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## **A new spirit rising among us : urban youth environmental activists.**

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A NEW SPIRIT RISING AMONG US:  
URBAN YOUTH ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISTS

A Dissertation Presented  
by  
DEBORAH LETA HABIB

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

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Education

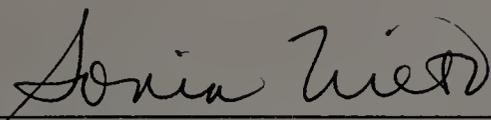
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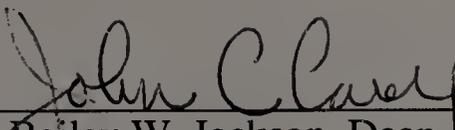
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by  
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*Perhaps a new spirit is rising among us.  
If it is, let us trace its movements well  
and pray that our own inner being may be sensitive to its guidance,  
for we are deeply in need of a new way beyond the darkness  
that seems so close around us.*

Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.  
"Beyond Vietnam" April 4, 1967  
Riverside Church, New York

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my grandfather, Isaiah. He worked six days a week, dawn until dark, ironing and bundling laundry in a Bronx basement. On Sundays, he studied. He was a voracious reader who, upon arrival in this country learned English, completed his high school education in two years, and then went on to study Russian, the language of his homeland. He was a leftist worker who read and wrote with a notebook and dictionary at his side, pursuing meaning and pursuing knowledge. And he was a peaceful and beautiful man of great integrity who struggled to maintain his political beliefs and cultural knowledge, and pass these on to his children and his grandchildren. As a child, I would sit and listen as he told stories of his life, vividly imagining a secretive Austrian border crossing or an encounter with the Bronx Mafia payment collectors before I drifted off to sleep in his apartment in the Far Rockaway projects. I know now that these stories not only shaped an understanding of his and my history that I would never learn in school, but also began me on a quest for the many meaningful stories that lives tell.

*And they shall beat their swords into plowshares,  
and their spears into pruning hooks;  
Nation shall not lift up sword against Nation,  
Neither shall they learn war anymore.*

*Isaiah*

And to the memory of Robert Shapiro, a trusted friend and colleague, and self described pilgrim. His peaceful presence and gentle wisdom are forever embedded.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My advisor Sonia Nieto supported, inspired, and challenged me throughout this process. Her scholarship, commitment to multicultural education, warmth and elegance is extraordinary. I truly cannot imagine this completed dissertation without envisioning her attentive and perceptive notes on my drafts, and the many meetings in her office that fueled and invigorated this work from start to finish. My other committee members, Byrd Jones and Myrna Breitbart provided insightful support and added diverse and important perspectives to this work throughout. I only wish they could all agree on where to put the commas! My colleague, dissertation companera, and dear friend Phyllis Brown has not only been a tremendous inspiration and source of support, but has become a wonderful, life-long friend.

My parents Stanley and Miriam supported and nurtured my creativity as a child, and believed in me as I pursued educational paths that did not match too many traditional models. My brothers Dan and Josh, although younger, are two of my greatest teachers, best friends and definitely favorite dancing partners. Chico and Jackson helped more than they will ever know by making me take a walk every day.

My husband Ricky is a tremendous supporter of my work as an educator while simultaneously ribbing me about my academic pursuits. He has helped me to keep a sense of humor and not take myself too seriously, often sneaking up behind me and pretending to hit the delete button as I worked. He is one of the most voracious learners I have ever met, and serves as a model of conviction and a passionate concern for social and environmental justice in all of his actions.

I sincerely thank the many adults who helped me to contact the youth I interviewed in this study, particularly Mariba Jos, Janet Parker, Eric Zinn and Trish Settles, for making connections and believing in the young people they recommended.

And I thank the beautiful and bright young people who shared the stories that inspired and shaped this dissertation, and filled me with hope and ideas.

## ABSTRACT

### A NEW SPIRIT RISING AMONG US: URBAN YOUTH ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISTS

FEBRUARY 1996

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The multicultural and environmental education movements have constituted significant political and educational forces over the last several decades. However, there has been little merger of these in terms of constituencies, ideologies and agendas. In schools, environmental and multicultural education are most often considered occasional additives rather than core curriculum, and rarely are they introduced as interconnected. Educational curricula and programs that support young people, particularly in but not limited to urban areas, in exploring connections between social and environmental issues and becoming knowledgeable and conscientious decision makers, leaders and activists are urgently needed.

Urban youth involved in environmental issues represent a venue for bridging multiculturalism and environmentalism as change agents who bring multiple cultural perspectives, wisdom, and leadership potential to the discourse. This research study explores conditions that promoted environmental activism and leadership among urban youth. An interview-based methodology was used to gain insights into the experiences and perceptions of twelve young people, male and female, who live in urban areas and are of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

The analysis explores influences such as family, culture, neighborhood and school in shaping the study participants' perceptions and involvement in environmentalism. Their

perspectives challenge limited and stereotypical definitions of environmental issues and support the notion that 'environment' is a socially constructed concept. The youth illustrate this in the examples of urban environmental concerns they identify and discuss as important to their lives and communities. Their experiences as youth activists and the nature of their activism is explored, including the importance of adult support and membership in community to sustaining their involvement. Their perceptions of leadership as a collaborative process, informed visions for rethinking schooling, and clarity in terms of educational and career aspirations reinforce their importance as contributors to the discourse on environmentalism. The lessons learned from this research are translated into recommendations for rethinking curriculum development and teacher education from a multicultural environmental perspective, and building alliances between schools and community and national organizations.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Numerous social and environmental concerns challenge people of all ages, in almost every nation in this day and age. Adolescence is a time period when identity is shaped and many internal questions asked. In the 1990s, young people in the United States are not only bombarded with popular culture that portrays images of sex and violence, but they themselves are often portrayed as uncaring, apathetic and problematic. Rarely does popular media or social science research focus on youth who are concerned about their communities and the planet they inhabit and will inherit.

These youth do exist. They are of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds and are emerging as educators and activists in their communities. There are many such youth in urban areas, aware of and concerned about the environmental and social health of their communities and the world. Their experiences, ideas and insights can inform the discourse on the education of young people in this society. Youth who are actively envisioning a healthier world may be in an optimal position to help shape learning environments that will prepare others to develop social and environmental understandings and approach related issues critically and creatively.

### Statement of Problem

Since the 1960s researchers have described youth, those ranging in age from 16 to 24 years old, as an alienated and isolated subculture (Ianni, 1992). Media images, public fear, and lack of support for the volatile and transitional time period called adolescence have resulted in the use of language that describes youth, challenged by multiple social and environmental ills, as members of "the new lost generation," or part of "the adolescent problem" (Ianni, 1989, p. 2). Schools and agencies sometimes use terms such as

"culturally disadvantaged," "at risk," and "dropouts" to describe youth. These labels tend to "locate problems within students rather than within the educational [and social] system," and can "present a view of students that is often discrepant with how they view themselves" (Roberts et al., 1991, p. 331). Language such as this reflects and informs the ways that society defines young people, focusing social crises on youth rather than examining how reactions of youth may be a response to social conditions.

There is little research on youth attitudes about social and environmental issues and it varies in results, perhaps reflecting the lack of attention paid to young people's perceptions of themselves and their role in society. One study that surveyed 17,000 high school seniors from 1978-1989 found that 45 % of those polled chose "mostly agree or agree" in response to the statement: "I feel I can do very little to change the way the world is today" (Johnson et al., 1975-89). Approximately 30 % chose "mostly agree" or "agree" in response to the statement: "When I think about all the terrible things that have been happening, it is hard for me to hold out much hope for the world." On the other hand, a great many youth are active and engaged in their communities, as evidenced by the response to the *Speak for Yourself* contest which tallies data from letters submitted by 12,000 young teens across the country. The letters show teens "studying issues, taking action, and proposing solutions to some of the nation's most difficult problems" (Youth Update, 1993, p. 1). That 12,000 youth responded when presented with a forum to state their opinions on social and environmental issues may be an indication that many young people are aware and concerned about the world in which they live.

There are many conflicting messages about youth and youth concerns, perpetuated by the media, and not always clarified or countered by educational statistics that often focus on unsuccessful rather than successful academic and social experiences among youth, particularly youth of color. Many of these conclusions are based on data collected and interpreted by adults. This may influence the research on and dissemination of information on young people today. There are many more images of gang-related violence on

television than there are of youth-run conflict resolution programs, and more discussion of teenage dropouts and drug users than of teenage activists and leaders. The perpetuation of negative images and the absence of positive ones may feed assumptions about young people, particularly urban youth, and their level of concern for social and environmental issues such as racism, violence, pollution, and public health.

According to Ianni (1989), a slightly higher percentage of all young people tend to live in metropolitan areas, and youth of color are especially concentrated in cities. Urban areas often host a tremendous variety of cultural, ethnic, and socio-economic levels, including recent and established immigrants and refugees from all over the world, and the impoverished as well as the wealthiest people in the nation. This diversity coupled with density of living gives rise to some of the most creative and exciting environments imaginable, as well as some of the most challenging social and environmental conditions.

Many young people in urban areas personally experience racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, and anti-Semitism. Adolescence is a time of deepening one's sense of personal and cultural identity. Starr (1993, p. 44) suggests that "developing a positive identity can be frustrated by experiences of racism, classism, harassment, and disrespectful education." Young people in cities face the complex issues of their urban environments, including violence, personal and public health, and pollution, as they simultaneously develop their sense of self. They must negotiate their transition from adolescence to adulthood while immersed in an age bracket often identified as developmentally and socially problematic. Furthermore, youth are bombarded with images of violence and sex in popular culture, and most lack the encounters with nature that so many cultures have recognized as essential rites of passage into adulthood.

Giroux (1994, p. 288) describes the postmodern culture of youth as "increasingly inhabit[ing] shifting cultural and social spheres marked by a plurality of languages and cultures." Urban youth of the 1990s represent languages and cultural traditions from all over the world, as well as many bicultural configurations that make them uniquely suited to

offer interpretations and perspectives on the multiple environmental and social problems that they face.

