

WORKING PARTNERS

AN URBAN YOUTH REPORT ON RISK, STRESS, AND RESPECT

When was the last time you had an open, serious talk with an urban teen? Teenagers like Tony, Shirley, and Mark bring a critical perspective to issues in our community. For these teens and others like them, problems in the news and on the street are not just statistics and stories but reality. Teen pregnancy, drug use, harassment by the police, conflict within schools, racism, gangs, abuse: all create a context of risk and stress which they—like we—long to change.



Tony (13) describes being drawn into a fight in which all of his options looked bad. Analyzing his own choices, he sees how the violence that erupts between neighborhood groups and gangs is often rooted in deep needs for respect—and the absence of productive ways to find it.

Shirley (15) describes the stress of everyday existence in her inner-city neighborhood. The inadequate advice given by adults who “haven’t been there” moves her to issue a “wake up call to adults” that pleads for a new sense of community that embraces all its youth.



Mark (15) describes how conflicts between teenagers and adults—including parents, teachers, and police—can arise from the dynamics of risk and respect. And he sketches a decision strategy that can open up better options for police and teens.

THE COMMUNITY LITERACY CENTER
AND
CARNEGIE MELLON UNIVERSITY

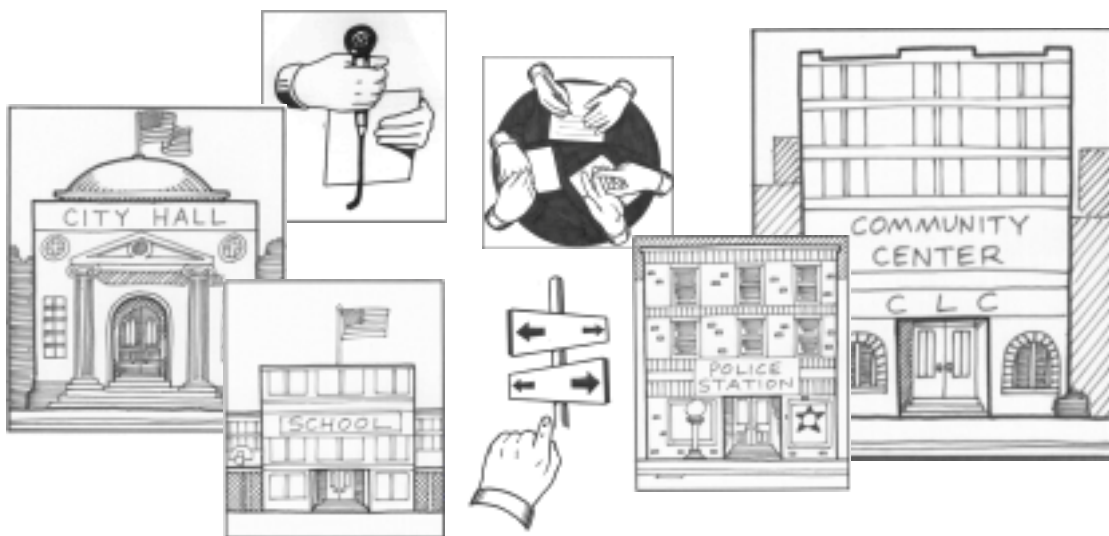
What do community problems look like from a teenager's perspective?

This report invites you to enter a Community Problem-Solving Dialogue in which urban teenagers join the process of building a better community as working partners. And it shows you how to begin a dialogue of your own in your neighborhood, workplace, or school.

Teenagers bring a unique and needed expertise to the analysis of urban problems. At Pittsburgh's Community Literacy Center, they also learn problem-solving and writing skills for shaping and evaluating better solutions.

Community Problem-Solving Dialogues build new working relationships that weave alternative perspectives into a community-constructed plan for action.

Are you ready for a breakthrough?





COMMUNITY PROBLEM-SOLVING DIALOGUES like these are tools for change. They support intercultural collaboration that gives respect and voice to the expertise of everyone. And they create a platform on which to build workable visions of a more just and compassionate community.

