Placemaking with Children and Youth

Victoria Derr, Louise Chawla, and Mara Mintzer

PARTICIPATORY PRACTICES FOR PLANNING SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

New Village Press • New York
Self-expression through the arts is included in Article 13 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child as one of children’s civil rights: “The child shall have the right to freedom of expression . . . either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child’s choice.” Article 31, which affirms a child’s right to rest, play, and leisure, also recognizes the right “to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.” In our experience, when we enable young people to express their feelings and ideas through methods of their choice, they gravitate to the arts—to music, poetry, painting, and digital arts. This was also true in the example from the United Kingdom of children choosing their own methods to document their travel to school: most of their choices were arts-based (Box 3.7).

Art-based methods provide an excellent starting point for participatory processes. They allow young people to access their hearts: they are methods that allow young people to explore themselves, their world, and their values. In the words of a young Native American of the Tewa people, “Art is important because it describes people’s feelings and what they think about their people and their own ways.” From this perspective, art is important in developing personal connections to a topic. Art-based methods help all members of a participatory project understand: What is important to me as an individual? What is important to our community? What experiences and perspectives do we have for a place? For an activity? This chapter will explore methods that help students identify connections and values to a place or urban issue.

Art-based methods can also be important in the analysis and synthesis of ideas. They can provide creative means of summarizing discoveries during a participatory project, in a way that resonates with young people’s interests. They can help a community express its history and identity and come together around a shared vision.

This chapter provides examples of methods that help young people express their values and synthesize and present their ideas through creative means:

- Drawings
- Murals
- Collage
- Nicho boxes
- Photographic methods
- Storytelling and writing
- Role plays, drama, and puppet shows

1. Bruce Hucko, _Where There is No Name for Art: The Art of the Tewa Pueblo Children_. (Santa Fe, New Mexico: School of American Research Press, 1996), 8.
3. Hucko, _Where There is No Name for Art_, 1. Quotation from Pauline Bourdon when she was age 12.
• Video and film
• Three dimensional models
• City as Play

It is important to remember that children and youth are the experts on what their creations mean. With every method, allow time for young people to interpret their work: in writing, if they are old enough, or by asking open-ended questions about what they have made and recording their answers. Remember also that young people own their creations. Ask them if they want their name on their work (unless you are collaborating with a university where rules of confidentiality prohibit this). If you want to take their work for your records or an exhibit, ask for their permission. If they want to keep what they have made, ask if you can take a picture or make a copy for yourself.

This chapter describes the purpose of each method, gives directions for how to apply it, and offers examples in practice. For each of the methods presented, remember that participatory processes are about generating and sharing ideas. The artifacts generated can be significant in themselves, but often they are tools for identifying interests, setting priorities, and making recommendations. This is helpful in taking the pressure off the methods themselves, especially if young people are concerned whether their art is “good enough.” Everyone’s voice matters, and the methods are simply media to help young people express themselves.

Drawings

Drawing is a simple method that children can readily use to express ideas, describe an experience, and communicate with each other. For the drawing method to be most effective, it is helpful to have prepared in advance the purpose of the drawings, to have a pre-written prompt to get children started, and to allow time to share and discuss ideas. The drawings themselves can provide important information, but it is the sharing and discussion that allow rich understandings of children’s perspectives. These discussions promote an understanding for the significance of the picture—why children drew what they did.

Never assume that you know what a child’s drawing means without asking. Jill Kruger, who has done a lifetime of participatory advocacy with children in South Africa, illustrates this point vividly with a story about a child’s drawing of a smiling clown. What else could it be but a happy clown? The child explained, however, that it was a witch disguised as a clown to capture children for their body parts.4 With very young children, ages 2–6, try to record their utterances as they draw. Otherwise when they show the final product and you ask what it is, you risk getting the answer, “It’s a picture.”5

Drawing is an excellent way to begin one-on-one interviews about children’s place feelings and experiences. Even shy children tend to open up when attention is focused not on them but their explanation of their drawing. When you want to use drawings in this way, ask for the child’s permission to take notes by hand or with a recording device, and label different elements of the picture that the child discusses.

Ages. While this method may be used with any age, we have found it to be most effective with children ages 4–11. Children 12 and older are often self-conscious of their drawing abilities, and this can inhibit expression rather than serve to develop it.

Materials. Paper, pencils, crayons, colored pencils or markers, clipboards or hard surfaces (if drawing will be outside or there will be no tables)

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**Time to Complete.** About 45 minutes total—10 minutes for introduction; 15 minutes for drawing; and 20 minutes for sharing and discussing.

**Method**

- Introduce the activity—tell children what it is you plan to have them do and why
- Provide the materials for the activity—paper and drawing implements
- When everyone is settled with their materials and actively listening, tell children the details of what you want them to do—use the prompt that you have prepared.
- Check in with participants. Do they have questions? Do they understand what they are supposed to do?
- As children begin, wander around the room or place where they are drawing. Children will ask questions for clarification and will begin to share their ideas. Ask questions that are general: Can you tell me more about this? What is special to you about this place? In this way, you can encourage them to continue but will not overly direct their drawing.
- If children are able, ask them to clearly label their drawings in their own words. Or a facilitator can write key words on the drawing.
- Once the work is nearing completion, give a 2- to 3-minute warning that the drawing time is coming to a close.
- Ask each participant to share his or her drawing. This can be done in small groups with a single facilitator, or with the whole group, depending on the number of facilitators and amount of time available. If possible, record the main points of the children’s ideas on flipchart paper for all to see. Children are welcome to offer edits to the recorder’s words if their ideas are not captured correctly.
- **Possible Extension:** Depending on the size of the group and amount of time available, ask each child to make a connection to something they heard another child say or draw that also resonated with them. This is a way to build group cohesion but also to help children process ways that they have shared interests and experiences with others in the group.

**Space use**

Some children may look at others’ work to get ideas about what they “should” draw and make copycat drawings. If you want to be sure that you get children’s original ideas, work in a big space where everyone can spread out, or with small groups where each child can have his or her own space and undisturbed focus. Emphasize that there are no wrong ideas—every contribution is valuable.

**Paper size**

Some children get immersed in this activity. Provide large sheets of paper and have extra sheets available in case some children want to extend their drawing beyond the margins of one page. Otherwise the scale of their response is constrained by the size of the paper.

**Sample Prompts**

- To understand the types of places that are important to children in their community:

  Today we are going to draw a special outdoor place. I want you to begin by thinking about a place where you like to spend time. It can be a favorite place, an exciting place, a hiding place, an exploring place, or any kind of place that is special to you. Think about what you like to do in this place and who you go there with. Think about what you see, smell, feel or remember about this place. When you are ready, you may begin to draw this place. (If the children are old enough, ask them to label the most important parts of their drawings.)

- To understand how children use or experience their local area:
In the city of Pachuca de Soto, Hidalgo, Mexico, children and adolescents participated in a project over eight months to identify issues of concern in their community, to gather information about these issues from their peers, and to develop recommendations.

Drawings were used as a means of both identifying initial concerns and as a means of evaluating what they learned as a result of the project. Initially, a group of young people in youth councils drew pictures of the issues that most concerned them in the community. These drawings were used to determine issues of interest, problems they saw in their communities, and as a means to identify a priority area of focus for further work.

From these drawings, young people identified themes of bullying and violence against children and teen pregnancy as issues they wanted to research further (Figure 5.1).

Following initial drawings, the youth council then developed questions that they would use to ask other children about their chosen topics. (See Chapter 6.) Finally, each of the team leaders reflected on their experiences. As in the beginning, they drew pictures and wrote reflections about what they had learned or how they were changed by the process of participating (Figure 5.2).

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In 2013, Boulder, Colorado and Mexico City, Mexico became part of the Rockefeller Foundation’s 100 Resilient Cities initiative to help communities around the world become more resilient to the physical, social and economic challenges cities face today. The 100 RC approach framed resilience in terms of understanding “acute shocks,” such as floods or fires, and “chronic stresses,” such as poverty and endemic violence. Growing Up Boulder and researchers in Mexico City partnered to explore children’s perceptions of resilience in the two cities using a paired participatory research approach.

As an initial way to understand children’s understanding of their city, we asked children (ages eight to ten) to draw assets and vulnerabilities at their home, school, street, neighborhood, and city scales. We defined an asset as a “valuable person, place or thing that helps you feel safe and supported” and vulnerabilities as “people, places, or things that make you feel afraid, unsafe, unsure, that make you feel exposed, open to being hurt, or that you don’t belong.”

Students generated asset and vulnerability drawings on two separate visits. At the end of each drawing session, students shared and discussed their drawings as a group. These drawings became the basis for mural collages (Figure 5.6) and a video exchange between children in the two cities. While some children focused on a single asset or vulnerability (such as in Figure 5.3), others compiled many ideas into a single drawing (Figure 5.4).


**Figure 5.3.** One student drew the flood, a natural disaster which had affected the city of Boulder two years prior, as a vulnerability. This drawing depicts aerial views of homes surrounded by water, as the child experienced during the storm. Image credit: Growing Up Boulder

**Figure 5.4.** This student drew many types of vulnerabilities, including car fumes, loud parties, dark places, and stinging bees. Image credit: Yolanda Corona Caraveo
Box 5.3. Childhood in Kentucky, 1900 to Now

As part of a project for the Kentucky Oral History Commission, a class of 8-year-olds spent a term studying Portland, their working-class district that borders the Ohio River in the west end of Louisville. Their activities included drawing, painting, and writing about their favorite local places and what they did there. At the same time, local residents from their parents’, grandparents’ and great-grandparents’ generations were interviewed about their childhood memories of Portland, and photographs were gathered that showed children in the community from the early 1900s to the present. An artist made colored illustrations of children in places that were repeatedly described in the oral histories. These illustrations were arranged in a border around a large map of the district, with the location of each place marked on the map. All of these materials were hung in a special exhibit in the Portland Museum, a local history museum, including excerpts from the oral histories and the 8-year-olds’ drawings, paintings, writings, and other products from their community study. On the opening night, the students served as exhibit guides for their families and other visitors.

Figure 5.5. Favorite childhood places in the past. Given the importance of quilting in Kentucky culture, Annette Cable, the artist who rendered older residents’ memories, assembled her illustrations like brightly colored quilt squares bordering a Portland map. Image credit: Portland Museum, Louisville, Kentucky
Today we are going to make a drawing of the area around where you live and the places where you spend most of your time, where you work, play, or go to school. I want you to include your house and your school, but everything else you draw is up to you.

- If a child is having trouble getting started:
  What about if you draw a picture of your house and the places around your house where you like to play, alone or with friends, or places where you ride a bicycle or go with friends or family?

Depending on specific project objectives, you could start with one of these prompts and then add additional details. For example, if you are interested in safe routes to school, you could add:

Now I would like you to draw [you can ask them to use a specific color—like a red pen] how you get to school [or downtown, or wherever is significant for your project]. Draw a line showing the route that you take, and write down if you walk, bike, use a scooter or skate board, drive, or take the bus. If you go more than one way, pick the route and type of travel you use most often. You may add additional details to your drawing as you think about your route to school.