Many youth are actively involved in a process of redefining and making sense of environmental issues and connecting them to social issues that are familiar to their own lives. I met Charlene, a young Haitian American woman, at a conference sponsored by the *Environmental Diversity Forum* in Roxbury, Massachusetts. She described learning about the struggle of the Cree people battling plans for a *Hydro-Quebec* dam that would result in their cultural and geographic displacement, and how this initiated her involvement in the movement at her school to divest in *Hydro-Quebec*. Charlene explained that the scenario of exploiting land and people for economic reasons resonated with her experiences as a Black Haitian female immigrant living in the United States. In describing her recent interest in environmental activism she explained "It hit home, like environment was not those crazy granolas, it was [about] race, class, you know, power. So that's me, and I got directly involved." At this same conference I spoke with Julie, a Chinese-American young woman who had been surveying community groups, health centers, and religious organizations to gather information on the work they were doing on urban toxins in order to initiate dialogue among these groups. She explained that although they were "not explicitly talked about in Chinatown ... housing and space are environmental issues, but not green, bunny sorts of issues."

Fatima and James are African American high school students who live in Baltimore. They worked as counselors at a summer day camp for children run by the parks and recreation department. They described taking a group of children on a hike to see an old mining site. Abandoned for 20 years, it is now, as James described, a "big green pool of water with a lamp post sticking up out of it" where kids sometimes "get up on the side of [an old mining machine] and dive off into the water." Fatima's voice was passionate and alarmed when she described finding the site. "When we first saw it we were like 'what is this doing sitting in this neighborhood?'" They decided to call the head of the department

of public works, who told them he had not known that the site existed. Fatima described their action plan to me, and how they planned to turn the investigation into a series of activities for the children at the camp.

We gonna start letter writing on Monday, and we gonna call [the] senator and ask him 'does he know about that site?' and also write him. We want [the senator, public works people and district planners] to all come down one day and see this place. It angers me, 'cause I said to myself, in upper- class neighborhoods, you have the industrial parks, and they tell you that it's polluted, but then you have this thing sitting here. We don't know if it's polluted or not. There's no monitoring, and there's no way of telling whether this stuff can be toxic.

These stories describe youth making connections between environmental issues and people's lives and communities. The energy, wisdom and commitment evidenced by these and other young people are essential to social and environmental change movements. In addition to adding important voices and perspectives, their stories counter the negative stereotypes of youth and urban environments repeatedly embossed on the American mindset that perpetuate negativity, fear, and despair.

Gottlieb (1993, p. 314) notes the importance of the youth movement to environmental activism in his book on the history of environmentalism in America.

Young people have come to represent the first generation to be aware of the dimensions of the environmental crisis and its relationship to everyday experience. Young people are not simply becoming eco-activists, but they are also increasingly aware that the economic and social choices they face about their future work and lives have become more and more limited. The environmental crisis becomes the metaphor for a larger social crisis, while a generational politics, including a student and youth based environmentalism, becomes one crucial route for linking issues and movements that must be linked if that crisis is to be addressed.

Youth environmental activists, particularly students of color, are an essential part of the environmental justice movement which has emerged over the last few years as a forum for those traditionally underrepresented in mainstream environmentalism, including people of color, the working class, and the poor. Bullard (1993, p. 39) describes those involved in the environmental justice movement as "the most influential activists in placing equity

and social justice issues onto the larger environmental agenda and democratizing and diversifying the [environmental] movement as a whole."

The environmental justice movement has made public the fact that the social and ecological health of urban communities has been largely absent from the political and educational agendas of most mainstream environmental organizations. Millions of people in communities across the nation are directly impacted by the poisonous waste products of our society which have been buried under their neighborhoods. According to Bullard (1993, p. 17), "the most polluted urban communities are those with crumbling infrastructure, ongoing economic dis-investment, deteriorating housing, inadequate schools, chronic unemployment, high poverty rate, and an overloaded health care system." Communities with large populations of people of color and/or low socioeconomic class, often located in urban areas, have been disproportionately used as dump sites for our nation's toxins (Lee, 1987).

While environmental issues such as water and air quality, housing, food production, public health, and waste disposal impact every individual and community, knowledge about these concerns has been only minimally supported and disseminated in the primary educational institutions of the United States, the public schools. When addressed in the curriculum, environmental education is usually considered additional, or as Smith (1992, p. 11) says, "relegated to the status of another subject, another part of an already overburdened curriculum." When included, it is often from what I call the "hug a tree" perspective (Habib, 1994). This approach focuses on occasional celebrations of nature without attention to the sociopolitical context of environmental education or a lasting commitment to developing a socioecological consciousness among young people.

In particular, there is little environmental education curricula that specifically addresses urban environments or urban ecology. Due to perceptions of 'environment' as synonymous with 'wilderness,' cities have often been assumed to be 'environment-less' places. In a conversation with a friend and colleague who is a New York City urban park

ranger, I asked whether she or her coworkers had access to curricular materials that were relevant to teaching environmental education in an urban area. She responded that it was necessary to develop everything from scratch as there was very little existing material appropriate for the urban environment. In addition, she shared with me that many of the park ranger slots had been delegated as park patrols by the administration, further reducing the pool of educators, and providing a rather sad statement about the importance paid to urban environmental education. Those who suffer most from the lack of consideration given urban environmental issues in education are the youth who live in cities.

Several telephone conversations I made in order to establish contacts for this research inadvertently provided some informal data on perceptions of urban youth environmentalism and illuminated some related assumptions. Upon identifying myself to a contact, I explained that I was looking for young people who lived in urban areas and were active in environmental issues in their communities for participation in an interview-based study. When I called the office of *Teen Voices* magazine, the person who answered the phone immediately responded that she "didn't think the environment was an issue of concern for teens these days." Contrary to her perception, I had already made several successful connections to sources who were able to identify a number of urban youth and organizations actively involved in environmental issues in their communities, and I chose to share this information with her.

She asked, with surprise, "teens in inner cities?"

"Yes," I said, "all over the country."

"Well, when you talk to them, ask them if they want to write something for our magazine," she answered.

A call to a YMCA regarding an organization called *Earth Service Corps* began with my standard introduction to the project. As soon as the project coordinator heard my request, she responded immediately saying "first of all, the environmental issues that these kids are working on are probably not what you would consider environmental."

The first contact's response perpetuated the assumption that young people in urban areas, and perhaps people of any age in urban areas, are not interested in environmental issues. The second contact's immediate clarification of the context of their work implied that I would not likely consider their issues of concern environmental without an accompanying explanation. This is representative of the notion that cities are somehow not part of "the environment," and illustrates the pervasiveness of a dominant message about environment as synonymous with nature. These examples illuminate the need for increased public and educational understanding, a role that multicultural environmental education may be able to fill in order to bridge chasms that can no longer be ignored.

Although the multicultural and environmental movements have each significantly influenced educational and political agendas over the last three decades, there has been little merger of the two movements in terms of constituencies and educational ideologies. The major issues addressed by each have, for the most part, represented different populations, issues and priorities. Growing out of the civil rights movement, multicultural education has focused on and been associated with human rights and social justice. Evolving from the preservation and conservation movements, the mainstream environmental movement has focused on and been primarily associated with appreciating and protecting natural ecosystems. Those involved in the two movements have tended to represent different sectors of the nation's population. Proponents of multiculturalism primarily represent those discriminated against in society based on ethnic and cultural identity, while mainstream environmentalism has tended to attract a White, middle-class population. While there is a wealth of possibility for curricular intersection, as well as a great need for dialogue about the conflicts and contradictions between multicultural and environmental education, there has been a void in connecting these two fields. Not only have they been introduced in isolation of each other, but neither has been adequately recognized as basic education. Instead they are still perceived and incorporated as occasional additives to public school curricula.

The stories of youth environmental activists such as Charlene, Julie, Fatima and James may help to direct research and education that bridges multicultural and environmental perspectives and suggests that both are basic education. Young people such as these inspire hope as initiators of change in their communities and beyond, and as models for other young people as well as for adults. The cultural and ethnic diversity represented among them is an important reminder that environmental concerns and activism can and must cross perceived and actual boundaries and take many forms.

Educational programs and curricula that support young people in developing personal power in the midst of economic difficulties and social ills, and that promote positive self identity, knowledge of social and ecological issues, and leadership are urgently needed. They can all be informed by the stories and experiences of youth environmental activists.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain insights about conditions that promoted environmental activism and leadership among urban youth in order to suggest directions for curricular development and educational practice that reflect multicultural and environmental perspectives.

The following research questions guided this study:

What do young people of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds see as key environmental issues facing their lives and urban communities?

What causes these young people to become concerned about and take action on environmental issues?

What can educators learn from environmental youth activism and leadership, and what are the implications for school curricula and community programs?

An interview-based methodology was used to gain insights into the experiences and perceptions of 12 young people, male and female, of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds who live in urban areas. Additional data was gained by observing three

group dialogues and conducting mini-interviews with several youth at an urban environmental conference. Articles written by the youth in this study and media clippings and photographs reflecting their environmental activities and interests provided supplementary data.

The intent of the phenomenological interviewing and collection of written and media materials was to illuminate the participants' perceptions of environmental issues in their communities, their involvement with environmental activism, and the meaning they made of their experiences. The data was analyzed to develop profiles of each of the participants, then organized by themes that explored similarities and differences among their experiences. This research may be useful to educators in establishing curricula and programs that support activism and leadership and promote a positive sense of personal and cultural identity among young people, as well as suggest considerations and direction for education that is both multicultural and environmental.

### Assumptions

The importance of this study is founded on the following assumptions:

- 1) Multicultural environmental education as a field of inquiry and practice has not been significantly researched, defined, theorized or applied.
- 2) It is socially and educationally desirable to promote learning environments where students can build ecological and multicultural understandings, develop creativity and critical thinking skills, learn tools for citizenship and participation in a democracy, and be treated and treat others with respect and compassion.
- 3) The stories and experiences of all young people are valid and valuable and constitute important contributions to educational research and practice.

## Meaning of the Terms

For the purposes of clarity, the following terms are defined as they are used in this study.

### *Urban Areas*

Urban areas are considered medium to large cities and connected metropolitan areas. Some distinguishing characteristics of the urban areas in this study include: high density living with less open space than suburban and rural areas, ethnically and socioeconomically diverse populations, and complex infrastructures of transportation, water, waste disposal, energy, schools, and other public services.