This report draws from the texts, videos, and public community conversations produced by teenagers at Pittsburgh's Community Literacy Center, collaborating with Carnegie Mellon student mentors. It illustrates a process that supports both learning and inquiry through three strategies:

- *Getting the Story Behind the Story,*
- *Seeking Rival Hypotheses, and*
- *Examining Options and Outcomes.*

These research-based strategies can help community groups, educators, and policy makers to initiate Community Problem-Solving Dialogues of their own.

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WHAT ARE TEENAGERS SAYING ABOUT RISK ?

THREE STRATEGIES FOR AN INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE



STRATEGY 1: GETTING THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY

Teenagers have expertise—and alternative perspectives—on urban issues that involve youth. They can help us define the problems, describe the hidden logics of youth that adults may not see, and evaluate options. Teenagers in Community Problem-Solving Dialogues use the Story Behind the Story strategy to talk about some critical causes of risk and stress:

- Urban teenagers tell how they cope with a constant sense of risk. When the adult community seems to turn its back, teenagers describe the need for alternative groups (including gangs) that can provide three essentials: safety, understanding, and identity.
- Urban teenagers tell how they are motivated by deep needs for respect. Respect is hard to find in inner cities. Adults relate through authority—teachers, police, parents rarely ask why, don't seem to care, won't listen. The future holds no solution: old paths to economic adulthood look closed; other roads to achieving respect are hard to find or follow. Finding identity and respect is the problem teenagers want to solve.



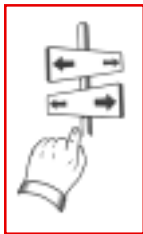
STRATEGY 2: SEEKING RIVAL HYPOTHESES: BRINGING MORE VOICES TO THE TABLE AND INTO THE PLAN

Complex questions don't have single answers. So Community Problem-Solving Dialogues use the rival hypothesis strategy (rivaling) to seek out alternative perspectives on risk, stress, respect, and other issues. In their writing and videos, CLC teens document surprising rival perspectives that people often don't expect.

- Risk:** Stressful and potentially risky situations can be open to rival (alternative) readings by teens and adults. For instance, a group of teenagers standing on the street is often seen as threatening—invested in protecting turf and proving a “hard” identity. A rival reading, however, might argue that, given the options in the inner city, teens are actually seeking a safe and social place to “hang” together. And a third rival reading might see in that group individuals who are struggling with not only social pressure to belong, but practical concerns for safety if they don't join. Adding police to the scene can be read as the arrival of help or of harassment; it can be the imposition of order or the imposition of power without recourse. Rival readings occur every day on the street when women clutch purses at the sight of any young African American male: women see risk; teenagers see racism. And when white adults see black youth dressed in hoodies, cornrows, and baggies, they see signs of antisocial

•**STRESS:** In trying to cope with the stress of the street, poverty, racism, and adolescence, teen culture often advises its members to “bury” the stress, to just “hang on,” or more proactively, to “be hard.” The rival wisdom of adult culture, however, urges teenagers to “just say no,” disaffiliate with their peer group, or accept adult counsel. Teenagers, facing everyday risk and stress, bring a deep skepticism to the advice of adults who grew up before the violence started—adults who “haven’t been there.”

•**RESPECT:** Is respect the obligatory response one must give to those with age, status, or power? Or, the rival goes, is receiving respect also the right of the young, the powerless, the learner? Authorities often use subordinate “respectful behavior” as a way to judge urban youth (and a prerequisite for even listening). But teenagers (who hold the rival view) often look for signs of mutual respect and zero in on signs of “dissing” (disrespect) from adults—including teachers, police, and business people. They see resistant behavior as part of their demand for dignity. Adults want to manage behavior; teens are trying to manage stress.



STRATEGY 3: EXAMINING OPTIONS AND OUTCOMES

It is not enough to listen empathetically. A Community Problem-Solving Dialogue tries to weave rival perspectives into a community-constructed plan for action by, first, generating multiple, competing and complementary options. Secondly it subjects these options to the test of local knowledge—it uses teenage expertise to play out probable outcomes under real conditions. Action plans are then judged, not by good intentions, but by predicted consequences.

