
Issue Editors' Notes

THIS VOLUME OF *New Directions for Youth Development* represents new thinking about the ways in which youth and parents are engaged in local reform, particularly education reform. Opportunities for youth and parents to have their voices heard are growing, and community organizations are helping them do so. Because of the organizing and advocacy taking place through community organizations, groups traditionally outside the political system are having a more significant impact on what happens for local youth.

The articles in this volume examine ways in which organizations advocate for and with youth—through youth organizing, parent organizing, more traditional youth advocacy, and funding support. Youth advocacy can be defined as efforts that are taking place on behalf of youth, whereas youth and parent organizing consists of efforts to engage individuals in social change, develop leadership, and tackle issues that participants themselves identify. Youth advocacy also tends to focus on outcomes, while youth and parent organizing typically give significant attention to the process of engaging people in collective action.

Advocacy organizations and community organizers of different stripes work in a variety of ways to improve conditions for youth in urban areas: they lobby to change policy, connect diverse institutions to serve youth, and help youth become advocates for themselves. The article authors find a range of ways that organizations challenge policymakers and other leaders in urban areas to create better schools, get more resources for youth in city budgets, and educate local officials about the needs of young people.

Most of the article authors use case studies to examine the work of advocacy organizations. In this volume are case studies written by organizational leaders and by observers. Some contain a single case, and others compare organizations. We can learn the benefits, barriers, and complexities of advocacy and organizing work through these close examinations of organizations working for and with youth on policy change. With their diversity of efforts and locales, these cases also build a broader base of knowledge about advocacy and organizing.

All of the articles in this volume address organizing and advocacy on a local level—the level at which policies and the needs of youth and families meet. As we describe in the first article, there is a local advantage to the work that community-based organizations do for and with youth. These organizations know about the needs and resources in their communities and can craft specific proposals to address them, forge strong local partnerships and coalitions around issues, and negotiate the particular mix of contexts in each setting.

The second and third articles take up local youth organizing for education reform and efforts to help youth become agents for change in their own school contexts. Mark R. Warren, Meredith Mira, and Thomas Nikundiwe provide an analysis of the recent rise in local youth organizing focused on school issues. Using case studies of two organizations, one working in Baltimore and one in Boston, they find a trajectory in the concerns of youth organizing groups from community issues to school reform. Seema Shah and Kavitha Mediratta also examine the impact of youth organizing on education reform efforts, focusing on the relationship between youth organizers and local educators and how issues of race and class are part of this work. They find three key strategies youth use to get their message heard and gain support from educators and school systems and suggest implications for reform efforts and educators.

Nancy Lee, the executive director of Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth in San Francisco, describes some significant changes in strategy that the organization has made over the past thirty years. This advocacy organization has recently begun to shift

its structure and strategies toward a bottom-up community organizing model and is considering ways in which it can be more accountable to the communities of color it represents.

Michael P. Evans and Dennis Shirley in the fifth article and Ron Snyder in the sixth examine parent organizing for school reform in Boston and Oakland, respectively. Evans and Shirley examine parent participation in organizing, both traditional understandings and the developments they have studied in the Jamaica Plain Parent Organizing Project. They are interested in the moral imperative parents see in their organizing work, pushing for change for the whole community in addition to change for their own children, and how organizations might support this type of collective civic engagement. Snyder details the experience of Oakland Community Organizations (OCO) in bringing small schools to Oakland in response to community members' concerns about overcrowding and unsafe school conditions. He discusses OCO's organizing model, its partnerships, work inside and outside the system, and the role of the faith community.

Finally, Sylvia M. Yee describes the entrance of one San Francisco foundation, the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund, into the world of youth organizing: what it took to make that shift and how the foundation has understood the relationships between youth development and youth organizing. Yee also provides a guide for how other foundations can support youth advocacy and organizing.

Many of the article authors reflect on the larger impact of organizing on the participants, in addition to the concrete changes that have taken place. They note a shift from a self-interest frame to a larger understanding of the importance of civic engagement in communities (Warren, Mira, and Nikundiwe; Snyder; and Evans and Shirley). There is a ripple effect in these local youth and parent organizing efforts; not only do policies and contexts change, but groups and communities themselves begin to change too.

Although youth are still not central players in most of the policy decisions that affect their lives, the articles in this volume suggest that significant progress is being made to give youth and parents the tools and opportunities to improve schools and other

institutions in their lives. And their organizing is having tangible results in many urban areas.

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