### *Youth*

Ianni (1989, p. 8) describes the time period called 'youth' as ages 16 to 24, "no longer adolescent but not yet quite adult." In this study, I gathered data from young people between the ages of 12-20, as the experiences and understandings of youth between these ages seemed most applicable to pre-college curriculum. While the experiences and perceptions of youth in this age bracket contributed data to the study, all but one of the 12 who participated in indepth interviews were between the ages of 14 and 18.

### *Environment*

Random House (1975) offers the following definition of the term environment: "The aggregate of surrounding things, conditions, or influences." This might include natural, built or social aspects of a place. An *environmentalist* is defined as "any person who advocates or works to protect the air, water, animals, plants, and other natural resources from pollution or its effects," which brings us back to a more limited definition, pertaining only to nature. In this research, the concept of "environment " is viewed as a social construction, and therefore may have variable meaning depending on individual and

cultural perceptions, as well as the time period during which it is applied. Participants in the study were asked to define and make sense of this term from their current perspectives and levels of understanding.

### *Diversity*

In this study, diversity refers to ethnic and cultural affiliations, including race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, and social class. These and other dimensions of diversity were incorporated as the participants defined them as important to their lives and experiences. Diversity was an important consideration in recognizing that ethnic and cultural orientations may shape experiences, beliefs, and attitudes that contribute to the formation of environmental perspectives.

### *Multicultural Education*

Multicultural education is a dynamic process of recognizing that there are multiple ways of perceiving, believing, and learning that may be influenced by ethnicity and culture. Through involvement in this process, individuals can deepen their own personal and cultural understandings as well as develop increased respect for others. Jenoure (1994, p.9) suggests that "multicultural education entails the broadening of consciousness based on similarities and differences among and within individuals." Multicultural education is informed by the histories and herstories of struggle for human rights and justice. It challenges institutionalized bias in educational structures and promotes equitable learning opportunities for all students while preparing them for active participation in multiple social, economic and global spheres.

## Significance of the Study

This study examines conditions that supported urban youth from a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds in becoming concerned about environmental issues in their communities and moving their understandings to action. It is unique in that it intersects youth leadership and activism, community service, and environmental issues in urban areas, and bridges environmental and multicultural perspectives.

This study is significant to education in several ways. First, the need for students to develop environmental literacy and multicultural understandings is stressed in many current education documents. However, there are very few models that unite multicultural and environmental education in theory and in practice. This research provides some specific directions for teacher education, school curricula that develops ecological and social understandings and citizenship, and community programs that address environmental concerns in urban areas.

Second, while there is a wealth of research on the "problems" of adolescence, there is lack of research and information disseminated of positive examples of young people working for change in this society. Through the voices of youth representing a diversity of personal, cultural, and geographic perspectives, this research explores perceptions and knowledge of, and experiences with social and environmental issues in urban areas. It explores conditions that supported a dozen young people in becoming concerned about environmental issues in their communities, and how they translated their concerns and understandings into action. In a social climate where violence and despair fill the airwaves and popular media, the stories of these young environmental activists provide models of awareness, hope, empowerment, responsibility and community building for other youth and for educators.

This research also offers direction for supporting learning environments that help to build a "socioecological consciousness." Pedagogy and curricula that support the development of a "socioecological consciousness" engage students in examining

connections and contradictions among personal, historical, cultural and global perspectives on environmental issues, fosters creative and critical thinking, and supports their involvement in networking and community building, research and activism (Habib, 1994). Educating for socioecological consciousness requires bridging ideologies that focus on equity and social justice with those that develop environmental awareness and ecological understandings. The examples of decision making, leadership, and social and environmental activism exhibited by the participants in this research illuminated educational factors and values that promote respect, responsibility and citizenship. Insights regarding these conditions may be significant in helping educators to develop curricula and programs that bridge social and ecological concerns.

This study, and the articles and educational materials that will evolve from it are significant and timely in light of the 25th anniversary of the first "Earth Day" in 1995, and some significant shifts in the environmental movement and environmental education. The 1990s are witness to grassroots organizations in urban areas and poor and working class communities networking and collaborating to challenge environmental injustices imposed on their communities and form what is known as the environmental justice movement. This research serves as a means of disseminating the stories of youth so that their knowledge, experience and skills in activism, and ideas for educational and social change can contribute to the environmental justice movement and to the field of environmentalism as a whole.

#### Delimitations of the Study

In this section, I will explain the scope of this study by describing design factors that limited the study for the purposes of manageability. The delimitations helped focus the research and shape a methodological design relevant to the questions that guided this research. There are several variables that may have influenced the interpretation of findings. These are identified in this section as well.

The first delimitation concerns the process of selecting participants. Data were gathered in the form of indepth interviews from 12 young people between the ages of 12 and 18. I selected this age group in order to access the experiences of adolescent youth who still lived in their communities of upbringing, and were of secondary school age. I did not conduct a random sampling because I was seeking youth who had experiences and involvement in environmentalism. In this study, most of the participants were referred by adults, but it would also be possible and desirable to develop a process by which students could self-select based on predetermined criteria.

The study group was diverse in terms of ethnicity, gender, and geographic location. The intent of seeking out such a diverse group was to represent multiple voices shaped by varying cultural and regional perspectives, all of whom shared common experiences of urban living coupled with environmental activism. This diversity most definitely added to the richness of the study, and its contribution to multicultural research. At the same time these same factors complicated the analysis in that it presented multiple variables to consider in the interpretation of the data. As I could not possibly be personally familiar with the cultural and ethnic experiences that shaped each of their understandings, I interpreted the participants' stories and experiences to the best of my abilities, from a lens shaped by my own cultural knowledge and life experiences. The nature of the study involves interviewer as an instrument of data collection and is subsequently infused with some level of personal and professional values and beliefs.

The role of adult involvement needs to be considered as a component of the research design. Most of the participants in the study were referred by adults and were therefore identified based on adult assumptions about what constitutes a youth activist and a leader. In my conversations with these adult contacts, I did not specifically define the

words "activist" or "environmental," therefore allowing some freedom on the part of the contacts to interpret these words from their own perspectives. A primary focus of the interviews and the research was to give meaning to these terms from the perspectives of the youth in the study.

The levels of activism and leadership, and the particular environmental concerns with which they were involved varied among the youth, as did the amount of time that each youth had been involved in environmentalism. This study was an exploration of an evolving process among youth environmental activist and leaders as well as their interpretations of environmental issues, rather than an attempt to define what exactly constitutes "activism" or develop an extensive understanding of adolescent environmental perception.

I am not a youth. Although I did my best to respect their voices and experiences in the collection, handling, and analysis of the data, I believe it would be beneficial to conduct a study in which youth themselves are involved in the development of the design process, and collection and interpretation of the data.

I do not live in the communities where I conducted the research. While this offered an element of objectivity to the study, at the same time it meant that I was an outsider, returning to my mountain-view desk to write about urban experiences. However, my level of comfort with young people, familiarity with life in urban areas as part of my own youth, and commitment to urban environmental education may have benefited my interactions and ability to obtain insightful data.

For the purposes of manageability and sensitivity to the participants and due to the nature of phenomenological qualitative research, the study was not conducted over a long time period, nor did it include extensive observation. A series of in-depth interviews with each participant may have been beneficial in providing more insights. However, I found that with adequate pre-interview contact and preparation, the participants readily opened up

a wealth of information in the course of our in-depth interview, and without the pressure that may have resulted from a longer-term commitment. The interview and analysis process provided insights and questions that may serve to inform and guide further studies.

### Summary

I wish I could say that I wrote the following lines, as they are both appropriate to this research, and my philosophy of the practices of teaching and learning:

To educate is to take seriously both the quest for life's meaning and the meaning of individual lives. . . . Through telling, writing, reading, and listening to life stories, one's own and others, those engaged in this work can penetrate cultural barriers, discover the power of the self and the integrity of the other, and deepen their understanding of their respective histories and possibilities (Witherell and Noddings, 1991, pp. 3, 4).

Research built on people making sense of their lives and experiences through telling their stories is gaining acknowledgment and acceptance in circles in the social sciences and education. This study inquires into and relays the experiences of 12 young individuals who offer a diversity of personal and cultural experiences and who share a concern for the environmental condition of their communities and their world.

In this first chapter, I provided some background to the study, identifying educational concerns that this research seeks to address. Chapter 2 reviews literature pertaining to the topics of urban youth environmental activism and multicultural education. This serves as a foundation for the study, supports the analysis of the data, and helps to inform and shape the recommendations for educational practice and future research that stem from the findings of this study. Chapter 3 describes the research design and methodology. It includes discussion of the approach to phenomenological interviewing that was the primary means of data collection, integrity of the research including researcher bias and rights of the participants, and the process of handling and analyzing the data. Chapter 4 consists of profiles of each of the participants. These are their stories, in their

own words-- who they are, where they live, and how they got interested and involved in environmentalism. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 are my interpretations of their stories and include thematic analyses of similarities and differences among their experiences and visions, conditions that shaped their involvement in environmentalism, and the results of their activism. Chapter 8 explores the implications of the lessons learned from the analysis, and advances recommendations for educational practice, including teacher education and curricula and programs in schools and communities, as well as recommendations for further research.

It is my hope that the information and ideas gathered and presented as this dissertation will be useful to educators seeking to deepen their understandings of multicultural and environmental education and, in particular, ways of bridging these in theory and practice. In addition, it is an attempt to add to the ancient and ever-growing body of knowledge built of stories told and shared among peoples and cultures throughout the world.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### Introduction

There are four literature reviews that support this study: urban environmental issues, empowerment and pedagogy, multicultural curriculum theory, and social change. The review on urban environmental issues provides background information on some environmental concerns in urban areas and supports the premise that environmental and social conditions are intricately connected. The literature on empowerment and pedagogy includes definitions and conceptualizations of powerlessness, power, and empowerment, and examines empowering pedagogy as education for personal and social change. Multicultural curriculum theory provides frameworks developed by several prominent educational theorists and practitioners, and is included to examine possibilities for socially and ecologically responsible education. The review on social change explores the nature of such movements and applications to youth activism.