Variation:
Intergenerational Drawings

One way to understand how children's use of local environments changes from generation to generation is to compare children's drawings and explanations about the places that they currently use with older generation's drawings of their childhood environmental memories. If older residents are comfortable drawing, this activity can be integrated into an oral history about their childhood engagement in their community. If people hesitate to draw, an artist can illustrate the environmental stories that they tell (Box 5.3).

Murals

Mural making serves a double purpose. It is a medium for young people to share their views and visions about their city, but creating a mural also requires deliberation and collective decision-making about what to communicate, why, and how. Mural making can serve as a contribution to the community, making young people's creativity apparent and bringing life and color to public buildings and streets.

Murals can be a collaborative method for developing ideas early in a project, or for synthesizing ideas toward the end of a project. Either way, the mural represents a summation of ideas that can be shared with others.

Ages. 4 and up.

Young people ages 12 and up may be self-conscious of their drawing abilities, which can inhibit their free participation. When working with youth, it may be helpful to enlist a professional artist who can support artistic development, which can result in a more professional product with less angst from participants.

Materials. Paper for drawing initial ideas; pencils and colored pencils; larger paper, canvas, or reclaimed materials (an old door, board, or bed-sheet) for the mural base; paints, paint brushes, and small containers to hold paints; smocks or shirts to protect clothing during painting (optional); dropcloth to protect surfaces

Time to Complete. At least three sessions of approximately 45–60 minutes
Method—Generating ideas
- Introduce the activity—tell participants what you plan to have them do and why
- Provide the materials for the activity—paper and drawing implements
- When everyone is settled with their materials and actively listening, give participants more details about what you want them to do—to make a mural that represents their ideas about why the city is (or is not) a good place for young people (or substitute a different prompt here, such as what they want to see in a new park)
- Ask each participant to draw a picture that represents their response to your question prompt
- Ask participants to share their ideas with each other. This is a collaborative process, so it is important to share ideas early so that young people who are interested in similar ideas can work synergistically
- Have a facilitator write down the key words and ideas each participant shares. If many participants respond to a particular idea, make note of this with a check mark or other notation that reflects how common an idea is.

Method—Planning the mural
- Provide the materials for this activity—the mural base (paper, canvas or other material), paints, and the drawings to be used
- Review the themes generated in the first session
- Ask participants to arrange the drawings they have made onto the mural. Ask them to reflect on the major themes that emerged from their drawings and generate groupings of pictures that reflect all participants’ ideas.
- To transfer the images to the canvas, students can cut them out, glue them to the canvas, and paint over them, or they can draw them onto the canvas. If participants desire this alternative, you can bring in an artist or design student who organizes and transfers drawings to create a cohesive and artistic representation.

Method—Painting the mural
- Depending on the amount of time you take to organize and transfer images, you can begin painting the mural on the same day or in another session.
- Lay out a dropcloth on the surface where young people will be painting
- Place the canvas on top of the dropcloth with enough room around the edges for paints
- Review the canvas to be painted—ask participants to discuss and plan out colors and a strategy for completing the mural as a group. Since not everyone may be able to paint at a single time, identify roles for everyone.
- Provide small quantities of paint at a time in small containers. When working with younger children, provide only a few colors at a time, each in its own container to avoid a mixing of all colors, which can result in a brown mural.
- When the mural is about halfway painted, have participants stand up and view the mural for a moment. Ask them to reflect on the colors, balance, and overall progress of the mural. Is there a color that is too dominant? Are all the ideas being expressed with colors and images that feel consistent with the group’s original drawings and intentions? Make any revisions or adaptations needed to keep the mural moving in a cohesive way toward completion.
- Allow time for the mural to dry in a level spot
Box 5.4. Whittier International Elementary School, City Values Mural

As part of a project to understand children’s perceptions of resilience, Growing Up Boulder engaged primary students, aged 8 to 9, in developing a mural. Before beginning the mural, school children discussed their city and identified assets and values that they felt represented their city. These values included open space and parks, care for animals, shelter for people, healthy lifestyles, education, and the arts. Once these values were identified, each student ranked the values from those that they thought were “well done” in the city to those that “need more work.”

From their individual assessments, children chose one of the values that was most important to them and drew a picture that reflected their thinking about this value and how it was, or could be, represented in the city. Project facilitators sorted the drawings and created a framework for a mural that would have four quadrants with drawings that reflected: the arts and care for animals; safe neighborhoods; healthy lifestyles, including food for the homeless; and parks and nature. The mural was ringed by Boulder’s mountains, as drawn by one student who particularly loved the mountains. After images were transferred to the canvas, students collaboratively painted the mural, with much negotiation over colors and embellishments that gave the mural character.

The completed mural (Figure 5.6) was part of a public presentation to the school board, city planning staff, and community about how to support resilience in the city. It was hung in the school for the remainder of the year. After mural completion, students conducted research and developed recommendations for how to improve those areas of the city that needed “more work.”

Variation: Intergenerational Mural Making

When elder artists come together with young people to paint murals, their creations can bridge windows into a community’s past with visions of its present and future. When the University of Colorado established a Children, Youth and...
Environments Center on its Boulder campus, the center director invited the Society for Creative Aging, a nonprofit organization formed by senior artists and volunteers, to work with children to make murals to decorate the center walls. Elder artists worked with students in two elementary schools to depict a “child friendly community”—inspired by the principle that a community that is friendly to children is also friendly to elders, and a more livable place for all ages.

The elder artists began with two sessions of activities to spark ideas:

- **Word associations/concept mapping:** To brainstorm words that describe a child-friendly community, the artists hung a large sheet of adhesive fabric on the wall and stuck headings at the top that represented different facets of community life, such as Education, Recreation, Government and Nature. Students were given strips of paper and asked to write one word for each of these themes that described what it would be like if it were child friendly, and then stick their words under each heading.
- **Tree of life:** Children painted leaves, cut them out, and wrote a word on each leaf to tell what they would like to see in a child-friendly community. The leaves were later hung in the Center.
- **Haiku writing:** After the artists gave examples of haikus, each student wrote a haiku about an element of a child-friendly community that he or she found especially important.
- **Definitions:** Each child wrote a paragraph that defined a child-friendly community.
- **Ecological footprints:** Because the children highly valued nature, the artists introduced the concept of ecological footprints. Each child was given an old sneaker and students decorated their sneakers to signify the creative steps they could take to build a more child-friendly and nature-friendly community.

After these activities, the children and artists were ready to work together to transfer their ideas into paintings. They began with individual paintings that were each fixed behind a panel of old wooden window frames to signify Windows on the World of a child-friendly community. Then they worked together to paint long strip murals and large circle murals. The circle form signified Building Bridges in communities where everything connects in the circle of life and cycle of generations. Elder artists painted their memories of favorite features of their own childhood communities, including a woman who remembered what Boulder was like for children 90 years before. Students worked in small groups to illustrate their ideas (Figure 5.7).

**Variation: Banners**

Banners can serve as portable murals that can be rolled up and taken to a variety of places. Through art stores, you can order durable canvas with grommets, which makes mounting banners and taking them down easy. Places that can be enlivened by children’s banners are only limited by the imagination.
Box 5.5. Lily Yeh’s Participatory Mural Making at the Dandelion School

In her book *Awakening Creativity: Dandelion School Blossoms*, Lily Yeh describes her evolution as an artist, and how she came to integrate children into participatory mural making, from inner-city transformations of vacant lots in north Philadelphia to her work with the Dandelion School in the outskirts of Beijing, China. This school primarily served the children of a “floating” population of migrant workers. Her initial workshops focused on drawing and writing in which students told stories about themselves, and the emotional burdens they bear from economic inequities and the family stresses that result.

During her first two years of working with the school, Yeh conceived of the Transformation Project which sought to beautify the campus but also “to raise issues such as identity, self-empowerment, democracy, and equality” (p. 51). The Transformation Project engaged the whole school community, including students, teachers, staff, and volunteers, over five years. Her process began slowly, providing a space for freedom of expression, sharing of ideas, and cultivating a sense of hope. In her first year, she held a series of workshops:

1. **Listening.** Through a school-wide meeting, Lily Yeh introduced the project and asked students what they would like to see on their campus, what they thought would add beauty. Their resounding response was for nature in its many forms.

2. **Workshop for teachers.** Teachers in Beijing, like many parts of the world, work long hours and are under pressure to meet performance standards. Yeh’s aim for the teacher workshop was to create a relaxing, participatory, and fun environment. In these workshops, teachers created murals with paper-cuts, drawing from the Chinese folk art tradition.

3. **Workshop for students.** Yeh conducted a series of workshops with students as well. She asked students to discuss their thoughts and feelings of the moment and then to transfer these feelings onto paper, using paper-cuts, ink, and watercolors.

4. **Painting big and painting together.** In this phase, students made large paintings on reclaimed bed sheets. They painted their own silhouettes and added details of stars, plants, and abstract patterns.

Subsequent years built on these workshops and generated exhibitions of student’s drawings, personal stories, and a “moving assignment” to connect students with their parents. Only then did she move into site design workshops. Through a series of additional workshops, students and teachers designed mosaic murals and a large scale Dandelion Tree of Life. Over time, the entire school campus was transformed by the school community’s artwork, a whimsical mixing of mosaic tile and painted murals.

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When Growing Up Boulder began, participants were asked to identify city issues that they wanted to work on and they divided into action teams. Middle school students wanted to make young people’s presence in the city more visible through public art that children and youth created. As a beginning, they created a series of banners that depicted their visions for a child-friendly city. Over the years, the banners hung at a large festival in a city park, the city art museum, schools, and a meeting for the city’s comprehensive planning process.
Children’s banners can also be printed on public service signs in public transport. A third grade class of English language learners in Boulder spent a fall term evaluating the “Hop,” a bus line that winds its way through downtown streets and shopping areas, stopping close to their school. One of their recommendations was to add art that would make the bus ride more engaging for children. During the spring term, they worked with an artist to create a linear banner of iconic city places along the Hop line, with bunnies half hidden throughout the picture. Printed as a public service sign, the banner adds whimsy and color to Hop buses and gives young children the challenge of finding all the bunnies. (See Chapter 8 for more information on this project.)

Collage

Collage is an assemblage of objects to create an image. It can be made of anything that catches an artist’s eye that can be adhered to a surface, often combined with drawing, painting, and words.

Box 5.6. Collage and Cutouts to Engage Children in Participatory Budgeting

With Omayra Rivera Crespo
And Yazmín M. Crespo Claudio

In 2014, participatory budgeting was introduced in San Juan, Puerto Rico. In this process, citizens directly decide how to spend part of a public budget. The San Juan process included an assembly, several meetings of a Committee of Delegates who represented residents of the community, a presentation of projects that citizens wanted to see the city finance, and voting on priorities. The meetings could last for several hours as people discussed their points of view, made comparative tables, and debated the pros and cons of potential projects. As the process unfolded, the architectural collective taller Creando Sin Encargos (tCSE) recognized that a more dynamic and visual process was needed.

