theoretical analysis (Alderson 2001:146). Even the use of age as a measure of children's ability to participate can be minimized through participatory methods (Hill 1997; O'Kane 2000:140). The above examples also highlight the importance of providing young researchers with the training, help and support for them to achieve their research aspirations, although it is arguable that any novice researcher would require the same support as well (Hill 1997; Alderson 2001:150).

Important practice debates have also taken place around how best to take account of gender, disability and ethnic differences, bearing in mind considerations of power, trust and understanding (Hill 1997:171). For example, the views of children of minority ethnic backgrounds may be under-represented; doubt has also arisen over the validity of using westernised research methodologies to interpret findings in non-western communities (Hill 1997:179). Alderson (2001) also notes that there is a danger that researchers from the same ethnic, age, or gender, group will over-identify with interviewees and assume they understand more than they do.

Conclusion

The findings of this literature review have highlighted the importance of environmental factors and more specifically, neighbourhood environments, for the health and wellbeing of families and children. The evidence suggests that where there are more supports and opportunities available for youth in neighbourhoods, this will ultimately constitute more pathways to success – pathways diverse, wide and accessible enough for youth to see, try and ultimately select from. These pathways offer the basic things young people need: people to talk to, places to go, opportunities to explore and pathways that build the attitudes, skills, values and knowledge they need in a full range of areas from cognitive and vocational to personal and civic.

Furthermore, successful positive youth development initiatives require multiple inputs from multiple sources over a sustained period of time to be effective and sustainable. Collaborative partnerships are required at all levels to define and progress the issues that impede and promote increased youth investment and youth participation. If multi-agency, intersectoral partnerships are to achieve their potential, greater understanding of the challenges involved in implementing initiatives or policies, as well as a commitment to the development of strategies to support relationships and improved practices needs to be acknowledged and addressed at the outset and at all stages.

The inclusion of children and young people - as future citizens and leaders in the decision-making processes of their communities - is at the heart of any youth development initiatives and appropriate processes essential to their success. Evidence presented in this literature review has shown that children and young people, when given the right opportunities and support from adults, can bring innovative, creative yet salient alternatives to current policy work (Fals-Borda 1994; Schwab 1997; Baldwin 2001; Bhatt and Tandon 2001; Brydon-Miller 2002). Participatory Action Research (PAR) has been presented as a key method to help facilitate authentic engagement from children and young people in its capacity to facilitate forums and 'dialogue spaces' for children and young people where they can have their views and opinions heard by key stakeholders such as community leaders, Council planners

government agencies, and policy-makers (Bhatt and Tandon 2001; Brydon-Miller 2002). Finally, PAR is a research methodology that equips children and young people with the skills and confidence to produce reliable locally generated ‘insider knowledge’ and data that can provide government agencies (and other interested parties) with directions for future policy and policy outcomes that are more in line with the needs and aspirations of today’s, and tomorrow’s, youth.

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