These four reviews were chosen to support the process of data collection and interpretation and to provide direction as to how the insights gained from this study may be useful to education, particularly multicultural and environmental curriculum. Additional material was sought out as the data was collected and organized to aid the process of interpretation. This literature is included throughout chapter five in order to support discussions of significant themes that emerged in the process of analysis.

#### Urban Environmental Issues

This literature is useful in examining how urban environmental issues have been largely ignored in the mainstream environmental movement and subsequently in environmental education programs and curricula. In the interviews, young people were

asked to identify primary environmental issues in their community. The existing literature is useful in assessing whether young people's perceptions and experiences correlate with information and research being conducted and disseminated regarding urban environmental issues. The primary issues in the literary spotlight include, but are not limited to, solid and hazardous waste, factory effluents, air pollution, poor water quality, incinerator ash, lead in paint, and pesticides used to control insects and rodents.

Many urban environmental issues are so intricately connected with social, political and health issues that they have been ignored as environmental issues, particularly by dominant political and educational organizations; they simply do not fit the "wilderness and wildlife preservation" image that many have come to hold as synonymous with the concept of environment. Anthony (1993, p. 57) says that "with its focus on wilderness, the traditional environmental movement on the one hand pretends there were no indigenous people in the North American plains and forests. On the other, it distances itself from the cities, denying that they are part of the environment."

Urban ghettos and barrios, rural "poverty pockets," and economically impoverished Native American reservations face some of the worst environmental devastation in the nation (Bullard, 1993). In 1987, a landmark study entitled *Toxic Waste and Race in the United States* was conducted by the Commission for Racial Justice of the United Church of Christ (Lee, 1987). This study and subsequent report identified and exposed some of the horrors of environmental toxicity in communities across the nation; it made a case for the inequitable and unjust connections among race, class, and the poisoning of communities. Some of the findings included the following: Cities with large African American populations have the largest numbers of uncontrolled toxic waste sites in the country; three out of five Blacks and Latinos live in communities with uncontrolled toxic waste sites; and race is the leading factor in the locating of commercial hazardous waste facilities.

Guerrero and Head (1990, p. 11) critique the mainstream environmental organizations' claims that people of color are finally coming around to the importance of what the environmental movement has been advocating for a long time. They state that:

Latinos and other people of color have historically been involved in struggles for environmental justice. The question of whether or not such involvement has taken place is rooted in the narrow definition of environmental issues used by environmentalists. People of color, on the other hand, have taken on environmental issues as community, labor, or civil rights causes.

Anthony (1993, p. 54) asserts that:

Most African Americans and Latinos have long been aware that our neighborhoods were dumping ground for locally wanted land uses, but not until Ben Chavis invented the term 'environmental racism' did we have a name for it. When the United Church of Christ Commission on Racial Justice published *Toxic Waste and Race* which documented the disproportionate siting of hazardous waste facilities in our communities, everyone knew right away what they were talking about.

Environmental issues and environmental injustices in urban areas are not a new phenomenon. Urban areas have long been places where social and environmental issues intersect. Solid and hazardous waste generation and disposal, occupational and public health issues, and water quality were among environmental and social issues endemic to the industrial city at the turn of the century (Gottleib, 1993). In the progressive era in the early part of the century, urban areas in the United States experienced a major increase in industries, and therefore the by-products of industry--toxic wastes and health problems among workers. The triumph of fossil fuels, diminishment of urban open space, and growth of industries such as steel, rubber, and chemicals, and the discharge and disposal of industrial by-products contributed to the massive human and environmental toll of this period. For those who directly benefitted from industrial and urban expansion, the city became a source of great wealth and a symbol of progress. However, this same expansion produced unsafe factories, polluted waterways, and untreated and uncollected wastes. Cities became environmental nightmares for urban workers and residents, many of whom were poor and/or immigrants.

As Gottlieb (1993, p. 54) describes it, "environmental degradation was seen as a necessary by-product of urban and industrial growth, with industry and civic leaders seeking to shift the burden of responsibility to the worker and community resident rather than the industry or municipality." Sanitation, occupational hazards, and environmental and industrial poisoning were defined by those with power and profit as the results of poor individual habits, equaling a new kind of environmental victimization. Gottlieb identifies Alice Hamilton as the country's first great urban environmentalist. Born in 1869 in New York City, Hamilton was a medical doctor who worked with occupational health and industrial poisons. In pursuing research among lead companies in the 1920s, she often encountered the belief that "worker unwillingness to wash hands or scrub nails was the primary cause for occupational lead poisoning and its occurrence was therefore inevitable" (Gottlieb, 1993, p. 49). She also found that many workers concealed illness out of fear of losing jobs, and therefore health impacts were under-reported by workers.

At the same time that urban environmental issues have been largely ignored by mainstream environmental organizations, massive environmental initiatives by these powerful organizations have usually excluded the residents of the communities who are faced with environmental issues. They then suffer the economic repercussions of "cleanup" without being included in the decision-making process. The following is excerpted from a letter to the "Group of Ten" (the largest environmental and conservation organizations, including the Sierra Club, National Audubon, and The Wilderness Society) in 1990, by individuals and organizations representing the environmental justice movement.

Your organizations continue to support and promote policies that emphasize the cleanup and preservation of the environment on the backs of working people in general and people of color in particular. In the name of eliminating hazards at any cost, across the country industrial and other economic activities which employ us are being shut down, curtailed, or prevented while our survival needs and cultures are ignored. We suffer from the end results of these actions, but are never full participants in the decision-making which leads to them. . . . (Sierra Roundtable, 1993, p. 54)

Some of the commonly and traditionally identified environmental issues affecting urban areas include pesticide use and toxicity, air pollution, lead poisoning, unsafe housing, energy costs, asbestos, siting of nuclear power plants and incinerators, and hazardous waste production, storage, and transportation. This list is not complete, and it varies from community to community. Each issue is vast and warrants extensive discussion. For the purposes of this research, brief descriptions of several of these and their impact on city dwellers serves as a foundation for understanding some of the urban environmental issues that participants in the study group must contend with.

Pesticides, the broad term for chemicals used to kill unwanted plants and animals are used in urban areas to control mosquitoes, rats and mice, cockroaches and termites. Pesticides are sprayed on parks, school yards, trees, highways, golf courses, and right of ways, in stores, restaurants, hospitals, office buildings and in factories. The greatest use of pesticides in urban areas is not for public health reasons but for nuisance pests and beautification. In cities, only 15 percent of pesticide use is for public health, while the rest is for property protection, nuisance pest control and aesthetic reasons (Concern Inc., 1985). Pesticide use in urban areas poses a serious threat to public health as exposure is often involuntary, and more concentrated than as used in agriculture. Sprayings are often decided on by local or state officials, rarely with public forums to discuss alternatives or possible risks. In addition, most pesticide labeling and warning signs are in English, thereby limiting the ability of those who do not speak or are not fluent enough in English to clearly understand associated dangers. Pesticide poisoning can cause temporary acute effects such as inflammation of eyes and skin, and respiratory tract infections. Chronic effects include certain cancers in adults and children, birth defects, and liver and kidney disorders (Brown, 1990).

Transportation, housing and energy use patterns of the urban poor differ from suburban residents. Anthony (1992) posits that in general, city dwellers consume less land, less energy, less water, and produce less pollution than their counterparts who live in

lower densities in the suburbs. However, many impoverished city dwellers must contend with the quality of life that comes with crowded and dilapidated housing, and less access to land for food cultivation. Housing density in the suburbs ranges from four to six units per acre while urban housing ranges from 20-80 units per acre. Compact buildings, shared walls, and less space per person should mean less heating demand per person, yet the poor often live in rented households which are badly weatherized and ill-maintained by owners. The urban poor spend a higher percentage of their household income on home energy than those who own homes in suburbs (Anthony, 1992).

While city dwellers use more public transportation, and shared housing, and therefore use less fuel and energy per individual, they still suffer from the pollution generated by nearby industrial and electricity generating facilities, much of which is in the form of air pollution. According to Wernette and Nieves (1992), industrial and electricity generating facilities are disproportionately concentrated in counties with high percentages of "minorities," hosting twice as many air polluting facilities as those with below average (less than 14 percent) "minority" populations. These facilities are the major source of primary air contaminants including carbon dioxide, sulfur dioxide and nitrogen dioxide.

A major issue affecting the residents of cities, particularly children, is lead poisoning. Schwartz and Levin (1992) describe this urgent environmental and health issue as hundreds of times higher than in pre-industrialized times. Lead in the form of particulate matter and emissions in the air contaminates surface and ground water, and soil. Lead toxicity is particularly problematic in children, and can cause learning impairment, brain damage, blindness or death. According to a national health and nutrition survey conducted between 1976 and 1980, blood levels were notably elevated for children living in inner-city areas. In New York in 1985, 1,300 cases of childhood lead poisoning were reported, with 90 percent of those in Black and Latino children. Prior to stricter regulations, gasoline, some food cans, and paint all contained lead. Lead paint poisoning is directly related to housing conditions. The more dilapidated the housing, the higher the possibility of lead

exposure as it is the release of lead dust from old paint on deteriorating walls that is responsible for many cases of lead poisoning. In addition, bare soil, uncovered by grass, lawn furniture, or swing sets leaves more bare, lead-contaminated exposed earth for children to play on.

The environmental issues affecting cities and city residents are numerous, and in addition to the aforementioned include the accidental release of hazardous materials, nuclear power plants, asbestos in homes, schools, and offices, and chemical spills which occur during production, storage, and transportation. The literature on urban environmental issues offers some disturbing but important information, and helps set the stage for concerns that the study participants face and identify, and that environmental education curricula needs to address.

### Empowerment and Pedagogy

It is in the spirit of empowerment and the pursuit of educational conditions that support empowerment that this study was conducted and interpreted. An assumption of this research is that many young people are conscientious, caring, and knowledgeable members of our society with ideas and actions that can provide models of youth leadership and inform curriculum development. The scholarship on empowerment validates dialogic, interactive, and transformative pedagogies, and is essential to the discourse on education that is multicultural and environmental. Definitions and conceptualizations of powerlessness, power, and empowerment are included in this review in order to consider the various dimensions of empowerment.