To engage children and understand their point of view, taller Creando Sin Encargos helped children and other members of the community create large collages composed of text and images taken from magazines and the internet to represent their visions for each project under consideration for participatory budgeting (Figure 5.8).

For example, if a group wanted a community center for different activities, they made a collage of people of all ages performing, participating in art workshops, doing exercises, or having a celebration. If they wanted a garden, they glued together images of people planting tropical vegetables and fruits. With this approach, children could also explain the benefits of each project that they envisioned.

In 2015, participatory budgeting was implemented again, in a large community of San Juan named Río Piedras. This time the organizers used collage as a tool from the beginning in order to...
include more children. A few university graduates from architecture and engineering were hired as a Technical Committee to develop participatory methods using images. They prepared boards with maps of existing areas or basic architectural plans, along with cutouts of urban furniture and play areas. Children created collages of what they wanted to see in each area. For example, if they wanted swings in a future park, trees, a sitting area, and a gazebo for informal meetings, then they glued these illustrations where they thought they should be located on the board. Members of the TCSE collective found that asking the children to focus on well-defined areas helped them pay attention to physical characteristics of the environment and issues like density, and generate specific ideas.

Collages can be made with many purposes. The nicho boxes featured in Figures 5.11-5.12 later in this chapter are a form of 3-D collage, created in this case for children to express their identity and culture that they would like to see represented in their city’s Civic Area. In the Phila Impilo project featured in Chapter 11, children in a hospital created collages to express their sources of strength and resilience. In Box 5.6, young people created collages as part of a larger process of participatory budgeting to express their priorities for budget spending. (For more information about participatory budgeting, see Chapter 8).

When all the objects are gathered from one place, it can represent a locale, or children’s journey through a space as they pick up objects along the way: for example, a tracing of a leaf from a tree, a feather, a candy wrapper from a purchase at a snack stand, a word from a sign, shiny paper from street litter, and a selfie snapped with friends along the way. Collages can also be made with cutouts from magazines or children’s own drawings. They can also be assembled digitally.

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They also wrote and drew directly on the boards. Members of the TCSE collective found that asking the children to focus on well-defined areas helped them pay attention to physical characteristics of the environment and issues like density, and generate specific ideas.

Based on the collage boards, the Technical Committee made several 3D drawings so that the children could see different possible results of their proposals and choose the best one. On the day when citizens voted, the boards for different projects were presented together with the 3D drawings. In this way, children felt that the project proposals represented their intentions and not ideas imposed by the city administration.
Nicho Boxes

Nicho boxes are multimedia art boxes inspired by wall niches common to Southwestern architecture, termed nichos, and Latin American folk art. Like a personal shadow box, each nicho contains small objects like pictures, symbols, figurines, writing, and anything else that expresses a person’s identity and culture. Children can create nicho boxes to express their relationship to a place, or what is important to them in their environment.

Ages. six and up

Materials. shoe boxes or cigar boxes; spray paint; multipurpose glue; glue gun for hot glue; magazines and other sources of images to cut out; construction paper; markers; small objects that children bring from home because they find them personally significant but that they are willing to leave in the box. You can save time and mess by spray-painting the boxes in advance. If you don’t want to use spray paint, children can glue a covering of colored paper all over their box. Shoe stores and cigar vendors will often donate boxes.

Time to Complete. One to two sessions of approximately 30–45 minutes

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This particular adaptation of nicho boxes was developed by Growing Up Boulder as a culturally-responsive way for children to express what was important to them about their city, as a first point of engagement for a much larger public space planning process.1 Children, ages 8–9, were asked to consider, “Who am I? What do I love? What would I like in the city that reflects my identity, family and culture?” Parent volunteers collected enough shoeboxes for every child and spray-painted them in solid colors in advance. Children were provided a range of materials including fabric flowers and small animal figurines and children were encouraged to bring their own items from home.

1. Victoria Derr and Emily Tarantini, “‘Because we are all people:’ Outcomes and reflections from young people’s participation in the planning and design of child-friendly public spaces.” Local Environment: International Journal of Justice and Sustainability 21, no. 12 (2016): 1534–1556.
Method: Generating ideas and assembling objects

- Introduce the activity—explain what nicho boxes are and how participants can use them to express their identity and what is meaningful to them in their environment.
- Provide a prompt question. Give participants time to think about how they want to represent themselves and what matters to them, relative to the prompt. Give them time to write down ideas, or make a list with assistance if they are still learning to write.
- Provide objects that participants can select to begin to construct their boxes, such as construction paper in different colors, magazines or other sources of images that they can cut out. Participants store this material with their box until they are ready to assemble everything.
- Encourage participants to look for other objects at home or in their environment that they want to add. These can include natural objects, little figurines of people or animals, photographs—anything that they find meaningful to express themselves and their relationship to their environment.

Constructing and explaining the boxes

- Participants arrange the images and objects in their boxes and glue them down. Multi-purpose glue will work for light pieces like paper and photographs. Young children may need adult help with a glue gun to secure heavier pieces like figurines, branches or stones.
- Each child writes a few sentences describing their box and why its objects are significant for them. They print out their descriptions and mount them on their boxes. Some participants glue the description on the top or side of their box. Some hang them on the box like a sign.

Sharing with community members and decision-makers

- Participants share their boxes and their meaning. They can do this just among themselves, or it can be at a public event with parents, city staff and other city leaders invited. When there are many participants, the boxes can be displayed around the room with the creators beside their boxes, ready to explain their work and answer questions as visitors rotate around the room.

Box 5.8. Nicho Box to Support Children’s Long-Term Health Care

As part of the Phila Impilo! program for children in long-term hospital care in Durban, South Africa, children created simple nicho boxes by pasting a pocket mirror inside a cardboard box and drawing valued people and objects in their lives around it. (For more information about this program, see Chapter 11).

Figure 5.12. Identity drawing with mirror: This boy said that his box showed “that children are important here on earth. You can place important things in your life around you. This reminds you of who you are despite your illness.” Photo credit: Monde Magida
Placemaking with Children and Youth

Nicho boxes make colorful, intriguing displays for a public place like a library, local art museum, recreation center, school lobby, or hospital (Figure 5.11).

Photographic Methods

Expressing, observing, dreaming—photography is an effective tool for facilitating a range of purposes. This section describes methods and examples of two photographic applications: photovoice and photo-drawing. Other uses of photography that emphasize information gathering, evaluation and discussion are photoelicitation in Chapter 6, and photo-framing and photogrids in Chapter 7. There is no firm line, however, between photography as an artistic medium and as a tool for documentation and evaluation. Encourage young people to explore how they can bring their artistic vision into all of these approaches.

While each method varies in its applications and potential, participatory photography provides some consistent benefits:

- Many people are familiar with cameras, or can learn to use simple ones fairly quickly. Cameras do not require the ability to read, write, or speak a certain language fluently—they can thus equalize participation for some who would otherwise be marginalized, such as English language learners in the United States context.
- It is a useful tool early on in participatory processes, to develop young people’s thinking about a particular place.
- It helps practitioners understand young people’s perspectives.
- It provides a visual record that communicates to a variety of audiences at multiple points of a project (from idea generation to project presentations or sharing beyond the life of a project).
- The portability of cameras (and ubiquity of cell phones in many parts of the world) expands the possibilities for this method to include multiple times of day, individual experiences, or otherwise private aspects of experience.
- Photography can help people “see” familiar places in a new way, and through images, to develop an expanded sense of a place and its meaning or function.

Photovoice

Photovoice is a method for visually describing places and experiences. Photovoice has a rich history in both public health and urban planning, as it supports participation among community members who may not have previous experience expressing their views. With its roots in participatory methods in documentary photography, photovoice emerged in the 1990s from public health assessments with women in China and from Growing Up in Cities’ participatory planning with young people. As Caroline Wang and Mary Ann Burris describe it, photovoice seeks to enable people to record their community’s strengths and express concerns, promote critical dialogue through small and large group discussion of the photographs, and reach policy- and decision-makers.

Taking pictures is a relatively safe means of beginning to communicate ideas. It helps establish trust and validate ideas, which can lead to enriched discussions and more open sharing than might otherwise happen. It can be used.

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10. Wang and Burris, “Photovoice”
as a relatively quick assessment of an area, as a first entry into a proposed project space or public place, and to capture first impressions and ideas. The method has been particularly effective with youth as it provides a mode of creative expression and helps facilitate dialogue. Photovoice can help expand the conversation from youth peer groups to the entire community, through exhibits that invite a larger community of participants.\textsuperscript{11}

This method may be used when young people are together as a group—for example, taking pictures on a walking tour outside their school, visiting a public space, or walking in their neighborhood. It can also be varied so that young people take pictures independently at their homes, neighborhoods, or city spaces. The method described here is for facilitating photovoice within a group setting. Variations are given for independent photography.

\textbf{Ages.} six and up

\textbf{Materials.} Hand held cameras (digital, 35 mm, phones or tablets); data sheet, clipboard and pencils (optional); some way to view and share images (projector, computer, printed images); a white board, chalk board, or paper to record ideas during the photograph discussions.

\textbf{Time to Complete.} At least 45 minutes (if digital images). Ideally completed in a minimum of two sessions—one or more for taking photographs, and at least one for discussion

\textbf{Method—Getting set up and taking pictures}

- Introduce the activity—what you plan to do and why
- Make sure that everyone knows how to use the cameras. At a minimum you should cover how to turn on the camera, zoom in and out, use a flash, and snap the picture.

\textbf{Processing pictures and facilitating discussion}

- After photographs have been taken, you can upload them for discussion immediately or you can take them to an office or photo lab to upload and organize for a discussion in a separate session.
- Project or print the images so that all participants can view them
- To facilitate discussion, you can choose whether to have students write short descriptions about each photograph (or refer to a data sheet if they used one), ask students to respond to written prompts, or ask each photographer to explain their photographs verbally (Box 5.9).
- Potential prompts, whether oral or written, include: Why did you take this picture? What do you like or dislike in this picture? Why is this important to you? (See Box 5.9 for additional prompts.)

\textsuperscript{11} Driskell, Creating Better Cities with Children and Youth.
Youth Services Initiative (YSI) is an after-school program run by the City of Boulder's Parks and Recreation Department for children and youth who live in public housing. The majority (95 percent or more) are Latino and many are immigrants. At a planning meeting for a participatory project to redevelop a public space, the leader of YSI expressed concern that youth in her program might not connect with a redesign project when they were concerned about issues such as food and housing scarcity or deportation of family members. YSI youth had said that they were interested in learning photography, and so a new project was developed to understand these youths' experience of the city more broadly.