- When teenagers talk about options that would make a difference, they start with a direct call for respect, compassion, and serious conversation with adults—a change from the familiar outcome in which adults put out advice, give instruction, and rehearse the situations of their time.
- Teenagers also ask adults to take more committed public action: to create safe opportunities for socializing and athletics in poor neighborhoods, too; to create schools that can motivate, encourage, and educate even the children under stress; to create an economic future for us all. But when policy makers focus on youth, they often end up trying to manage behavior, create constraints, and punish. And the outcome of that policy is polarization.
- Teenagers don’t stop at suggesting options and outcomes for adults. As you’ll see in later sections of this report, they place equal emphasis on the role this strategy plays in the decisions they make on a daily basis.

A Community Problem-Solving Dialogue follows a strategic path that leads from constructing Stories, to seeking Rivals, to examining Options.

Join the table, and read on to see what this three-step strategic process is revealing.

STRATEGY 1: GETTING THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY



In these accounts written by Community Literacy Center teens, Tony gets involved in a fight, while Shirley and Mark encounter neighborhood gangs. Someone might advise, “Just say No. Ignore them.” But inviting teenagers to tell the story behind the story—the side adults don’t see—reveals more dimensions to the problems of stress and violence. This narrative problem analysis lets teenagers tell us what really happens and why.

WHY FIGHT? A ROUTE TO RESPECT AND POWER

Tony (13) discusses his story of a fight: He and his friends are walking downtown when they encounter a group of 17 and 18-year-old Crips—blue rags hanging out of their pockets. Taunts lead to contact, and he finds himself in a dangerous fight and a situation he can’t control. Here Tony describes the “no exit” options he sees for himself and the logic that turns groups into gangs and turns their encounters into violence:

I am telling this story to let other people know how gangs can take over a neighborhood or a city without the police able to be there all of the time. I, myself, didn’t feel comfortable being around when this incident happened. But what else could I do but run, and if I ran, then the people I was with would look at me as a traitor. This is a tough call to make. This situation pushes young teenagers into joining gangs for fear of being an outcast. I am not for joining gangs, and I wouldn’t advise it to anyone else. But why do I and others have to sit around and watch the scene being taken over?

People are no longer free to walk around in public (which they have the right to do) for fear of having a run-in with a gang. There aren’t many options for dealing with the situation except running or ignoring the situation. A lot of gangs form in order to retaliate against other gangs or out of a need for power and control. If this is the reason why people start gangs, shouldn’t it also be the solution?

There are other ways to get power and control besides joining gangs, and these alternatives are what we need. (From “Gangs Think They Run the Neighborhood”)

WHAT IS BEHIND EVERYDAY STRESS?

Shirley describes how her dash for the wrong bus lands her on a corner in the WRONG neighborhood where a group of boys sitting on a car are drinking and smoking weed, asking, “Hey girl, where you from? What school you go to?” The standard adult response to Shirley’s story (“just ignore them” or “call a policeman”) misses the logic of the situation as Shirley sees it. Like most urban teens, she is personally acquainted with the victims of violence:

Flashback: The announcement on the news pounds through my head: “Last night a young 14-year-old boy was shot 9 times while he was out of his neighborhood. He was a freshman student at Oliver.” A conversation with a friend runs through my head from yesterday: “Hey, Shirley, I’m not staying after school.



They might do a drive-by or shoot someone.” These thoughts run through my head, like a tape recorder: “HE WAS SHOT NINE TIMES WHILE OUT OF HIS OWN NEIGHBORHOOD! NINE TIMES! OUT OF HIS NEIGHBORHOOD! SOMEONE’S GOING TO GET SHOT!”

Inner Thoughts: Here I am standing on this corner wondering what’s going to happen to me. If I tell him where I’m from, he might have some beef with my neighborhood and make me a victim of his anger just because I was from the wrong part of town. Some people might say, just ignore them. All you have to do is close your eyes and ears. But he’s drunk, so if I don’t answer him he may come over and start trouble.