Shor defines empowering education as "a critical-democratic pedagogy for self and social change. The goals of this pedagogy are to relate personal growth to public life, by developing strong skills, academic knowledge, habits of inquiry, and critical curiosity about society, power, inequality, and change" (1992, p. 15). He suggests that "empowered students make meaning and act from reflection, instead of memorizing facts

and values handed to them" (p. 12). Within his discussion of empowering education, Shor addresses the political nature of education:

No curriculum can be neutral. All forms of education are political because they can enable or inhibit the questioning habits of students, thus developing or disabling their critical relation to knowledge, schooling, and society. Education can socialize students into critical thought or into dependence on authority (p. 13).

Several scholars relate definitions of empowerment to the learning process, addressing both pedagogical practice and behavioral change. Shor proposes an "agenda of values" that describes empowering pedagogy as: participatory, affective, problem-posing, situated, multicultural, dialogic, democratic, researching, interdisciplinary, and activist (p. 17). Many of the pedagogical values he describes imply collective activity. DiBenedetto (1991, p. 37) suggests that empowerment is "personal change and growth that results in a more confident, articulate, and societally active individual," and that "personal change and growth, fostered through experiences in a group can lead to more public, visible ways of exercising power."

Macy (1983) describes a fear of feeling powerless as part of the reason people disengage themselves from topics which are difficult and painful to address. She describes for example, that a frequent response to the subject of nuclear threat, acid rain, or world hunger is 'I don't think about that because there is nothing I can do about it.' She says that resistance springs less from powerlessness as a measure of our capacity to effect change, than from the fear of experiencing powerlessness.

While Macy tends to focus on personal experience in regards to powerlessness and empowerment, Kreisberg (1986, p. 33) situates the discussion in a sociopolitical context.

Most discussions of empowerment state or imply that large numbers of people in this society are 'disempowered' and that the experience of powerlessness must be emphasized in grappling with social problems. The idea and term "empowerment" emerged as a direct response to analyses of powerlessness and critiques of social structures and social forms which perpetuate domination and the corresponding urge to understand, identify, and describe processes through which individuals and communities create alternative domination.

Power has been historically misused and misappropriated as a force to dominate and control individuals, societies and nature. Rather than placing the blame on power itself, it needs to be reconceptualized so that access to knowledge and resources is more evenly distributed, without the destruction and oppression that power has often symbolized. Several scholars and theorists suggest perspectives on power which equalize access rather than dismiss power in its entirety. hooks (1984) speaks of a need for changing perspectives on power which call for a redefinition, new organizational strategies, and a creative and life affirming power defined by energy and accomplishment. She suggests that real power may come in the refusal to accept the definitions and assumptions put forth by the powerful.

Delpit suggests that critical analysis and acquisition of the "dominant discourse" can provide "a way both to turn the sorting system on its head and to make available one more voice for resisting and reshaping an oppressive system" (1994, p. 22). Sleeter and Grant describe "knowledge as central to power," because "knowledge helps us envision the contours and limits of our own existence, what is desirable and possible, and what actions might bring about the possibilities" (1991, p. 50). Knowledge about the workings of ecosystems, for example, and how the lives and health of individuals and societies are intricately connected to healthy and balanced ecosystems may support individuals and communities in recognizing environmental hazards and developing networks and strategies to challenge these injustices to their lives and communities.

Cummins (1993, p. 1) provides a framework for looking at power in his discussion of coercive and collaborative relations of power. In coercive relations, the exercise of power by a dominant group is to the detriment of a subordinated group, with the assumption that there is a fixed quantity of power that operates according to a balance effect. Cummins suggests that coercive relations, however, will eventually result in disempowerment, destroying those even in dominant positions. In his words, the "winner ultimately joins the loser." An environmental example of this is that pollution will

eventually affect even the polluters. Due to nature's ingenious design of the water cycle, those who own the factories which dump their wastes in the river out of short-term economic interests will eventually be serving up the contaminated water in coffee at their board meetings.

In contrast, collaborative relations of power assume that power can be generated in interpersonal and intergroup relations, resulting in empowerment and a greater sense of efficacy to bring about change. In collaborative relations, power is generated and shared. Grassroots environmental and social justice movements and organizations represent an example of collective and collaborative activity resulting in the power to affect political, social, and environmental change. Cummins's thinking on coercive versus collaborative relations has similarities to a question that Freire (1989) has raised: How can the oppressed participate in developing the pedagogy of their liberation? Freire poses that the pedagogy of the oppressed is "a pedagogy that must be forged *with*, not *for*, the oppressed (whether individuals or people) in the incessant struggle to regain their humanity" (p. 33). The concept of "power with" rather than "power over" as discussed by Kreisberg has similarities to the thinking espoused by both Cummins and Freire. Kreisberg suggests that:

The more people act and interact together in an 'integrating manner,' the more their common and individual power increases. Thus power is clearly conceived as expanding and renewable, emerging in the process of synergistic interaction (1986, p. 75).

Dialogue which focuses on deconstructing and reconceptualizing power can promote participation, collaboration, knowledge construction and empowerment in educational environments. Dialogue is essential to empowerment and critical thinking in education. As Freire (1989, p.81) says "without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education." Burbules (1993, p. 151) suggests that current tendencies in instructional practices are antidiological:

Our fundamental educational problem today is not one of turning schools into better engines of increased economic productivity and growth or of finding more and more directive ways to inculcate students with a body of 'basic facts' that we

presume they need to know. It is in finding ways to involve schools in creating and maintaining conditions in which inclusive, democratic, and open ended dialogue can thrive. Such an endeavor is basic to our individual flourishing and to fostering the social political development of equality and freedom.

Respectful dialogue with others can develop listening skills and the ability to analyze an argument or assertion. Students can apply skills learned through dialogue to their observations, arguments and conclusions, perhaps recognizing in the process their own assumptions and rationalizations. Critical dialogue necessitates individual reflection and provides a forum to share thinking and experiences.

Several theorists and practitioners include the concept of empowerment in their discussions of multicultural education. Sleeter suggests that "empowerment and multicultural education are interwoven and together suggest powerful and far-reaching school reform" (1991, p. 2). Nieto suggests that a multicultural approach values diversity and encourages critical thinking, reflection, and action, and that through this process, students can be empowered. She describes this "critical and liberating education" as opposite to what Freire (1985) calls "domesticating education" which emphasizes passivity, acceptance, and submissiveness. Instead, "liberating education encourages students to take risks, to be curious, and to question" (Nieto, 1992, p. 219).

Pedagogies that support the process of empowerment, such as multicultural and environmental education, present a necessary alternative to the individualistic, mind and heart numbing dynamics that often sadly characterize what goes on in schools. Aspects of empowerment, including dialogue, re-distribution of power, and personal and social change, are important considerations in moving education in schools from occasional "multicultural moments," or "hug-a-tree" nature celebration approaches, to education for a socioecological consciousness, which supports students in participation in critical, creative, and reflective activism.

## Multicultural Curriculum Theory

Multicultural curriculum theory is important to curriculum reform and revision in order to bring about equitable educational opportunities for all students. This literature review includes several prominent multicultural education theories that provide useful frameworks for examining how the insights gained from this research study are applicable to practices of socially and ecologically responsible education. This literature was of primary importance in interpreting the research data, and suggesting directions for curricular reform based on the insights gained from the study.

Sleeter and Grant (1987, pp. 423, 429, 434) reviewed multicultural education literature and developed a taxonomy by which to examine the term multicultural education and how it is used in texts, in order to provide a framework for examining different interpretations of multicultural education. In their review, the authors describe the literature according to the following categories:

\* *Teaching the Culturally Different*, which conceptualizes multicultural education as "something one does mainly with students who are of color."

\* *Human Relations*, which describes multicultural education as a way to help students of different background feel good about themselves.

\* *Single Group Studies*, which "focus on the experiences and cultures of a specific group, such as an ethnic group."

\* *Multicultural Education* which includes material that promotes the "strength and value of cultural diversity, human rights, and respect for cultural diversity, alternative life choices for people, social justice and equal opportunity for all people, and equity distribution of power among members of all ethnic groups."

\* *Education that is Multicultural and Social Reconstructionist*, which "prepares young people to take social action against social structural inequality."

Because of its emphasis on social action, this final category, *Education that is Multicultural and Social Reconstructionist*, is particularly pertinent to this study.

In his "approaches to curriculum reform" model, Banks (1988, p. 3) identifies levels which describe how multicultural education can be integrated into the curriculum. In my own work (1994), I have adapted Banks's model to view environmental education as currently taught in schools, and conceptualize intersections of multicultural and environmental education. The two frameworks are compared below.

	<u><b>Banks</b></u>	<u><b>Habib</b></u>
<u><b>Level 1</b></u>	<b>The Contributions Approach</b> Focuses on heroes, holidays, and discrete cultural elements.	<b>The Hug-A-Tree Approach</b> Focuses on occasional celebrations of nature.
<u><b>Level 2</b></u>	<b>The Additive Approach</b> Content, concepts, themes, and perspectives are added to the curriculum without changing its structure.	<b>Earth Appreciation Approach</b> Environmental themes and units are introduced, often explored as endangered resources, with a focus on developing fondness and awareness.
<u><b>Level 3</b></u>	<b>Transformation Approach</b> The structure of the curriculum is changed to enable students to view concepts, issues, events and themes from the perspective of diverse ethnic and cultural groups.	<b>Connections &amp; Contradictions</b> Environmental issues are core to the curriculum and viewed from personal, historical, cultural and global perspectives. Interrelationships are stressed. and conflict is addressed.
<u><b>Level 4</b></u>	<b>Social Action Approach</b> Students make decisions on important social issues and take actions to solve them.	<b>Socioecological Consciousness</b> Students examine political, social, economic and environmental intersections and engage in critical thinking, networking, research and activism.