In this project, young people worked with a professional photographer and undergraduate design student over a ten-week period. The first few lessons were focused on principles and practices of photography, in which youth learned about composition and perspective. They took photographs outside their meeting center from both "worm's eye" and "bird's eye" views. As the project progressed, young people went to public spaces and photographed nature and their friends. In the last weeks of the project, youth took cameras home and photographed their families, friends, houses, and neighborhoods.

To add "voice" to the project, youth responded to a number of written prompts, including:

"From ______ to ______, I come from ______."
"If I could change one thing about the world, it would be ______."
Or simply: "I wish ______."

One participant took a picture of her sister wrapped in a Libyan flag and wrote "From riding horses to hiking mountains, visiting Africa and smelling spices, I come from Libya." Another took pictures of her open refrigerator and food cooking on her stove and wrote "We need to make sure our refrigerator is always full, so we can feel normal." Another took a picture of his friend, Jesus, and wrote, "If I could change one thing about the world, it would be the way that people in the U.S. treat immigrants—they should be nicer and more accepting of us. They kick us out, tell us mean stuff, and all we are trying to do is have a better life here."

Photographs and words were printed and then mounted on foam boards. The main exhibition was at a recreation center that hosted approximately 1,500 visitors per day. Many visitors stated that they "had no idea" how some of Boulder's youth lived, and some called the recreation department after the exhibit to express their interest and pleasure in learning more through this venue. While many of the photographs caught visitors' attention, it was often the words that conveyed the most. Youth exhibited a sense of pride in their accomplishments as well as a truly being seen and heard.

Two years after project completion, the photographs were again exhibited and presented at a county-wide immigration summit, whose aim was to deepen community understanding of the immigrant experience in Boulder County.1

As participants share their ideas, write them on a white board, chalkboard, or large paper so that everyone can see them. When ideas are repeated, place a check next to that idea to indicate the number of participants who share that idea.

Like the drawing method, if there is time, you might also want to ask participants to respond to what they heard their peers say—ways that they connected with other people's thinking. This helps build connections among the group and also helps facilitators understand how salient, or significant, certain ideas are among the group.

These themes and ideas can be translated into an action plan (Box 5.9) or to recommendations made directly to city leaders and community members (Box 5.9 and 5.10).

**Sharing with community members and decision-makers**

Depending on the context of your project, you may invite community members and decision makers to the discussion described above, or you may wish to display images in a public venue. This could be a gallery-like exhibit (Box 5.9) or at a community event (Box 5.10). The photographic displays can help catalyze communication.

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**Box 5.10. Photovoice as a Tool to Promote Environmental Health and Leadership among Farmworker Families in Salinas, California**

The City of Salinas, California is home to many migrant farmworkers who contribute to the extensive agricultural production of the Salinas Valley. Farmworker families live in substandard housing with poor access to healthy foods or safe places to play. Researchers and health workers partnered with the Youth Community Council (YCC) in Salinas to employ photovoice as a means to explore environmental health issues that many farmworker families experience in the field and in their home environments. Sixteen Latino youth, aged 14–18, participated in twelve photovoice sessions held on Saturdays at the public library. The youth took pictures independently, with the instruction to take pictures of environmental health issues, including what they perceived as “problems” and “assets” in their community.

In full group sessions, youth identified common themes and issues from all the photographs. Then, each youth selected one picture that they wanted to highlight. Adult researchers facilitated discussion using the “SHOWeD” technique that asks: “What do you **See** in this picture?” “What’s really **Happening** here?” “How does this relate to **Our lives**?” “**Why** is this happening?” and “What can we **Do** about it?” Each participant wrote narratives for his or her chosen photograph in response to the SHOWeD questions.

The YCC members shared their pictures and narratives with community leaders and at public venues and events, including a local library and a regional health event. They also developed an action plan for two projects to address environmental health issues they had identified. One of these plans resulted in a 5K Run/Walk to address the lack of safe walking and biking spaces, as well as further recommendations for bike lanes and routes. A second plan developed a recycling program at their local high school, with the intent of eventually scaling it up to the school district.1

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between young people and other community members. As adults look at pictures, they naturally ask questions that the young people can respond to. This helps ease any communication barriers that may exist between age groups (Figure 5.13).

**Photovoice implementation with young children**

It may be challenging for younger children to juggle the camera, data sheets, and frames (if used, see below). It can be helpful to have adult or youth assistants who can carry materials and facilitate the picture taking. Older assistants can be responsible for recording ideas on data sheets. If taking pictures in an urban environment, they should also be responsible for watching traffic. Children are enthusiastic photographers and can forget that streets and intersections can be risky.

**Photo-Drawing**

This method allows children to express their ideas and visions for a place through images. It can be used with all ages, but the variation described here is designed to give young children freedom to play and physically experience a place, while adults make observations and take photographs of the places where they are playing. Then, using print images of the photographs, children can draw on top of the image to develop and share ideas for how to improve a space. This method is effective with young children because it lets them explore a site firsthand, without having to step out from the play realm to take photographs. It can be useful for facilitating young children’s participation in parks planning or safe routes to school.\(^{12}\)

**Ages.** four to six

**Materials.** Hand-held cameras (digital, phones, or tablets); access to computer and printer; colored markers; clipboards or phone for taking notes. For this method, it is helpful to have a minimum of two adult facilitators—one responsible for taking photographs and another who records children’s ideas, activities, and responses to the sites they explore.

If using a 35 mm camera, you will need: 35 mm camera; film; access to photography lab; tracing paper; colored pencils or markers, as well as note taking materials.

**Time to Complete.** At least two 45-minute sessions—one (or more) for taking photographs, and one for drawing and discussion. Ideally, the two sessions should be close together in time, with no more than a week between the site play and the discussion.

**Method—Taking pictures**

- Introduce the activity—what you plan to do and why
- Collect the cameras, any film, and note-taking materials
- Take children to the site you want them to explore—this could be a neighborhood street, a park, or a vacant lot. Give children time and permission to explore the space. If you have a small group of four or five, you can give each child a turn to be the “play leader” who chooses a spot where everyone plays for ten minutes . . . and then it is another child’s turn to move the group to a new space. This is a good way to cover a territory based on children’s curiosities and attractions.
- As adult facilitators, observe children’s play. Simply watch—providing for children’s safety but otherwise with no interventions. Take photographs of the spaces children interact with. Make notes about

what children say and do in the different spaces.

- At the end of the allotted playtime, ask children to share what they enjoyed about the space and if there is anything they would change or add to make the space more enjoyable. Make notes.

**Method—Photo Processing**

- Between sessions, upload digital photographs to a computer.
- Process the images so that they are at about 40–50 percent saturation. You can make these adjustments in a wide range of photo image processing software, from Microsoft Office\(^\text{13}\) to Adobe Creative Suites. You want to lighten the image so children can draw on top of the image while maintaining the elements of the original image as background (Figure 5.14).
- Print each image on paper approximately 8.5 x 11 inches.
- If you are using 35 mm film, print each photograph as 8 x 10 inch prints; tape tracing paper to the top of each picture so that children can look underneath but draw on the tracing paper for their modifications.

**Method—Photo Drawing**

- When images are ready, compile your materials—this should include the printed images, colored markers, and notes
- First review the pictures with children. Ask children what they remember about playing in this space. Use your notes for prompts to help them remember.
- Ask children to generate ideas about how they want to change or improve the space. Use your notes to prompt them.
- Give children print images to draw on. As they draw, record their ideas.
- Have each child share his/her drawings and ideas.
- Ask children to make connections to ideas they liked from other drawings.
- As a final step, you can scan these images and annotate them with the children's words.

**Storytelling and Writing**

Storytelling has a rich tradition in cultures around the world. For many cultures, storytelling remains an important means of understanding who we are in relation to the larger world. Stories can also provide a context for discussing complex social issues, including those related to social justice, environmental degradation, or resilience.\(^\text{14}\)

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\(^{13}\) In Microsoft Office, select the image you are modifying, click on Picture Tools, click on Color and select a Recolor option that is sufficiently light for children to draw on top.

\(^{14}\) Sarah Fletcher, Robin S. Cox, Leila Scannell, Cheryl Heykoop, Jennifer Tobin-Gurley and Lori Peek, “Youth creating disaster recovery and resilience: A multi-site arts based youth
Box 5.11. River of Words—International Art and Poetry Contest

Founded in 1995 by writer and activist Pamela Michael and then-U.S. Poet Laureate Robert Hass, River of Words was conceived as a way to provide tools and training for educators and after-school programs to support ecoliteracy through poetry and the arts. The program hosts an international art and poetry contest for young people ages 5–19.

There are many ways that communities have adapted River of Words to a local context. In one example, River of Words joined with the San Francisco Estuary Partnership to create the One Square Block Contest for students from twelve counties in the Bay Area to explore their immediate surroundings and to develop art and poetry that reflects their natural, built, and cultural environments.

River of Words is housed in the Center for Ecoliteracy at Saint Mary’s College in California. Submission to the contest is free, and the website archives many of the resources that might inspire others to explore poetry and art as an entry point for young people to explore their surroundings.

https://www.stmarys-ca.edu/center-for-environmental-literacy/river-of-words

Box 5.12. Collaborative Book Writing

Collaborative book writing has been used as a method in many parts of Latin America to engage children in storytelling about the places where they live and to share their experiences with other children. In the example below, each child wrote a story about their travels to parks, the countryside, and other special places. The stories were compiled into a book with cardboard binding. These books contribute children’s voices to local libraries and are used as a means for children to share their experiences with each other and with adults in communities with few resources. Termed Libros Cartoneros (roughly translated as cardboard book makers, in reference to the children who construct the books with reclaimed materials), this method is used widely in Mexico and other parts of Latin America to promote indigenous cultures and education.1

1. The text Libros Cartoneros: Una Alternativa para la Integración a la Cultura Escrita by Eleuterio Olarte Tiburcio and Juana Zacarías Candelario provides additional examples of these books and discussion about how this approach has been used. Dirección General de Educación Indígena de la SEP. http://www.educacionyculturaaz.com/articulos-az/libros-cartoneros-una-alternativa-para-la-integracion-a-la-cultura-escrita. (Retrieved September 25, 2017).
Many approaches support storytelling in participatory practice. These include the reading of published stories, oral history or storytelling from adults, and the making of personal stories. This section focuses on methods that enhance young people’s creation of personal stories and help others understand young people’s perspectives and experiences. Stories can be powerful as tools for imagining desired futures and narrating heroic journeys through fears or challenges that young people face.15


Box 5.13. I Know the River Loves Me, I Know Salinas Loves Me

In the picture book, *I Know the River Loves Me*, by Maya Christina Gonzalez, the river is a place of comfort, of a young girl finding her own identity in relationship to nature.1

This story was used to facilitate lessons in East Salinas with second grade children, ages 6–7, who are primarily of Mexican descent. While East Salinas is often characterized by its problems and challenges rather than its culture and assets, the ethos of this project was to help children think about their community as a place where they are supported and connected.