On the other hand, the cops drive around here twenty four seven (all the time), but they probably wouldn’t stop for me, because the cops around my neighborhood are racist. (Shirley flashes back once again to the park and a hoop game.) The cops were throwing the boys against the fence, hassling them, asking them “Where’s your I.D.? You all shouldn’t be up here late at night anyway.” (They said this even though they had I.D.) But I noticed that they didn’t hassle the white kids; they never watched them when they played ball. So should I really call the cops, ‘cause it’s going to start a whole lot of trouble. All they are going to do is hassle the kids that are asking me questions, throw them against the wall, and frisk them, and make them want to fight back. And when that happens, the kids are going to come back for me. I have to decide soon. . . . (From “A Wake Up Call to Adults”)

UNDERSTANDING THE HIDDEN LOGIC

In telling the Story Behind the Story, Shirley, Tony, and Mark are urging adults to get beneath the surface of events and to respond to the hidden logic behind teens’ behavior and to the forces that motivate people. They ask us to help manage the problems, not just behavior.

Shirley explains why she called her account: “A Wake Up Call to Adults”

I wrote this to show you that kids go through a lot of stressful things. Some kids get angry at the world because some cops have a bad image of kids and take it out on the kids, but it also works both ways. Kids go through a lot of deaths and have to watch where they are going for their sake too. Some kids may kick and throw things and take their anger out on people like parents, faculty, and staff. Adults, try not to take it personally because that’s the only way some kids know how to handle their problems.

In “Maybe the Reason Why . . .” Mark speaks to parents who often ask:



“Why don’t you . . . go to the basketball court anymore? All you do is sit around the house all day.”

Maybe the reason why... he doesn’t go to the basketball court anymore is because a drive-by was done by a rivaling gang there before. But the reason doesn’t have to be gang related. Your son could be worried about getting harassed by the police because the basketball court may be considered “hot.” The term “hot” means a certain area is known for its heavy drug selling activities.



STRATEGY 2: SEEKING RIVAL HYPOTHESES: BRINGING MORE VOICES TO THE TABLE AND INTO THE PLAN

Inquiry into difficult questions demands a rival hypothesis stance that seeks alternative explanations. Using the “Rivaling” strategy, teens bring multiple perspectives to the table and predict how other people might interpret difficult problems such as those explored in this section: risk, gangs, respect, and work. Using this strategy means listening to others, imagining their thinking, and ultimately rivaling yourself.

RIVAL READINGS OF A RISKY SITUATION:

Christy: You know they’re threatening Shirley. It’s all gang stuff.

Mia: Wait a minute. Lemme try this one from the guys’ point of view, OK? Look again at Shirley boppin’ along the sidewalk. She’s fresh, she’s good looking, she’s alone. Get it? I mean, she’s like Little Red Riding Hood! They’re just having fun scaring her a bit. It’s like flirting, you know?

Jake: Flirting! Look again, sister. Look at all that gangsta graffiti stuff all over the old house where those hoods were hanging out. And remember the gang graffiti at the beginning? Man, that stuff’s no joke! And that house really looks like a crack house. It all adds up.



Joe: How about if we put ourselves in a cop’s shoes?

Joe (speaking as a cop): By the time we get there, the people involved already have ten witnesses saying they’re somewhere else. There’s just nothing we can do about it.

Jake: Sure. What about a bad cop’s shoes?

Jake (speaking as a bad cop): Hold up, kids, y’all need to get away from there—quit messin’ with them people. I’m gonna give y’all to “three” to get your punk ass outta there: three

Shaquon: I still want to try standing in the shoes of those three guys.

Shaquon (to himself, as 1st guy): She’s kinda cute—I could be tryin’ to talk to her, instead of tryin’ to get her. I don’t even know why I’m doing this. But I guess it’s alright; the boys think I’m hard, you know?

Jake: Yeah, we gotta try seeing what was going on in their minds.

Jake (to himself, speaking as 2nd guy): To tell you the truth, I was afraid of not being with those guys.