Banks describes how in actual teaching situations, the levels of integration of ethnic content are sometimes mixed and blended. He suggests that it may be unrealistic to expect a teacher to move directly from a "highly mainstream-centric curriculum" to a social action model, but that the move instead be gradual, using these levels as vehicles to go from one to the next (p. 2). Each progressive level may include the ones before it. I would suggest that levels 1 and 2 in the environmental education framework are most accessible to a

majority of educators, and may be used as vehicles towards a more comprehensive approach. Often, however, the integration stops short of levels 3 and 4 in both scenarios. In both Bank's and my models, I would suggest that lasting personal change in terms of attitudes and actions on the part of both students and educators is most likely to occur in level 4, and that the actualization of this level requires deep commitment, and conscientious pedagogy. The approaches to multicultural education and environmental education most useful in conceptualizing the potential applications of this research are the *Social Action* and *Socioecological Consciousness* approaches, both of which have similarities with Sleeter and Grant's category of *Education that is Multicultural and Social Reconstructionist*.

Nieto suggests that "because [multicultural education] uses critical pedagogy as its underlying philosophy and focuses on knowledge, reflection and action (praxis) as the basis for social change, multicultural education furthers the democratic principles of social justice" (1992, p. 208). She describes multicultural education as:

- \*antiracist education

- \*basic education

- \*important for all students

- \*pervasive

- \*education for social justice

- \*a process

- \*critical pedagogy

Multicultural education, Nieto suggests, "invites students and teachers to put their learning into action for social justice" (p. 216).

Multicultural education that is social activist or social reconstructionist in nature supports students in analyzing issues of inequity; then it moves them to reflection, dialogue, and action. Suzuki suggests that the goals of education that is multicultural include helping students "gain a better understanding of the causes of oppression and

inequality and ways in which these social problems might be eliminated," as well as to help students conceptualize a vision of a better society and acquire the necessary knowledge to enable them to move the society toward greater equality and freedom (1984, p. 308).

A truly inclusive, social activist curriculum requires major change in the structure of education in this society. McIntosh states that the reconstructed curriculum not only examines all of human life and perception, but puts all elements in a revolutionary new relation to each other, so that the "pyramidal shapes of the psyche, the society, and the world are seen as inaccurate and incompatible with the decent, balanced survival of human psyches, institutions, and nations." She adds that "a genuinely inclusive curriculum, based on a global imagery of self and society, would reflect and reinforce the common human abilities and inclinations to cultivate the soil of the valleys and to collaborate for survival" (1983, p. 21).

Smith (1992, p. 93) also addresses the role of the curriculum in cultivating values of caring and social and ecological responsibility:

As the pursuit of self interest is impeded by the limits of the planet, we will have to regenerate patterns of mutual support encountered in [many] pre-modern societies and affirm ways of knowing that acknowledge our membership in the broad natural and social ecological systems of which we are a part. The cultivation of such support and the acknowledgement of this membership will require the creation of educational practices and structures that impart a new hidden [and I would add, core] curriculum, one that nurtures interdependence, achievement for the well-being of the group, affective and particularistic ties, and a deep sense of moral responsibility to the natural environment and to one another.

The multicultural education theories and frameworks summarized in this chapter were chosen for several reasons. They present multiple perspectives on pedagogy and curricula, illustrating that multicultural education is a dynamic process and a movement with many voices. Each of those I included resonated with my thinking about education that is multicultural and environmental. Multicultural environmental education bridges two developed schools of educational thought, but it is just coming into its own as an area of inquiry and practice. While existing programs can be adapted to reflect both realms,

ultimately the bridging of these ideologies entails a transformation in ways of thinking about teaching and learning. The orientation towards justice, critical and creative thinking and active student participation evident in the theories and frameworks presented in this review renders them extremely useful in guiding curricular revisioning along these lines.

### Social Change

This literature review is relevant to the study from two perspectives: First, because the field of environmental education in theory and practice can benefit from the knowledge and history of social change movements; second, because youth activism represents an important mode of social change. This literature review focuses on the grassroots, political nature of social change and provides a useful lens from which to explore youth environmental activism as a vital social change movement.

The *Random House College Dictionary* defines the word 'movement' as "a progressive development of ideas toward a particular conclusion," and "a series of actions or activities directed or tending toward a particular end" (1975, p. 873). It is a noun infused with verb-ness. The evolution and development of a movement is a process of creation shaped by multiple artists in a political, social, and environmental studio. Touraines (1981) analyzes social movements as central to how people create the world in which they live. He and others (Dobash, 1992) contend that social movements represent a collective process in society which emerges out of social unrest and develops and changes through various forms of interaction and communication. Dobash suggests that social movements come in waves, with numerous groups such as women, ethnic and religious minorities, and workers all seeking to change their social, political, and economic circumstances.

Piven and Cloward (1979, p. 3) describe that:

The emergence of a protest movement entails a transformation both of consciousness and of behavior. The change in consciousness has at least three distinct aspects. First, "the system" or those aspects of the system that people

experience and perceive loses legitimacy. Large numbers of men and women who ordinarily accept the authority of their rulers and the legitimacy of institutional arrangements come to believe in some measure that these rulers and these arrangements are unjust and wrong. Second, people who believe that existing arrangements are inevitable begin to assert rights that imply demands for change. Third, there is a new sense of efficacy, people who ordinarily consider themselves helpless come to believe that they have some capacity to alter their lot.

Gusfield defines a social movement as "socially shared activities and beliefs directed toward the demand for change in some aspect of the social order...what characterizes a social movement as a particular kind of change agent is its quality as an articulated and organized group" (quoted in Piven and Cloward 1979, p. 5). Similarly, Wilson describes a social movement as a "conscious collective organized attempt to bring about or resist large-scale change in the social order by non-institutionalized means" (quoted in Piven and Cloward, p. 5). Piven and Cloward suggest that whatever the varied intellectual definitions, "the effect of equating movements with movement organizations, and thus requiring that protests have a leader, a constitution, a legislative program, or at least a banner before they are recognized as such is to divert attention from many forms of political unrest and to consign them by definition to the more shadowy realms of social problems and deviant behavior" (1979, p. 5). Whatever the different schools of thought about social movements, there is general agreement that the emergence of popular uprisings can reflect profound changes in the larger society.

A commitment to an ecological mindset involves a paradigm of care, consciousness, and balance, which may be appropriately addressed through non-violent activism as a form of social change. Sharp (1992) discusses the historical impact and methods of non-violent struggle. Non-violent protest and persuasion can occur through verbal and symbolic expressions of a position or a grievance. He notes that protests and persuasions in the form of letters, petitions, leaflets, teach-ins, lobbying, picketing, vigils, marches, processions, and silence are among the activities that have been effective in diverse situations, and represent verbal and symbolic expressions of a position or a

grievance. Sharp describes a second category of non-violent methods as non-cooperation, which involves the deliberate defiance of certain existing relationships--social, economic, or political--with the intent to effectively delay or halt normal operations. In this approach, people may boycott selected products, stop work, or refuse taxes. A third form of protest is non-violent intervention which is a way to interfere in a situation and disrupt it by nonviolent means. Interventions can include hunger strikes, sit-ins, pray-ins, non-violent obstruction, setting up alternative systems of communication, or establishing a parallel government. These and other approaches to non-violent protest suggest peaceful, abundant, and effective tools for socioenvironmental activism. Though largely ignored in the discourse on social change movements, there are current and historically rich connections between nonviolence, social protest and environmental issues. Martin Luther King Jr., for example, was shot in Memphis while protecting garbage workers, and Thoreau was imprisoned for protesting the Mexican American War (Anthony, 1993).

The "traditional" environmental movement reflects the populations that have often dominated and been served by mainstream organizations. Bullard notes that "although concern for the environment cuts across class and racial lines, ecology activists have traditionally been individuals with above average education, greater access to economic resources, and a greater sense of personal power" (1993, p. 22). Youth environmental activists, particularly youth of color in urban areas, can diversify and add important voices to the environmental movement. Youth environmentalism is a movement in itself. Gottlieb (1993, pp. 313, 314) suggests that "student and youth-based environmentalism has the capacity to play an important role in creating new opportunities for environmentalism." He contends that "a youth politics offers another kind of opening for change, part of a renewed activism capable of undertaking its own 'long march through the institutions' in its quest for environmental redefinition and transformation."

A Unesco report (1981) identifies a post-1960s brand of "issue oriented" youth activism:

Youth may well end up playing a separate and militant role in a variety of social, economic, and cultural movements. Already in the ecology movement and other activities most visible in the industrialized nations of Western Europe and North America, we can see an issue oriented style of youth action taking shape. These movements are a sharp break with the visionary idealism of the 1960s. They take a defensive stance against further deterioration in living and environmental conditions (p.23).

In the discourse about the emergence of and participation in social change movements, it is interesting to consider the role of personal and collective hope and empowerment and how these can take precedence over despair. Tatum (1994) describes a "sphere of influence" as the arena within one can affect change. Evolving from this concept is the question of what conditions and factors affect one's ability to identify their own "sphere of influence" and how this is related to a sense of empowerment and efficacy in their lives and in their communities. Ianni suggests that "to effectively teach youth the importance and benefits of caring about themselves and others, communities must become environments where it is desirable to be caring" (1992, p. 1, 2). A sense of empowerment, and the sense of one's self as a change agent are related to the availability of support systems that promote positive self and cultural identity. "The dilemma of adolescence is not simply how to develop a self concept, it is a question of where to look for the personal guidelines which will allow a teenager to satisfactorily relate the sense of self with the social structure he must negotiate"(Ianni 1989, p.261).

What are the conditions that support individuals or communities, in this case youth, in gaining access to and participating in decision making, organizing, leadership and collaborative activities; all which are tools of social activism? A group of young people with leadership positions in a community service learning project were asked to generate words to describe their experience of youth leadership. The list included the following terms: "social consciousness," "responsibility," "social change," "counteracts despair,"

"peer support," "dialogue," "collaborative power," and "sense of self-identity development." This list, although not specific to an environmental agenda, is illustrative of what can happen when young people feel empowered as leaders and decision-makers (TEAMS Project leadership group meeting, March 12, 1994).

### Summary of the Reviews

McCracken (1988, p. 31) suggests that "the investigator who is well versed in the literature now has a set of expectations the data can defy." These four literature reviews provided background information, theoretical frameworks, and related research that served as sources to strengthen my analysis of the data, and at times, premises to challenge. These reviews provided foundational information that supported the socioecological focus of this research, and strengthened and challenged my thinking about curricular renewal from a multicultural environmental perspective.