Constructed in three phases, the project was developed between university faculty, university students, and an elementary school teacher. In the first phase, children were introduced to isolated images from the book *I Know the River Loves Me* through a gallery walk. The picture book shows a young girl traveling to the river with her backpack. Children were asked to observe the drawings and to describe the feelings evoked through the drawings. Then children read the book as a class and discussed how the river represented a place of potential calm, health, and trust for the girl in the story.

Children were then asked to move from thinking about the book *Know the River Loves Me* to constructing their own stories for how *I Know Salinas Loves Me*. Mirroring the image of the girl in the backpack, each child took a picture of him or herself in Salinas in response to the prompt: “I know Salinas loves me because . . .” Children used these neighborhood photographs—of themselves at the library, a park, a church—to discuss how Salinas can also be a place of support and comfort.

In the final phase of this project, children moved from the city to the family, developing Mothers’ Day cards that expressed how “I know my mother loves me . . .” The project represents a means of integrating storytelling and art in order to support children’s emerging identity with their family and community. In this way, children begin to understand that love represents taking care of somebody, or some place.2

2. This project was developed by Dr. Miguel Lopez at California State University Monterey Bay, in partnership with service learning students and teacher Evelyn Mesa. Personal communication between Miguel Lopez and Victoria Derr.
Stories can be used to understand a wide range of topics, such as understanding how young people experience their city (Boxes 5.11–5.16), how they think about social justice (Boxes 5.16–5.17), what transportation is like in a city (Box 5.14), or how they respond to a natural disaster (Box 5.19). Means of storytelling range from poetry (Box 5.11) to storybooks (Box 5.12) and comics (Box 5.14), to letter exchanges between children in different cities (Box 5.15), and music videos (Box 5.16).

**Box 5.14. Youth Voices for Change**

Youth Voices for Change is a long-term engagement program out of the University of California, Davis, that provides skills and training to a multi-racial coalition of youth in West Sacramento, California, so that they can develop and articulate their community vision. The youth group “Sactown Heroes” participated in Youth Voices for Change by identifying likes and dislikes in their community and sharing their thoughts and ideas through a comic book format. As a collaborative project between youth and adults, the comic book portrays “favorite” and “challenging” places with pictures and call-out boxes. In the layout, the comic book style thought bubbles represented youth ideas, and square text boxes represented summary captions written by adults with youth input.1

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Box 5.15. Letter Writing as a Means of Sharing Young People’s Experiences of the City

Article 13 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child provides for freedom of expression, including the right to share information in ways children choose, such as through drawing or writing. Many participatory projects provide a means to both reflect on existing conditions of the city and to imagine a desired future city. Letter writing is a way to engage children with others, in a dialogue that bridges places, and to authentically consider the place where they live. It is also a way for young people to reflect on their city—how they experience it currently, and what they would like it to be.

Letter writing emerged as a method in Mexico as a means for indigenous children to share their experiences with other indigenous children. Rooted in anthropological and linguistic methods, the process seeks to achieve educational as well as participatory goals. Yolanda Corona and her colleagues extended this work to children in different towns and cities, as a way for them to share their experiences of living in the city with others. The method integrates both letter writing and drawing, typically with children between the ages of eight and eleven. Children exchange a series of letters so that they can develop a relationship with each other.

Through children’s exchanges between Tepoztlán and Cuernavaca, Mexico as well as between Tepoztlán and Mexico City, Dr. Corona and her colleagues have found that children more readily share their experience of the city when they are writing to other children. They show a sense of intimacy, immediacy, and enjoyment with the exchanges.

In Dr. Corona’s most recent project, children from schools in two places—Tepoztlán, Mexico and the megacity Mexico City—wrote letters to each other.

Figure 5.17. Children in Mexico City wrote to children in Tepoztlán, sharing their experiences of the city. In this letter, the child says that in her neighborhood, Coyocán, there is much air pollution because of cars but there are also trees. The child says she would like to change the world, “but how?” She asks if there are many cars where her pen-friend lives. Image credit: Yolanda Corona Caraveo

Figure 5.18. Letter exchange from Tepoztlán child to Mexico City children. In this letter the child from Tepoztlán says she likes to play with her dolls, she has many friends, and she likes to sing a lot. Image credit: Yolanda Corona Caraveo

(Box 5.15 continued on the next page)
other to share experiences that children have had with nature. Children’s experiences primarily showed great differences between the two places, with children in Mexico City describing tall buildings, high volumes of traffic and pollution (Figures 5.17 and 5.18). The Mexico City children wrote that the children of Tepoztlán are lucky because they get to live with nature as a part of their homes. Many Mexico City children described only being able to experience nature when they leave the city, to vacation destinations such as Acapulco.

Letter writing is an inviting and simple means to achieve child-to-child exchanges and provide a forum for young people to share their experiences and learn from others, as they consider the place where they live.1


Box 5.16. Using Music Video to Spread the Word: Youth Becoming Flood Resilient Citizen Scientists with Dr. Merrie Koester, University of South Carolina Center for Science Education

Gadsden Creek was historically a place of swimming and recreation and a vital habitat for many marine plants and animals. Over time, much of the creek was filled in with trash and debris, and then paved over for development.

As a result, vital ecosystem services were lost, and the housing project area has been experiencing severe flooding, especially during high tides (Figure 5.19). Sea level rise is making matters even worse. The most common sign near the school is a ROAD CLOSED sign.

Dr. Merrie Koester, a science and arts integration specialist, employed principles of place-based learning to position students as resources of knowledge about flooding and development impacts on their community. With significant support from community artists, stormwater engineers, climate scientists, environmental justice specialists, and city officials, students learned about the marsh ecosystem, its history and development, moon phase and tide relationships and then developed artistic digital media competencies to share their knowledge and perspectives at a community event.

Figure 5.19. The Gadsden Creek context for a music video about development and environmental racism. Photo credit: Jared Bramblett

In many cultures and traditions, music is a form of storytelling used to transmit knowledge and experience. In the urban hip hop culture, rap music often conveys stories of profoundly unbalanced systems in the world. Working with Dr. Merrie Koester of the University of South Carolina Center for Science Education and a team of community mentors in Charleston, South Carolina, a class of eighth-grade African American students, ages 13–14, from Charleston Development Academy explored the causes of flooding in their neighborhood, a public housing site built adjacent to what was once a thriving tidal creek.
The short music video shows the students moving out of their school into the marsh. They rap about the degradation of Gadsden Creek and the ecological and social consequences that come from ignoring nature. They describe the natural cycles of the tides:

“Hi-Lo, Do Re Neap
All these tides are flooding our streets.
Spring, King, not the same thing.
It all depends on the moon’s swing . . .”

And their goals for their neighborhood:

“. . . We’re on a mission—
Not asking for permission.
Find a solution for our city’s evolution
Gadsden Creek is filled with trash.
Now the flooding is a pain in the
A5-phalt . . .”

Through their music, they express their concerns for wildlife and their hopes for a better solution than continuing to develop the tidal creek and wetlands. Youth shared this video at a large community gathering and called for the developers to consider green infrastructure and a reduction in impervious surfacing in their current plans, garnering support from the city’s stormwater engineer along the way.1


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Digital Stories

Some youth express preferences for sharing their ideas in digital media.16 Digital stories move storytelling into a digital process that can be used in face-to-face groups or shared across time and space. A wide range of programs support digital stories, including the Center for Digital Storytelling.17 Its director, Joe Lambert, has developed an excellent resource on digital storytelling methods.18 He describes approaches to facilitate a wide range of stories including reflection, intergenerational connection, identity, and activism. Here we provide simple methods that can be helpful in engaging young people in urban planning processes.

There are three basic steps to the digital storytelling process: create a narrative, take or compile pictures that reflect this narrative, discuss and collate into a digital story. Digital stories can be developed from a series of photographs (still images) or from video or film. The images are compiled in a sequence with the narrator telling his or her story. The end product is a personal story that is told digitally.

Ages. 10 and up

Materials. Existing photographs; cameras or video recording technology; computers with
Box 5.17. Youth FACE IT, Digital Stories

The Youth FACE IT (Youth Fostering Active Community Engagement for Integration and Transformation) was a program of Boulder County, Colorado. The program was designed to engage Latino youth in critical dialogue and paired university mentors with Latino high school students to create multimedia narratives. The primary methods for this work were photovoice and digital storytelling. The combination of photovoice with digital storytelling allowed youth to reflect both on their lived experiences (through photovoice) and then to reflect on their photographs (through digital storytelling).

These methods were important for Latino youth who live in a predominately non-Latino community, to express their identities and struggles within their community. Like the photovoice project with Salinas youth (Box 5.10), youth used the SHOWeD method to discuss their pictures. After discussing the photos, youth wrote captions for their pictures and chose those that conveyed important meanings. These then made their way into the digital storytelling process, and were shared with city leaders.

While many Latino youth generally want the same types of things for their communities—places to hang out with friends, youth-oriented activities, and safe public spaces—they also want places where they feel included and welcome, not discriminated against because of their ethnicity. The photovoice and digital storytelling processes allowed the expression of all these ideas.


Method—Creating a narrative

• Introduce the method and what participants will be doing
• Provide prompts for youth. Prompts that ask participants to reflect on their city, neighborhood, or other parts of the physical environment can include: What do you like about your city? What about your city is friendly and supportive to you? What can the city do so that it is a better place for young people?
• Provide materials and instructions for youth to take photographs (see Photovoice instructions, this Chapter). Or, ask students to compile existing photographs that represent these ideas. Or compile a collection of both.
• Taking photographs and identifying images that will reflect a personal response to the prompts are part of the process for constructing a narrative.
• Youth can share with facilitators and each other the photographs that they take, with prompts such as: What does this picture show? How does this picture reflect [what you like about your city]?19 Is there anything you could change to make this place better? Is there anything the city could do?

Prompts can ask young people to reflect on both the positive and negative aspects of their community, as they think about what they would like to celebrate and maintain, or change.

19. Change the text in brackets to reflect the prompts that you are using.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shot #1</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Description/Dialogue (Insert what you will say about Shot #1 here):</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Shot #2</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Description/Dialogue (Insert what you will say about Shot #2 here):</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shot #3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Description/Dialogue (Insert what you will say about Shot #3 here):</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shot #4</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Description/Dialogue (Insert what you will say about Shot #4 here):</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Method—Compile Images and Narrative**

- Once youth share their stories, ask each student to create a storyboard. A storyboard is a sequence of images and words that show the progression of the story planned for a film or video. Participants can hand sketch these ideas onto frames or notecards that represent the sequence of ideas they will share in their digital story.

- It may be that participants think of additional pictures they will need or want to include to complete their digital story. For example, one digital story showed a candle burning as a way to represent a change or transformation in the young girl’s life. The participant and facilitator should make a plan for compiling these extra images.