RIVAL REASONS WHY KIDS JOIN GANGS

• **A Teen who associates with a gang says**, “I am now 16 years of age and if I was to go to the Hill, Garfield, East Hills, Homewood I would get jumped and possibly shot, because they know where I’m from and assume I am in L.A.W. I am not ‘in’ the gang, but I stay over at my friends’ houses and go places like the movies and the mall with them. . . . So what are my choices? Since everybody thinks I’m in it anyway, and they label me that way, I might as well be in the gang. And I would have someone at my back. I feel that is why 90% of the gang members join.”



• **A Girlfriend who is angry about the gang scene says**, “We (the ladies) have nothing to do with what you men are doing, but yet we find ourselves in the middle of it all. If I happen to like a boy from another neighborhood, somehow that makes you angry enough to threaten my relationship.”

• **Another Girlfriend says**, “I decided to continue a relationship with Sam because I believe he doesn’t do gang things. He just happens to be friends with some of the wrong people, and he’s labeled a gang member. But there is a side of me that says. . .”

• **A Teen whose brother has just been shot**, “I joined a gang three years ago. Three years ago there were barely no shootings that were gang related. On the streets, there weren’t that many guns. Most of the things we did were positive. My brother and I joined the gang because it was the only way out of getting jumped every day. (We had moved to a new neighborhood.) The guys who are in the gang with me were friends. We played basketball with each other every day, and we would hang together all the time.”

• **A Public Health Administrator says**, “When we try to deal with violence, we need to distinguish among the different types of gangs. Some gangs are primarily social groups focused on turf and group identity, while others (that account for the most murders) are organized drug operations.” (Deborah Prothrow-Stith)

• **A member of a Chicago gang talks about the numbing, dead-end work available to adults in his neighborhood**, “A job like that is giving up. It just isn’t worth it. . . Why do we steal and deal drugs? Because there is no work for us. If we could find work, we wouldn’t be doing that stuff.”(Deborah Prothrow-Stith)

Rivaling gives you views from other mountains:

“One can not climb a number of different mountains simultaneously, but the views had when different mountains are ascended supplement one another; they do not set up incompatible, competing worlds.”

John Dewey

SEEKING MORE RIVAL HYPOTHESES

RIVAL HYPOTHESES ABOUT RESPECT

Rival views of “respect” can turn intercultural contact into confrontation. Urban teenagers lack the things that command respect in the larger society: money, status, education, age, race, and social power. Nevertheless, they feel an acute need for respect, a sensitivity to being “dissed.” In the powerlessness of youth and poverty, maintaining respect has a powerful logic. Adult institutions expect respectful behavior from teenagers and use authority to demand it. But teens may hold a rival hypothesis about the proper balance of authority and respect. Their reading of encounters with authority reveals deep-seated assumptions about mutual respect. Their rival expectations help explain a disappointment and disaffection with the adult community.



CONFLICTING EXPECTATIONS FOR RESPECT: IN SCHOOL

- My teacher will tell the class, “You’ll never become engineers or math majors.” He puts the class down mostly every day.
- A student, whose grades aren’t so good, doesn’t understand the material. The teacher assumes he’s slow and ignores the situation. The student gets frustrated, starts to talk in class, falls asleep.
- A teacher comments to a student about being late, and she immediately starts to talk back. The teacher says that it doesn’t matter, because she is failing anyway. The class laughs at the student.

From a Student’s “Checklist for Mutual Respect”

Signs of Mutual Respect

1. My teacher not only cares about individual students, but shows it and makes it known.
2. The teacher knows what is happening in my community and talks with us.
3. Students let others learn by not talking to friends in class.

Danger Signals

1. Teachers humiliate students by talking about grades in class.
2. Teachers assert their authority by shaking fingers in a student’s face.
3. Students assert their power by talking, joking, and tripping in class.

CONFLICTING EXPECTATIONS FOR RESPECT: WITH POLICE

Following a problem-solving dialogue with Pittsburgh police, Bessemah concludes:

We all want something. You want us to respect you because you are an adult and it makes your job easier, but we also want respect. . . . I think that we all need to cooperate with each other, but I think police sometimes feel we should just cooperate with you.