## CHAPTER 3

### DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

#### Overall Approach of the Inquiry

Macy (1983) describes a woman who undertook a world tour to find out what ordinary people thought about the prospects for our planet. In Tokyo, Bangkok, and Delhi, she sat on a bench in a central square with a sign beside her that read "American Willing to Listen." People lined up in lines so long that often she was there on her bench until one or two in the morning. The woman did not claim to be anyone famous. "I'm just an ordinary citizen" she would say, "who wants to know what people are thinking." I aspired to conduct this research with an internal sign that read "Educator Willing to Listen" as I sought out the voices of young people, while remaining aware of the research questions that guided and structured this study and supported the integrity and validity of the data collection process. This section describes the techniques that were used to gather data, how integrity and validity were addressed in the research process, and the organization and handling of data.

The methodology of this research involved interviewing youth environmental activists in urban areas. The study was an inquiry into what had inspired these young people to become involved in their communities, take action and perhaps believe that they could make a difference. The methodological design included questions and observations to enable me to gain insights into familial and cultural aspects of the participants lives, how they understood and made sense of the concept of "environment," and how they felt particular urban environmental issues were connected to their lives.

Qualitative ethnographic research was appropriate for this study, as a purpose of qualitative research is to "gain access to cultural categories and assumptions according to which one culture [in this case, urban youth environmentalists] construes the world," (McCracken, 1988, p. 17). McCracken adds that "qualitative methods are most useful and

powerful when they are used to discover how the respondent sees the world" (p. 21). A primary purpose of this research was to gain insights from the experiences of urban youth activists and leaders to help educators in developing effective school and community based education programs. Saravia-Shore and Arvizu (1992, p. xxiv) point out that "educational ethnography has emerged to depict and analyze the culture of schools, the social organization of classrooms, and the interrelationship between communities and schools" and that ethnography is an appropriate strategy for research that needs to take into account sociocultural processes, intergroup relations, and programs that develop compatibility between schools and communities.

### Participant Selection and Setting

The study group included young people between the ages of 12-18, female and male, from a diversity of ethnic and cultural backgrounds and socioeconomic groups. In addition to my personal and professional commitment to representing a multiplicity of voices of young people, it was my intent to have a diverse group involved in this research for the purposes of exploring similarities and differences among their understandings of environmental issues and experiences of leadership and activism, and the role that their cultural and social identities may have played in shaping these experiences.

I identified the participants based on the recommendations of contacts, most of whom were adults. To initially identify these contacts, I drew from my existing knowledge of environmentally oriented organizations and projects, suggestions and ideas from colleagues, and resource lists of youth organizations. This networking process eventually led me to a number of contacts who supplied me with names of young people they were affiliated with or knew of. In some cases, the adult contact first spoke with the young person to see if they would be interested in participating in this study. Others gave me their

names directly, encouraging me to say that "so and so" had referred me to them. One participant was referred by another youth who had met and been impressed by her at a conference.

I then began the process of correspondence with each participant to explain the purpose of the study. Each participant received a cover letter that described the purpose of the study, and a written consent form to explain their involvement and their rights should they choose to participate. These are described in more detail in the section entitled "Responsibility to Participants." A copy of the cover letter and consent form are included in Appendix B.

Twelve young people participated in in-depth interviews; five males and seven females. Three live in Baltimore, two in New York, one in Newark, two in the Boston area, two in Springfield, Massachusetts, one in Los Angeles, and another in Cincinnati. All but one, a mature 12 year-old, were between the ages of 14 and 18 at the time of the interviews. Six participated in school based environmental activities, and the other six in community or national organizations.

All but three of the interviews were conducted in person. I met with each youth at a place of their choosing, so they would be most comfortable and in a familiar environment. These included schools, workplaces, neighborhoods and homes. I spoke with two of the participants, one who lives in Los Angeles and the other in Cincinnati, over the phone due to the distance. Because of the demands of her lifestyle, summer school and work schedule, I spoke with another participant who lives in Newark over the phone as well. While telephone interviewing is not as ideal as in person, these three young people were included because their experiences are impressive, two live in urban areas not located in the Eastern United States, and because their cultural backgrounds (Malaysian/Chinese, Asian Indian and Brazilian) added to the multiplicity of voices and perspectives represented in this study.

## Data Collection

The primary means of data collection was in-depth interviewing. Several mini-interviews, three observations of group dialogue, writing samples, and slides and media clippings also served as instrumentation and contributed to the data. The purpose and process of each of these is described in the following sections.

### Phenomenological Interviewing

Seidman (1991, p. 7) speaks of interviewing as "a powerful way to gain insight into educational issues through understanding the experiences of the individuals whose lives constitute education." The approach to interviewing that I incorporated to gather data evolved from several philosophical and methodological sources on conducting qualitative research. I incorporated Seidman's model of open-ended questioning to, as he describes, "build upon and explore participants' responses" so that the participant "reconstructs his or her experience within the topic under study" (1991, p. 9). I also drew from the *Long Interview* approach to design and conduct the interviews. McCracken (1988, p. 11) suggests that the *Long Interview* allows one to collect data without participant observation or prolonged contact, and to "achieve crucial qualitative objectives within a manageable methodological context."

A phenomenological interviewing approach was incorporated for the purpose of illuminating the participants' perceptions of their environment, and their experiences and involvement with environmental activism. Phenomenologists raise epistemological issues in the lives of ordinary people. "They are interested in the way people experience their world, what it is like for them, how to best understand them" (Tesch, 1990, p. 68). Patton (1990) describes six types of interviewing questions that can be asked of people; experience/behavior questions, opinion/values questions, feeling questions, knowledge questions, sensory questions, and background/demographic questions. While I developed an interview guide which drew from each of these categories, many questions and prompts

emerged as was appropriate to each individual interview in order to build on the participants' responses and encourage them to make meaning of their experiences as they found the language to describe and express them (Seidman, 1991, Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The interview framework that I developed for the purposes of consistency in the data collection process and to ensure that I addressed the central questions that guided the inquiry is included in Appendix A. While I prepared by reading through this before each interview, it remained in my pocket during the course of the actual interviews so that the meeting could take on a conversational form. I usually looked it over before concluding the interview to make sure I was not omitting anything. Each interview lasted approximately one and a half hours, plus informal chatting prior to our session and as closure.

Each of the previously mentioned approaches to interview-based research offered valuable and appropriate insights for conducting qualitative research with young people. The use of open-ended interviewing encouraged the youth to tell their stories, make connections, and generate their own information without being restricted to the confines of a pre-determined questionnaire. While it had some limitations, one in-depth interview was a reasonable commitment to ask of these young people, whereas more may have been invasive and made it difficult for some to participate due to the constraints of school, work, and family life. Although we did not meet over several intervals, the participants shared experiences, ideas, and personal information quite willingly during the course of the single in-depth interview.

### Group Dialogue

Three group dialogues involving young people active in environmental issues contributed to the data collected for this study. Each of these took a different form. In one case, I asked if I could sit in on and observe a session that was conducted by youth for youth at a conference sponsored by the Environmental Diversity Forum. In addition to this session, I also conducted mini-interviews with several youth at this conference,

individually and in small clusters. In another case, I conversed with four young people at the camp they worked at in Baltimore, two of whom I had previously done in-depth interviews with. I asked the four if they would have a conversation without me there at another date, tape it and then send me the tape. In the third case, I visited with the youth members of HEAT, Holyoke Educators Against Tobacco, and structured a role playing exercise to stimulate discussion about environmental concerns in their community, and how they perceived their participation in community issues, education and organizing.

The purpose of incorporating group dialogue as instrumentation was to enable me to observe interactions and gather data which represented knowledge constructed and expressed socially through dialogue among peers, which I hoped would build on the data collected through one-on-one interviews. The data collected from these dialogues and mini-interviews was used as examples of youth concerns and activism in chapter one of this thesis, and it added to my overall thinking and approach to the analysis.

### Written and Media Materials

Newspaper clippings, letters, newsletters, journal entries, drawings, brochures and flyers, and awards and acknowledgments related to the participants' involvement in environmental issues were also collected as data. These materials gave the participants an additional means to express their understandings and experiences. They provided another dimension from which to interpret the experiences of the study group members and were particularly useful in supplementing data collected through the telephone interviews. When consent was given, photographs of the youths and their communities were taken, and will be used for future presentations and articles.

## Integrity of the Research

### Investigator as Instrument

McCracken emphasizes that as the primary instrument in the collection and handling of data in qualitative research, the investigator uses techniques of observation to "winnow out the data," and search for patterns of association and assumption. This implies that investigators use their own experience, perceptions and imagination as a sort of filter. In order to prepare for this process of using the self as an instrument of inquiry, McCracken suggests that the investigator inventory and examine the associations, incidents, and assumptions that surround the topic in his or her mind. This gives the investigator a more detailed understanding of his or her personal experience with the topic of interest, and helps prepare for the construction of the interview questionnaire, as well as recognize possible biases, assumptions, and experiences that the investigator has which may influence the collection and analysis of the data.

The environments that I have known have shaped my personal and environmental identity and my career choices. As a child, I had many positive experiences of the urban environment. I recognize upon reflection that my experiences spending weekends and some summers in "the projects" with my grandparents, and frequenting the city throughout my life are infused with experiences of positive family connection which may be clouding my understanding of the stress that can be associated with continual city living. While I view cities as culturally, socially and ecologically rich and varied learning environments, I would not, at this point, choose to live in a large city. Most of my upbringing was spent living on a street that created the border between a suburban area and an urban community, sort of "caught between worlds," neither of which provided connection to nature. My earliest interactions with nature took place in a narrow strip of woods near my house that served as a drainage area. My friends and I hot-rodged our spider bikes on a muddy path and found secret hiding places in outflow pipes. In middle childhood, I found refuge in the

land surrounding a rustic cabin in upstate New York where I chewed the tender ends of stalks of grass and marvelled at star-filled skies miles from city lights. Both of these natural places, one urban, one rural helped shape my sense of connection to the earth, personal identity and likely my educational and career pursuits.