- When the storyboard is complete, it should reflect a basic outline of the images and ideas that will be conveyed.

**Method—Create the Digital Story**

- Once the storyboard is completed, participants can begin to create their own digital
stories using movie-maker software. While the specifics will vary by software program, the process should include the following steps:

• Upload and process all images
• Generate the text that will become subtitles for the story
• Record the storyline
• Find and download any royalty free music that will be used as background
• Assemble and edit the digital story

Sharing with community members and decision makers

When all participants have developed their stories, host a venue to share the stories with others. This can be through a gathering with school or city leaders, a film shorts festival open to the community, and/or a virtual sharing of stories on the internet. Growing Up Boulder, for example, scheduled a special evening with city council members that began with a screening of young teens’ digital stories. Most of the storytellers and some of their family members were present. The stories prompted councilors to ask questions, and opened up conversations with the young people about their experiences. Facilitators needed to mediate the evening to ensure that young people felt appreciated and that they understood the councilors’ questions as invitations to a discussion—not a cross-examination. (See Chapter 8 for other examples for sharing projects.)

Participatory Video

Participatory Video began in the 1960s as a means of facilitating dialogue between community members and government officials. Participatory video enables collaboration as many participants can shape a story, contribute with different skills, and share in knowledge generation. Like many of the participatory methods described in this chapter, the process of generating the film contributes to social change more than the physical product. Participatory video has been used in a wide range of contexts including environmental and public health, social action, safe schools, parks planning and youth identity. It has also been employed widely in the context of international development. Because filmmaking requires a certain degree of training, participatory video can empower youth by giving them skills in documentary methods as well as developing their capacity to speak up as active citizens.

The steps to creating participatory videos are similar to digital stories. Because of the additional filmmaking skills required, the process is typically implemented over the course of a week-long intensive workshop or over a full year. No matter the time allotted, participatory video requires identification of facilitators with the skills and resources to teach filmmaking. Lunch and Lunch have written an accessible guide to participatory video, and an increasing number of websites share these processes for working with youth.

25. Lunch and Lunch, Insights into Participatory Video.
Box 5.18. Lens on Climate Change

The Lens on Climate Change (LOCC) project, developed by the Cooperative Institute for Research in Environmental Sciences (CIRES) at the University of Colorado, Boulder, engaged youth in developing short films that explore the effects of climate change on young people’s lives and communities. Film topics varied—from “Eco-Warriors” who demonstrate the pitfalls of poor environmental behaviors in the home, to “Coyote and the Drought,” which builds on Navajo stories to tell the tale of area lakes drying up in the Southwest U.S. All shared common ground in using humor to address a dire issue, valuing collaborative decision-making, demonstrating young people’s interest in sharing their lived experiences and culture, and stressing ways to make an impact now.

Youth in the project reflected that they enjoyed using art as a form of expression, learning more about their communities, working collaboratively with peers and mentors, and using film as a means to educate others. One student reflected, “The best experience of LOCC is they let me use my talent in art . . . This is a rare experience for me, and it helps me in so many ways to learn other skills such as leadership, teamwork, and how to cooperate with others.” Another student said, “I understand now that the world isn’t doomed, but we can fix it and make it better.” Similarly, another student said that “the best thing about the LOCC experience is making a film about how people could make a change for the better. . . . These films . . . will hopefully make others do their best to help the earth.”

Placemaking with Children and Youth

Ages. 13 and up

Materials. Video equipment; capacity to upload to YouTube or other storage and sharing space

Time to Complete. The amount of time varies widely, from a one-week intensive workshop to a year with multiple workshops and phases

Participatory video often involves four stages: an early knowledge and skill building series of exercises; identification of priority issues and storyboarding of messages; an iterative process of learning, filming, and editing; and a final stage that involves a screening, dialogue, and identification of action.

Method—Identifying issues and developing the storyline

- Introduce the method and what participants will be doing.
- The process can begin with open-ended prompts as in the digital story process, such as
  What do you like about your city? What about your city is friendly and supportive to you? What can the city do so that it is a better place for young people?

Or it can be focused on a more specific set of questions or issues, such as flooding (Box 5.16) or climate change adaptation (Boxes 5.18 and 5.19).

- For open-ended questions, it may be helpful to introduce a series of exercises, such as other arts-based methods in this chapter, to help youth identify an issue for focus with participatory video.27

- For a focused topic, such as climate change adaptation, this stage also involves bringing experts and youth together to explore a subject.

- In this stage of participatory video, facilitators will lead a series of exercises that build knowledge and skills about film-making as well as any subject matter needed.

Method—Identifying priority issues and storyboards

- After an initial phase in which youth explore a topic more broadly, each youth or group will determine an area of focus for their film.

- Youth create a storyboard. A storyboard is a sequence of images and words that show the progression of the story planned for a film or video. Participants can hand sketch these ideas onto frames (Figure 5.21) that represent the sequence of ideas they will share in their film.

- This phase is usually iterative, meaning that youth develop a storyline, get feedback from peers, community members, or experts, and refine their thinking before producing the film.

- When the story board is complete, it should reflect a basic outline of the images and ideas that will be conveyed in the film.

Method—Create the film

- Once the storyboard is created, participants can begin to create their own films. While the specifics will vary by software program, the process should include the following steps:
  - Generate footage
  - Edit the footage
  - Add any subtitles
  - Publish and/or share the film through a screening or workshop

As with digital stories, host a screening or other venue for participants to share and discuss their videos. Establish ground rules for sharing films so that youth retain the feelings of empowerment they developed in the process of production (Box 5.19).

27. Lunch and Lunch, Insights into Participatory Video provides many exercises that help build a storyline and film content.
Three-Dimensional Models

Model-making to construct cities, neighborhoods, parks, plazas, and buildings in miniature is an essential practice in architecture and planning because it enables people to see at a glance how all the pieces of a place fit together: as they exist currently, or as they could be transformed under a designer’s shaping vision. Given children’s pleasure in constructing small worlds, model-making has a long history in progressive education and urban environmental education as a way for children to investigate and represent their local environment and suggest possibilities for its future. As a method of research, asking a child to build a model of their town or the area around their school or home is a way to understand places that are salient and significant. During construction or after its completion, the model serves as a prompt for discussing the child’s place knowledge and experiences. Although there are software programs that even children can be trained to use to draw three-dimensional representations of the environment, there is still a great value in the tactile process of making models that people can walk around and manipulate together, using inexpensive materials that can often be scavenged from the waste stream or the natural environment. Ephemeral models may be made outside, scratching map features into the dirt or drawing them in sand, and constructing three-dimensional additions to the map with found objects from nature or the surrounding environment (Figure 5.24).

Box 5.19. Participatory Video for Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk-Reduction

Like the Lens on Climate Change project (Box 5.18), researchers in Eastern Samar, the Philippines have also used participatory video as a means for children and youth to express their ideas about how to respond to climate change. This extensive research project provided in-depth training for young people in climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction as well as documentary filmmaking. When the films were ready for screening, young people and adult researchers and facilitators worked together to develop a process for screening workshops. The process involved screenings in three locations, with government officials, community members, and project participants in attendance. In this process, discussion focused on which problems could be solved by the community and which needed governmental involvement or intervention.

Adult participants and facilitators held briefings with youth both before and after these workshops to discuss likely outcomes of their screenings, identify positive outcomes, identify social and political constraints, and reinforce that, while decision-making is often long-term, actions could happen. The participatory video project had a significant impact on its participants, with one youth stating, “Our inspiration in making the film is our fellow youth . . . We believe and claim that children hold the future, so let us lessen the risks.” Another reflected that “I don’t want this to end only after the film. We want [the government] to adopt those practices which could benefit our community.”

1. Haynes and Tanner, “Empowering young people and strengthening resilience”

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facilitators, or young people themselves. For example, children can learn about scale as they construct a base map, or older youth can learn about design processes (See Chapters 4 and 7.) The extent that young people are engaged at this stage may depend on the goals of the project as well as the time and materials available.

- The base of a three-dimensional model can be constructed of many materials—paper, recycled cardboard, reclaimed wood slabs, or design materials such as foam board. Materials selection depends on the purposes of the model and ages of participants.

- At its simplest, the base may be a solid form simply for holding a model (Figure 5.24), or may be a simple drawing of key features on a large sheet of paper, on which children can place model pieces (Figure 5.25).

- A printed base map also can be mounted on top of flat cardboard or foam board so that there are reference points (Figures 5.26 and 5.27), or young people can add these details to a blank slate and paint or draw features they think are important. Accurate scale may not be important, but do indicate key features so that participants can orient themselves for their designs.

- Bases can also be constructed so that they show the landforms of a particular place—hills, creek drainages, or gentle slopes. These features are important to think about in the design and imagined use of spaces, and can be represented through model-making itself (with clay, florist foam or other materials to represent changes in topography), or through the construction of a base map that represents topographic features. Base maps can be made with layers of cardboard, foam, or

**Figure 5.24.** This “found object” model was made from natural materials scavenged from a school playground and represents an enclosure, native plantings, wildlife-friendly pathways, and a creek with boulders for rock-hopping. Photo credit: Growing Up Boulder

**Ages.** 8 and up, as model making requires the ability to organize ideas in 3-D space

**Time to Complete.** Two to four 45-minute sessions. Depending on the age of the participants and the level of detail desired, it will take two to four sessions to make and paint the model pieces, locate them on the base, secure them with glue or other means, label them, and share them with others.

**Materials.** A base that can be as simple as a piece of paper or as sturdy as cardboard or chipboard; multi-purpose glue; glue gun; glue sticks; paint; an assortment of purchased and scavenged materials of all kinds for model building (e.g. blocks, clay, cardboard, construction paper, felt, fabric, ribbons, jar lids, popsicle sticks, tooth picks, straws, pipe cleaners, spools, paper towel and toilet paper rolls, craft store pom-poms, figurines of people and animals, branches, small stones, plastic trees, fabric flowers, or any other materials that are available that invite creative expression).

**Method—Preparing a Base**
- Base materials and details can be determined in advance, or as part of the participatory process with teachers, adult
chipboard to represent these topographic features (Chapter 4).

- For most projects, the scale of the base is not important for model making. Young people will be using a wide variety of materials that will not conform to this scale, and designing to scale may require significant additional instruction. However, it may be appropriate for detailed topographic models (Chapter 4). In these cases, partnership with a university design program or design firm will be helpful in facilitating the construction of such a base map.
Method—Planning the Model

- Whenever possible, begin with a field trip to walk around the site and discuss existing plans for redevelopment or renovations. If this is not possible, take pictures of the site and post them on a wall. Identify where photos were taken on the base map. (See Chapter 7.)
- Invite city staff or local planners or architects who are responsible for site changes to come talk to participants about design goals and answer questions. If different groups have competing goals for the site, share this information so that young people will be aware of these points of tension. They can consider opposing viewpoints and can think about how competing interests might be reconciled, or take a position of their own that they base on research, reflection, and discussion.
- Provide question prompts to get participants thinking about how the designed space will function. What is the space for? Who will use it? What ages will use it? How many people will use it at a time? What will they do here? How will it function at different times of day, different days of the week, and different seasons of the year? Are the uses by different groups similar or do they conflict in some ways? How can you design a space for multiple types of users?