Curtis describes the humiliating experience many young black men now go through—an unexplained, aggressive police search:

Seeing my cousin just home from college I give my cuz five (shakes hands) and soon five cop cars surrounded us from different sides. “All three of you — Get up against the wall — NOW!” I was scared ... but if you ask questions that’s like getting smart with them.

When the police visited the CLC, Curtis tested his hypothesis:

“One of the police officers stereotyped me. . . . He said, ‘I’ve seen that young man up on Federal Street,’ meaning I hang up there. He was assuming I was a drug dealer because I came down in zig-zag braids, black dickies (because of work) and gloves (because of my bike). I wore those things on purpose to see what they would say—their response. What would they take me as? And they fell for it. But if I was a drug dealer, would I be here at the Community Literacy Center? I want to be respected and not stereotyped as a drug dealer. I want police to pay attention to the real dealers—to stand up by the bars on upper Federal.

RIVAL ROADS TO RESPECT — THROUGH WORK

What are the roads to achieving adult status and personal respect in urban Pittsburgh—especially if you are black, your family is poor, your school is inadequate, and the people in your neighborhood can’t find decent jobs? How do you find a road into the working community and the economy of Pittsburgh? We need Community Problem-Solving Dialogues to explore these rivals with teens.

JOIN a gang and enter the “street” economy today

- you get quick status, money, and adventure
- you look cool, have power
- you join a community that looks out for you

But the Rivals are:

- you are also likely to get shot or end up in prison
- you can’t “leave” when you want to
- what you learn at 13 won’t get you work at 25

GET a “McDonald’s” job (fast food, grocery store)

in the hood

- it offers after-school work for older teenagers
- the “skills” are easy to learn
- you get work experience, minimum wage, and references

But the Rivals are:

- fast food jobs don’t open up adequate “roads to work”
- they mean limited skills, low potential
- they fuel fatigue and boredom
- they are an urban symbol of dead ends and giving up—not aspiration

FIND skill-building jobs (from self-employed paper boy & babysitter to clerk, intern, go-fer, trainee)

- these build a wider set of skills
- they offer desperately needed exposure to other worlds, to vocational and professional possibilities
- they lead you into the regular economy

But the Rivals are:

- be realistic: you are competing with adults, college students, and people from better schools
- jobs may exist in the suburbs, but how do you find them, and how would you get home when the bus stops running?

STRATEGY 3: EXAMINING OPTIONS AND OUTCOMES



There are no easy solutions to risk, stress, and disrespect. For teenagers, even the “best” options can have bad outcomes one must work around.

POSSIBLE OUTCOMES (FROM SHIRLEY’S ACCOUNT, ON PAGE SIX)

Some people may say, “why don’t you talk to a teacher?” Well that can cause you even more stress. Like when my friend told a teacher (that she trusted) about her problems at home, and then later heard the teacher talking and laughing about it in the teachers’ room. Other people may say, “why don’t you tell your friends?” I feel when you talk to your friends you just share some of the same anger. It doesn’t lead to anything. What you just shared with them may get out and then everyone knows all your business and problems. Some people may say that you’re scared of your own race, then make a big joke out of it saying you’re just as bad as the cops, you’re a racist, too.

This analysis prompted other teens to propose revised options—“Tell teachers just enough so they know you are working through a problem; talk only to friends you really trust”— and other possible outcomes: “You may find you aren’t alone after all.”

Even when all options have downsides, problem-solving dialogues can transform teenagers’ decision- making from a yes/no consideration of one choice, to a process that imagines multiple options and explores possible outcomes. The option and outcome strategy gives many teenagers an expanded sense of possibility and responsibility.

MORE OPTIONS FOR TEENS

Why join a gang? Some teens see a “no exit” decision:

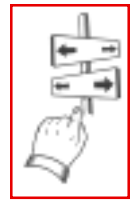
You can’t escape it. Everybody knows that there are gang members almost everywhere. . . . You could stay in the house all the time if you want, but who would want to do that?

However, other writers using the Option & Outcome strategy respond:

Option: Move to the area where your friends are, but watch what you get into. What I mean is if they want to beat up other gang members, I would just stay in the house and play Nintendo. And it does help to tell people you disapprove of beating people up for no good reason—especially when girls disapprove—because most girls don’t like dudes that bully. It might get the gang members to think twice about it if people from their own neighborhoods say this. One time I talked my friends out of fighting another group.

Option: Don’t hang on the corner with known gang members, because you could be the victim of a drive-by. If we see someone from a rival neighborhood, I tell my friends not to say anything.

Teenagers, it's clear, can use these decision strategies well when they're engaged in Community Problem-Solving Dialogues—in literate action. But even more importantly, perhaps, they also take these strategies into the decision-making in their daily lives. Teens talk about how the problem solving they did as writers transfers to examining life options and imagining their outcomes.



LASTING OUTCOMES

In a recent follow-up study Community Literacy Center teens talk about the impact of these strategy-based Dialogues once the experience is over. When Jason gets challenged he says,

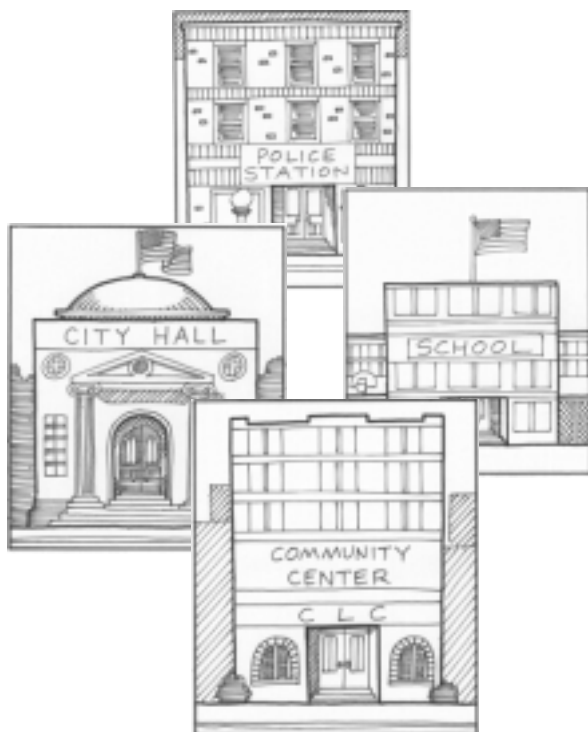
I try to see why he act like he do. . . . Maybe he think he bad, not want to be thought a punk, low self-esteem. . . . When I'm about to fight, I would now say, he just wants to fight because he's jealous. I look for reasons; before I wouldn't even think about that.

Arlena describes the influence Options and Outcomes had on her decision-making process right after graduation:

I didn't want to go straight to work out of school; wanted to chill a little. But I knew there were things I wanted and needed and the only way to get them was to work. So I sat down and made a list of "If I don't work (can't get this); if I do work (can get this)."

Arlena went to work and back to school.

For adults and especially for policy makers, a Community Problem-Solving Dialogue with teenagers can not only generate new options, but can also help predict some of the unintended, unpredicted consequences that often make youth policy fail.



OUTCOME-TESTED POLICY OPTIONS

A Dialogue on School Suspension policy at Oliver High School revealed that suspended students were in basic agreement with the policy, but that common practices like out-of-school (rather than in-house) suspension were ineffectual—"you get a vacation" and it puts marginal students even further behind. More importantly, they targeted the source of many suspensions in small conflicts that start with a student disruption, a teacher's desire for authority (and strategies for control, such as not staying to hear reasons, pointing in the student's face), followed by the student's response to being "dissed" and need to save face—events that both parties allow to escalate into confrontations. The document based on their Dialogue with school officials became a tool in teacher training.