Method—Building the Model

- Introduce the goals for model-making. This method works best after a project has been introduced and explored through other methods. You should remind everyone what the goals of the project are and how the model will help communicate young people’s visions for a place.
- Provide instructions and guidance for model-making. Guidelines can be provided for materials gathering or sharing, depending on the type of model to be made. Establish a time frame and any ground rules for making models. Guidelines can also include working within constraints of topography (Chapter 4) or budget (Box 5.20).
- Unless each participant is making his or her own model, group decision-making is a central aspect of model-making. Provide simple ground rules for respectful communication and decision-making. Emphasize that group members should listen respectfully to each other’s ideas and reach agreement about the model before items are fixed on the base.
- To fix model pieces, use multi-purpose glue, hot glue, or clay. Alternatively, details of models can be attached using toothpicks or small sticks.
- Have participants clearly label their model elements and write a paragraph that describes their piece. They can use the original prompt questions as a guide as they think about what they want to explain. Fix this explanation on the model or display it beside the model (Figure 5.29).
- Take photographs to document the finished models.

Group sizes and scale

If the model base represents an extensive area and it is scaled to be large, young people may work together as a group to develop an overall plan. Once the plan is made, divide it into sections with small groups responsible for building the model pieces for their section. When the base is small, one child or a small group of two or three may plan and construct individual models. It is important for the adult facilitator to initiate the process by helping team members develop guidelines for how they will work together. This sets the tone for collaboration and includes suggestions for how to address disagree-
Box 5.20. Learning to Design within a Budget: Picto-Play

A Belgian design firm developed a series of “picto-play” icons with dots that represent the relative costs of different design options. A climbing tree might be one dot, but a full-scale tree house might be two. The icons also show a variety of natural and topographic features—tall grass or a grove of trees, steep hills or small rolling hills—as well as play equipment. Growing Up Boulder used these picto-play icons when youth designed a large public space. Each group was given a set budget of 30 dots. The benefit of using icons with model-making was that it forced young people to identify and clarify their values and interests in the public space. One group chose to focus their dots on activating play at the creek side. Another group used all their dots to provide services for the homeless, whom they had observed at the park.1


Figure 5.28. When youth, aged 11–13, designed a public space, they worked within a budget of 30 dots. Each icon had a scaled number of dots to represent the relative expense. Photo credit: Growing Up Boulder
ments when they arise. When the models are finished, take time for everyone to step back and share their observations about important elements of their creation.

Sharing with community members and decision-makers

Invite the city staff, architects, or planners who initially briefed participants on design goals to come back to see the finished models, hear young people's ideas, and ask questions or display the models at a public event that is also open to design professionals from around the city, city leaders, parents, other children, and community members. If the models can be displayed at a public place like a library, local museum, or recreation center, add a brief text that gives an overview of the project.

Community events can be a good occasion to gather more citizen input. Hand out cards or have sheets on the wall where everyone attending can contribute their own ideas for the site. Provide prompt questions: What model elements appear particularly creative or useful? Why? Are there additional elements that they would suggest, and if so why?

Variation: City as Play

City as Play is an approach to model-making developed by the Los Angeles urban planner James Rojas as a way to take planning out of offices and into communities.30 Given its inherent playfulness, it can be used even with very young children such as preschoolers, but it also taps into the creative "inner child" in adults. Because it requires no special expertise, it levels the playing field for participants from all backgrounds, including immigrants from different cultures and those with low literacy levels.

Box 5.21. Using City as Play to Invite Intergenerational Ideas for a Mobile Home Park

When the City of Boulder, Colorado, was exploring options to upgrade mobile home parks into secure, safe, affordable, and energy-efficient housing options without displacing residents, they asked the Trestle Strategy Group, a community-building consulting firm, to lead an extended community engagement process with residents at Ponderosa Mobile Home Park in north Boulder. After gaining the trust of this community, where older Anglo residents and young Latino families live side-by-side in 68 trailers, Trestle introduced City as Play to gather ideas for redevelopment.

About 60 people of all ages, men and women, girls and boys, gathered around tables full of colorful materials in an outdoor space on the site (Figure 5.30). Several city councilors joined in—evidence of the long road that the city had traveled with Trestle to convince this community that it was a valued partner in redevelopment planning. Instructions that everyone could easily follow were written on a poster, and people spontaneously broke into table groups, with some children forming a table of their own and others making additions and suggestions as the adults worked (Figure 5.31). There was a high level of engagement as people at each table explained their ideas and answered questions, and many good ideas were generated that were integrated into the city plan for the site. The process was recorded with film and photography.

People put careful thought into where to lay new infrastructure and pathways. All ages wanted connection to nature through trees and gardens. They also agreed on a shared laundry facility and play spaces for the children. As they worked together, they realized that the outdoor space that they were sharing could be turned into a common area for community activities. In addition to these general recommendations, people made many specific design suggestions. The activity formed a significant step forward in the evolving partnership between the residents and the city and helped build resident leadership.
City as Play can be part of public meetings, using trained facilitators. It can also be taken where people are to gather ideas from people who are unlikely to ever attend a public meeting. Rojas, for example, has conducted impromptu workshops on a portable table outside convenience stores in immigrant neighborhoods, engaging people as they come and go.

**Age.** 3 and up

**Time to Complete.** 45–60 minutes

**Materials.** As suggested in the model making directions above, have many objects available, but focus now on found objects in a variety of shapes and bright colors. Although you may include some blocks and cubes, Rojas contends that colorful round objects—such as hair curlers, Mardi Gras beads, and plastic Easter eggs—encourage people to “think outside the box” and design more creatively.

**Method—Making the Model**

- Briefly introduce the activity and emphasize that all ideas are welcome, no matter how inventive they may seem. Let participants know that the purpose of City as Play is to quickly generate design ideas, and there is no right or wrong idea. Their models will be preserved in photographs, but after their model is completed, all materials will go back in the box for re-use on other occasions.\(^*\)
- Give a prompt question: e.g., “What is a favorite place?” “What would a fun and adventurous playground look like? How would you use it?”
- To streamline the time required for synthesizing ideas and reporting out at the end, you may want to divide participants into groups of four or five.
- Pass out a sheet of construction paper to each person to use as a model base. Each person should design her own model, or if you want to create one large shared model, give people a section to work on.
- Spread all the model materials on the table, or if you are working outdoors or on the floor, on a canvas or fabric sheet.
- Give people 15–20 minutes to select objects and incorporate them into their model.

**Method—Recording the models**

- While people work, have note-takers from the facilitation team write down the ideas expressed. We suggest two people recording: one taking notes in a notebook, and another writing ideas and recurring themes and design elements on a large sheet of paper on the wall. The process is fast-moving, so recording enables more ideas to be preserved.
- Have a photographer take a picture of each completed model.

**Sharing with community members and decision-makers**

Participants may share in small groups or with the group as a whole. Ask each child to first consider the most important idea that he or she wants to contribute and then take 30–60 seconds to share it verbally and identify this model element. If the audience has one or two quick questions, allow time for this too. At the same time, recorders can check their lists against the children’s public descriptions to make sure they have captured all the main ideas.

**Synthesis**

- If there is time, ask each small group to create a “best of the table” model together that combines particularly original or attractive ideas from each person. Give

\(^*\) This method is intended to be ephemeral, and so children should not glue or affix any items.
each group one minute to share it with everyone else.

The note-takers share back the main ideas that they have recorded and check whether their lists appear accurate. Have the main ideas been included in the "best of" model? Are there other important ideas to add? Do participants have any concluding thoughts or observations?

Role Plays, Drama, and Puppet Shows

Role plays, drama, and puppet shows can serve many aims. They can enable young people to try out the perspective and voices of other people and even elements of the environment. They can create open contexts for the free generation of ideas. They can provide a safe medium in which characters explore sensitive topics and express feelings that a child might be too shy to claim as his or her own. Without necessarily naming specific people, they can expose problems in a community and challenge authority, often with doses of humor and fun that make it easier for the message to be communicated. They can build collective identity and strengthen community bonds through the process of creating shows, enacting them with an audience, and the ensuing discussions and community problem-solving that performances invite.32

Whereas role plays can be impromptu, with participants assuming the position of real people or imaginary characters and improvising scenarios together, with little need for costumes or props, drama usually involves more polished productions. But the line between these art forms is not rigid. Actors often try out new perspectives through improvisational role playing in preparation for a dramatic production. Role playing also can involve background research, a scripted scenario, and props and costumes when young people take the positions of different stakeholders in an environmental dilemma. Puppetry, as well, can range from improvised stories with simple cutouts or sock puppets to elaborate staged performances. Depending on how ambitious an outcome you envision, you may be comfortable facilitating these approaches without any training in theater, or you may want to bring in outside artists who know how to work in participatory ways.

Many cultures have traditions of puppetry and street theater that children can draw upon, such as shadow puppets across Asia, the Punch and Judy shows of England, and street plays enacted during carnivals and festivals. The contemporary world of mass media films, television shows, online entertainment, and comic books is full of plots and characters that young people can adapt to their own purposes. Online games enable young people to create characters and adopt avatars, offering new opportunities to play out roles and create collective stories. In contemporary theater, various approaches have developed to bring performances into public places like schools, streets, plazas, and prisons, with professional actors and directors working with local people to research, write, and perform plays that increase awareness about issues of local concern and encourage collective problem-solving.33 All of these approaches can be applied to dramatize environmental issues, explore community responses, and suggest steps forward.

Given the varying levels of formality and different amounts of time that can be invested in any of these methods, there is no single prescription for how any one of these methods should be applied. Instead, this section offers a few examples of the variety that is possible. What is most important is to follow principles of authentic participatory practice:34

34. This list builds upon David Driskell’s suggestions for maximizing young people’s participation in dramatic methods in *Creating Better Cities with Children and Youth*, 125.
• Explore environmental topics that are important to the young people involved and their community.

• Take time to listen and learn along with participants. Why is this topic important? What do young people know about it? What are their feelings about it? Does it affect different groups in the community in different ways?

• Discuss the purpose of the role play, drama, or puppet show, whether they want to enact it just among themselves, of if they want to share it with an audience, and in this case, who this audience should be.

• Does time need to be invested in background research? Are there local experts who should be consulted to understand the history of this topic or why different stakeholders in the community respond in different ways?

• Let young people propose the roles they want to play and how they want to present themselves. Let it be an occasion for lots of fun and free-wheeling suggestions.

• Respect young people’s boundaries. Don’t force anyone to perform in public who does not want to—but value everyone’s contributions and create conditions where even shy children can feel comfortable and build self-confidence. Children who are initially hesitant may discover that they can act, sing, and dance as well as their peers. If a child wants to remain private, there are many other ways to get involved such as script-writing, costuming, set design and construction, and advertising.

• Provide time for feedback and discussion at each stage in the process. How do young people feel about what they have created so far? Does anyone have suggestions for adjustments or new additions?

• When participants perform, take time to engage with the audience. The young people have just presented an environmental story, and perhaps they have presented a future they fear, or a future they hope to create with others, and their suggestions for how to get there. How do members of the audience respond? Do they have suggestions of their own? Can they help the young actors realize their ideas? Ideally, the performance will lead to commitments for follow-up actions by the community.

• Evaluate the experience with participants. What was most successful? If they have additional performances planned, is there anything they would change?

Be mindful of the ethical mandate of protecting young people from harm (Chapter 3). If young people are dramatizing environmental events that expose negligence by local officials or a practice that serves powerful elite in the community at the expense of other groups and local ecosystems, discuss how much they can safely reveal in public. It might be useful at this point to bring in trusted members of the community who can provide advice about how to share this information without putting participants at risk.

Role Plays

Personscape.© When Nilda Cosco and Robin Moore wanted to understand how the district of Boca-Barracas in Buenos Aires functioned for its children, one of many methods that they used was the role play, “Personscape.”© Children divided into small groups, with each group assuming the role of a different place in their neighborhood. Since then this method has been used in workshops for all ages (Box 5.22).

Box 5.22. A Personscape Workshop

Nilda Cosco and Robin Moore

Personscape workshops, which conceive of a place as a person, can be done with children ten years old and above, teens, and adults. Participants are invited to think of a city as a live organism, with each individual place within it conditioned by the feelings, values, attitudes, and activities of the people who live there or use the site. A workshop takes two to three hours, depending on the size of the group and age of participants, as they complete the following steps.

1. **Introduction and Organization into Small Groups** (10 minutes)
   Facilitators explain the idea of a personscape, review the agenda, and ask participants to divide into small groups of four or five.

2. **Imaginary Trip to the Past** (30 minutes)
   As a warm-up exercise, participants in each group recall their favorite childhood places, including questions such as: location, size, type, used by, at what age, how often, what for, special names, special qualities? With eyes closed, participants let memories flow (5 minutes), then share with each other (20–25 minutes).

3. **Select a Personscape** (10 minutes)
   Each group chooses a familiar place to interpret as a personscape and chooses a group member to record their ideas. Prompts are listed below but groups are welcome to generate their own ideas.

   | dead-end street | playground |
   | schoolyard     | vacant lot |
   | garden         | playpark   |
   | shopping district | wild place |

   | abandoned site | old railway line |
   | plaza         | street market   |
   | busy street   | park            |
   | riverfront    | urban farm      |

4. **Develop the Personscape's Character** (30 minutes)
   Once a place is selected, each group member imagines that he or she is this place and impersonates it, speaking through its voice. Participants may ask themselves the following questions, and together build up the place history and personality.

   - How were you born?
   - Who do you consider your parents?
   - How old are you?
   - What is your name?
   - Do you have any nicknames?
   - Do you like children?
   - Do you like to be alone?
   - Do you like visitors?
   - Are you polite to people?
   - Have you been mistreated?
   - Who are your friends?
   - Who are your enemies?
   - What is your favorite time of day, time of year?
   - What is your favorite activity?

5. **Personscape Analysis** (20 minutes)
   Once a personscape is created, it is important for group members to consider the following questions about how well this place functions for children, youth, and their families and what could be done to make it better. This step should result in the identification of particular resources, specific people, and possible action methods.

1. This work is copyrighted by Nilda Cosco and Robin Moore. It is printed here with their express permission.

(Box 5.22 continued on the next page)
A Typical Day. Children’s experience of their local environment is defined by time as well as movement through space. Therefore it is useful to understand the places they travel through during a typical weekday and weekend schedule. In this exercise, children role play themselves, from the time they get up in the morning, to traveling to school, working and playing in school, traveling home, working or playing after school, to evening activities until they go to bed at night. They can make simple signs that identify each place they move through and hold them up to signify each new setting. When they travel, attend school, play or work together, they can act out these parts of the day together. Do the same for a day on the weekend. (This activity can follow interviews to create daily activity schedules as described in Chapter 6).

Drama

Dramatic productions can be entirely planned, scripted, and enacted by youth, with youth composing or selecting the music, making the costumes, and building the sets.\(^{36}\) In this case, adults just play a facilitating role and enjoy and celebrate the results. These dramas can be contained within workshops that enable youth to explore material theatrically without the goal of a public performance, or they can be planned and performed to increase others’ awareness and action in response

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to environmental issues that affect young people’s lives. In either case, adults can contribute by helping young people learn the many skills that a theater production requires.

Twentieth and twenty-first century traditions like applied theater, community-based theater, and theater of the oppressed bring actors, musicians, dancers and directors together with communities in more collaborative roles to co-create performances, although the goal of enabling a community to explore and articulate its own social and environmental issues remains primary. While the purpose is often to inspire collective problem-solving, it can be as simple as increasing understanding and appreciation of different groups in the community and valuing local cultures and traditions. The musical *Shine* features such a collaboration between professional artists, young people, and in this case climate scientists, around the theme of climate change and community resilience (Box 5.23).

37. For examples of theater workshops with young people in post-Katrina New Orleans and a brief guide to workshop processes, see Jan Cohen-Cruz’s chapter on “Gathering assets” in her book *Engaging Performance: Theatre as Call and Response* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 111–133.


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**Box 5.23. *Shine*: Young People Perform for Urban Resilience**

*Shine* is a play co-created by Beth Osnes, a theater professor at the University of Colorado Boulder, performing artists in music and dance, climate scientists, and local youth in seven cities where it toured. It presents young people as resources who can contribute to their community’s resilience: its capacity to survive and even thrive despite social stresses and environmental shocks such as climate change and extreme weather events. It combines information from climate-change experts with community-based solutions proposed by youth.

Act One and the play’s concluding scene consist of dialogue, song, and dance scripted by Beth Osnes in collaboration with a professional song writer, musician, and choreographer, with climate scientists serving as advisors. About a dozen older children and adolescents enacted the performance in each city where the play has toured. Two teens play the leading roles of Sol (the sun) and Foss (fossil fuel) while other actors are costumed as plants and animals who portray 300 million years of geological history as the sun’s energy is captured by plants and stored in the earth’s reserves of coal, oil, and natural gas. They weave a fabric that represents their interdependent community. In the end, as the industrial revolution begins humanity’s accelerating consumption of fossil fuels, Foss and his team tear through this fabric. As young people rehearse this act, they learn climate science and how human history has brought us to our current dependence on fossil fuels that is impacting the global climate. The act ends with the questions, “What story do we want to tell for our city? How

*Figure 5.32. Youth as ancient plants and animals and the Sun in a performance of *Shine* for scientists and the general public at the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Boulder, Colorado in June of 2015. Photo credit: Conner James Callahan*

(Box 5.23 continued on the next page)
Box 5.24. Performance Art and Co-Design to Facilitate Expressions of the City

with Susan J. Wake

This co-design example was developed following the inspiring performance art project called “Lookout” that was part of the Auckland Fringe Arts Festival in March, 2017. Lookout engaged 16 inner-city schoolchildren, ages 9–10, in an example of “pedagogical theater” that was developed by London artist Andy Fields.1 The performance has since toured a number of cities globally. Each show is a unique one-on-one conversation between one adult theater-goer and one child who joins them to share their views and memories of the city. The title “Lookout” refers to the location of the conversations: somewhere high up in the city, from which participants each look out and reflect on the past, present, and future of the city. Through preparatory workshops the children explored themes intended to provide the adults with a future-focused vision of their city, including natural-disaster conditions that might occur due to climate change. In preparation for Lookout, children workshoped material for two weeks prior to the start of the performances. Performances were partly scripted.

and delivered via recording to the adult, while standing and “looking out” at Auckland city. Then the adult was joined by a child who gave his or her views and posed questions to the adult, such as “what have you done to improve your city?”

This catalyst performance project also led to an interest in investigating, via design, the ideas of the children about how to improve their city. This occurred as a result of the children’s teacher wishing to continue to investigate these ideas with the children after the performances ended. Focus groups that build on the co-design approach (Chapter 8) asked children to recap their experiences of the performance process and suggest urban design ideas that came from this, that they felt would make their city more child-friendly. Their comments and drawings were analyzed and provided strong direction for the design. For example, they wanted their city to be safer, more fun, provide more play opportunities and green space, plus encourage people to be more environmentally friendly. This led to a variety of design drawings, focusing on the streets around the school that the children regularly walked, and the children reviewed these for popularity and suggested design changes. As one example, the children loved the funky rubbish bins that were a part of the design suggestions (Figure 5.33). These bins encouraged recycling and composting in a fun way, but the children wanted teeth added to the landfill bin to make it look more disapproving (Figure 5.34).

**Figure 5.33.** A rendering of rubbish bins designed in collaboration with children to make the street more fun and cared for. Image credit: Yi Luo

**Figure 5.34.** Children asked for the landfill bin to have more “teeth” since it is less environmentally friendly than the other disposal bins. Image credit: Yi Luo
Puppet Shows

The use of puppets ranges from the unscripted play of young children to some of the most sophisticated forms of art in traditional cultures. Because life-size and larger-than-life puppets capture attention in crowded events, they lend themselves to festivals, carnivals, and political protests. For young children, puppets provide an easy means to explore the roles of animals in their surroundings as well as different people, with a great deal of fun in the process. Because shy children may find it easier to voice their experiences through an alias, such as a puppet friend, it can also be useful to use puppets in interviewing young children about personal topics, enabling children to speak through the puppet rather than directly for themselves. (See Chapter 6, Interview Methods.) Puppets have also been an important means for self-expression, and are used extensively in art therapy and by health workers who use participatory research practices.

Box 5.25. Exploring an Issue through Puppetry

In the Phila Impilo program in South Africa, children in long-term hospital care created puppet “friends” that they imagined to be caring companions during their health care experiences. (See Chapter 6 for details about how the puppets were constructed and their role during interviews and conversations.) One aspect of hospital life that evoked strong feelings was clean-up work. What chores should reasonably be done by the children, and what was more appropriately done by nurses? The children came from families where they were used to helping their mothers and other family members, and therefore most of them agreed to taking responsibility for themselves when they were able to, such as picking up after themselves and washing their own dishes and clothes, but some resisted heavier tasks like emptying trash bins. To explore this topic, a few children constructed a cardboard scenery backdrop and enacted a puppet play about chores, with the help of a facilitator. This gave them a way to act out what they could do to help the nurses that they all considered fair (Figure 5.35).

For a profile of the Phila Impilo project, see Chapter 11.

Figure 5.35. Puppetry can help children speak about awkward subjects.

Photo credit: Monde Magida