HOW TO CREATE A COMMUNITY PROBLEM-SOLVING DIALOGUE

Preoccupied with other problems, Pittsburgh has left its teenagers to face risky streets, broken schools, declining jobs, and few roads to respect. Gangs offer protection, respect, and identity. Early motherhood confers adulthood and the promise of love. Can we meet this competition—with better options for forging identity, achieving respect? Can Pittsburgh draw its youth into alternative, intercultural communities?

Are you ready for a breakthrough? Urge the groups you know—your neighborhood council, your business, civic, and religious groups, as well as the schools, youth agencies, and policy makers we support—to create working partnerships around the problems on their tables.



1. INVITE URBAN TEENAGERS TO THE TABLE WITH YOU—AS PARTNERS.

Bring the expertise of those “in the struggle” into the analysis of problems and the evaluation of options for both adults and teens. Don’t let the adults become counselors and the teens become advocates. But train your group to work as problem-focused, collaborative planning partners. Creating partners creates an intercultural community.

2. EXPLORE A PROBLEM—STRATEGICALLY.

The problem-solving strategies illustrated in this report use writing and discussion (aided by interactive video and computer tools) to scaffold a substantive intercultural dialogue. Working in pairs, teens and adults sketch problem scenarios that uncover the “story behind the story.” They come to the table prepared to consider “rival” readings, to generate multiple “options,” and to evaluate possible “outcomes.”

3. ENVISION OPTIONS AND OUTCOMES.

A problem-solving dialogue goes beyond the rhetoric of complaint and blame by building options, using the expertise of teenagers to play out probable (and rival) outcomes. It puts these stories, key points, and conclusions down in writing as a springboard for discussion and action.

4. BRING THE LARGER COMMUNITY TO THE TABLE.

Make your collaborative planning and writing the basis for a wider community conversation, which invites more people to join the table not as advocates or critics, but as collaborative partners in building their own community.

5. NAME A PLACE FOR ACTION.

Turn talk into action by identifying a concrete situation in which alternatives can be tested and revised.

NEED HELP?

A Support System for Community Problem-Solving Dialogues is available at Pittsburgh's Community Literacy Center. The CLC workshops can connect you to a network of community/university advisors, a library of hands-on guides, and a portfolio of interactive videos and computer software that help groups start Dialogues of their own.

Teamwork: Teenagers Working Through Community Problems. An interactive training video by teens. A lively Community Problem-Solving Team demonstrates strategies for collaborative planning, rivaling, and decision-making as they investigate a problem case of urban stress. A manual and additional video problem cases help viewers transfer strategies to other issues.

Rivaling about Risk: A Dialogue Tutorial. An interactive HyperCard program that uses video, writing, reflection, and teen-authored texts to teach critical and rival hypothesis thinking and to give voice to teen perspectives on issues of urban risk.

What's Your Plan? Friendly computer support for a dialogue among young women and health workers, using the strategies in Teamwork to make (and print out) one's personal plan for sexual abstinence or contraceptive use.

Struggle: A Dialogue about Life Plans. A personalized computer program that lets teenagers, parents, and caring adults work together to acknowledge struggle, name aspirations, and make committed life plans.

How to Be Heard. A Handbook for Community Literacy. A practical guide to community literacy strategies for teens.

The Community Literacy Primer. An introduction to theory and practice of community literacy in vignettes of literate social action.

Community Literacy Research. A series of reports and reprints of articles on community literacy.

How to Create Problem-Solving Dialogues with Teens. A CLC Training Workshop on designing a Dialogue around your concerns.

THE COMMUNITY LITERACY CENTER IS A COMMUNITY/UNIVERSITY COLLABORATION OF
PITTSBURGH'S COMMUNITY HOUSE AND CARNEGIE MELLON UNIVERSITY

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The Community Literacy Center is a community/university collaborative of Pittsburgh's 80-year-old Community House and the Center for the Study of Writing and Literacy at Carnegie Mellon University. At the CLC, writing lets community members take action, build consensus, and be heard on a broad range of issues. Working together, CMU college mentors and CLC teens develop skills in intercultural collaboration, problem-solving, and writing. CLC projects culminate in public Community Conversations, which bring voices from the neighborhood, city, and university to a common table.

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