The lack of exposure to socially and environmentally conscious education in my own K-12 education also had a profound impact on my personal and professional choices. My own adolescence was a time of intense despair and feelings of powerlessness. The racial violence that gripped our high school and the lack of action on the part of school officials to implement conflict resolution measures or engage us in dialogue contributed to my pain and confusion. During this life period, the hope and creativity that I held onto for survival was maintained by a core and pure sense of the natural and the spiritual; an inner knowing that is still hard to find words to describe. Except for the art classes in which I sought refuge, my schooling did not nourish my creativity. I do not have any memory of science or environmental education that helped me to understand my connection to the natural world. These memories remain painful, but at the same time intensify my commitment to education that promotes respect for diversity and caring connection among people and between people and nature.

My commitment to advocating for education that is multicultural and environmental is reflected in the choice of this study topic. This ideological commitment and the personal and cultural experiences that shape who I am and how I make sense of things are infused in the design and analysis of this research and will likely influence the writing and teaching that will follow. I am touched by the young people in this study who live where I choose not to and face problems that I do not have to. My appreciation and respect for them relates to an assumption identified in chapter 1, that the stories and experiences of all young people are valid and valuable and constitute important contributions to educational research and practice. While I maintained professionalism and a critical perspective throughout the

process, I believe my enthusiasm for the young people who participated in the study was evident to them, and is an underlying current in the analysis and in the recommendations for educational practice that I suggest.

### Responsibility to Participants

After initial contact was made by phone or mail, each participant (and their parent or guardian if under 18) received a cover letter and consent form describing the purpose of the study, and their rights if they chose to take part. The consent form, (included in Appendix B) was designed following guidelines suggested by Seidman (1991). It explained the interview process, including their option to withdraw from the study without judgment at any time, and informed them that the research might be used for presentations and articles. Before beginning each interview, I reiterated that a purpose of the interviews was to listen to their ideas and experiences, that I would be taping and transcribing the interviews, and that they would take the form of a fairly informal conversation. I added that if I asked any question that they did not want to address, they had the right to "pass." They were then given time to ask me any questions about the process. At the end of each interview, I asked the youth if there was anything more they wanted to know about me or my work.

Participants had the opportunity to choose their own pseudonyms, or use their real names (first name only). This option was repeated before and after the interviews. Each of the participants chose to use their own first names. I respected this request as I interpreted it as a statement of them feeling good about themselves, and proud of their involvement in environmentalism that led to them being recommended for participation in this study.

Out of responsibility to the participants and to assure validity, they were asked to read the profiles which I prepared from their own words. After sending them each a draft of their profile, I called them to get their feedback and final consent. While I did not offer financial compensation for their participation, I sent them each a gift of a book to acknowledge their time and contribution to the research.

An overall goal of this research was to understand how these particular youth understood and made meaning of their experiences, and validate these understandings as knowledge that can inform others, including educators. It is my hope that the processes of meaning-making, dialogue, and networking that were a part of this research benefited the participants as well, and served as forms of support for who they are and the important work they do.

### Organization and Analysis of Data

The individual in-depth interviews, group dialogues, and supplemental materials served as instrumentation to gather data based on the purpose of the study and the primary research questions. The purpose of the study was to gain insights about conditions that promote environmental activism and leadership among urban youth in order to suggest directions for curricular development and educational practice that reflects a multicultural and environmental perspective.

Three primary research questions guided the study:

What do young people of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds see as key environmental issues facing their lives and urban communities?

What causes these young people to become concerned about and take action on environmental issues?

What can educators learn from environmental youth activism and leadership, and what are the implications for school curricula and community programs?

Twelve in-depth interviews served as the primary means of data collection, supplemented with observation, group dialogue and media material. Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 are the results of the processes of collecting, transcribing, editing, interpreting and organizing the data.

Chapter 4 is made up of short profiles of each of the 12 participants, in their own words. I edited these from the transcripts to present some biographical information such as name and age, where they live, and ethnic and cultural background as well as to serve as an

introduction to the environmental activities and groups they are involved in and what initiated their involvement.

McCracken (1988) suggests that a goal of qualitative research is to define analytic categories during the course of the research. In the process of listening to and transcribing the interviews I identified themes that emerged both in response to my questions and more organically. These started out as approximately 20 categories, and was eventually whittled down and consolidated to 13 major themes which are organized into the three chapters that comprise the analysis. Chapter 5 explores factors and conditions that shaped the youths' understandings, belief systems, initial thinking about and receptivity to environmentalism. Chapter 6 follows the youths' emergence and journey as activists, continuing to unlayer conditions that impacted their experiences and evolving insights. Chapter 7 explores personal transformations that have occurred as a result of their activism.

In order to initially organize the hundreds of pages of transcripts, I pulled out my trusty colored pencils and turned the written pages into rainbows of hues that marked significant ideas, perceptions and experiences. Using this color coded system, I established computer files of each original transcript from which I derived profiles of each of the participants for chapter 4. The remaining transcript material was, through a lengthy contemplation and cut and paste process, organized by thematic categories for what would become chapters 5, 6 and 7. I read and re-read each of these thematic sections, then incorporated literature from the reviews in chapter 2 as well as many additional sources to interpret and respond to the words of the youth. The analyses are organized as selected excerpted words of the youth interspersed with interpretation and commentary. General and specific lessons learned from this study are infused within the analysis. These chapters served as the primary source for chapter 8, in which I suggest implications of the findings, and pose recommendations for educational practice and further research.

## Summary: Notes on the Processes of Interpretation and Creation

Throughout the process of editing and analysis, I attempted to accurately represent the voices of each of the 12 young people who I interviewed and spent time with. I brought them into my study and heard their voices as I transcribed and reread the interviews. I remembered their body language, pauses, and the rise and fall of their voices when talking about something particularly exciting or discouraging or making a new connection. In addition, I attempted to remain aware of what was not spoken, to read between the lines in order to gain deeper insights and fresh perspectives.

It was exciting and challenging to assist the emergence of form as bits and pieces of connection among the stories became apparent. I used their stories as material from which to sculpt a new creation that doesn't exactly resemble any one of them. I attempted to let each of their contributions be a story in itself, to stand out as gold threads in a tapestry. Through the process of listening, over and over, to these young people's life experiences, their struggles and their dreams, I developed fondness for them as they made their daily entrance into my mental studio. I heard their voices, and one by one saw them in memory as they showed me their favorite part of a mural painted on building wall, or waved good-bye on a New York corner as they headed for the downtown bus. Although our time together was short, I see them as friends, teachers and inspiration, and I am appreciative of the vivid and at times frenzied convergence of voices that filled my mind as I did my best to make sense of and articulate their stories with clarity, creativity and integrity.

## CHAPTER 4

### PARTICIPANT PROFILES

The intent of this chapter is to introduce, through a brief biographical profile, each of the twelve youth who participated in phenomenological interviews. Demographic information on each participant is listed on the following page. The profiles were extracted from the transcripts to convey basic demographic and cultural information about each participant as well as to describe their involvement in environmental activities, and when and how that involvement began. These profiles are also intended to help set the stage for the extensive thematic analyses in chapters 5, 6 and 7. Some contain segments that appeared in the youths' writing and quotations from news articles.

In my editing process, I tried to be sensitive to word use, phrasing and sentence constructions, so that the voices of each interviewee remain imbued with the character and qualities expressed in the interviews. As one of the most commonly asked questions I've encountered among friends and colleagues is "how did you find them?" I have begun each of the profiles with a very short introduction about how I made initial contact, and where the interview was conducted. The variety of places and sites where the interviews took place added to the process and scope of this research, and is conveyed with the hope that setting the stage for each profile may bring a more visual experience to these diverse and inspiring stories.

Demographic Information

<u>Name*</u>	<u>City</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Ethnicity **</u>	<u>Socioeconomic***</u>
Alison	Baltimore	17	European Amer.	Middle Class
Kalpana	Cincinnati	16	[East] Indian Amer.	Upper Middle Class
Tam	Jamaica Plain	12	Euro and Native(?) Amer.	Privileged Poor
Jason	Roxbury	14	Cape Verdean/ White	Working class
Kenya	Newark	18	Brazilian	Working/Middle
Darnyell	Baltimore	17	African American	Poor/ Working class
Frankie	Baltimore	15	African American	Working Class
David	Los Angeles	14	Chinese/Vietnamese	Working/ Middle
Eva	New York	16	Chinese American	Working
Kiet	New York	16	Vietnamese	Working
Jessica	Springfield	16	European American	Working/Middle
Zita	Springfield	17	African American	Working

\* Before and after the interviews, each the participants was presented with the option to use their own first names, or a pseudonym of their choice used in the final written materials. All requested that their first names be used, and I respected this request as it seemed reflective of their pride in having their stories validated and told.

\*\*When the participant chose specific language to describe their ethnicity, I used their words, such as Jason who says half Cape Verdean and half white, and Tam who raises the question of his possible Native American heritage. In other cases, I have chosen commonly used terms such as African or European American, recognizing that these terms are broad, and often not inclusive or accurate descriptors of all aspects of one's heritage. If the participant was born in the United States, "American" appears as well. The demographic information on this list is included to provide an overview of the many ethnic and cultural groups, including age and location, that the participants in this research reflect. The words of each of the participants included in the profiles and analysis illuminate in more depth their personal, familial, and cultural identities as significant to this research.

\*\*\*The participants were not asked to specify a socio-economic category. This information was gleaned and determined by their responses regarding their parents employment, and descriptions of their homes and neighborhoods. The categories are chosen by me, with the recognition that class lines are not always so clear. The category "privileged poor," for example, refers to a family that has essentially chosen a life of low income living, although educational and career options may have been accessible to them.

## Their Stories

David

David was mentioned as a "mover and shaker" in promotional material I received from *Kids for Saving Earth*, an international organization based in Minnesota, who assisted me in making contact with him. As he lives in Los Angeles, we spoke several times by phone, conducting the interview from our respective homes on the East and West coasts.

My name is David and I'm currently 15 years old and a freshman in high school. I was born in Malaysia. That was when my family was emigrating to the United States. We are Chinese, and we were living in Vietnam. My father was born in China, and my mother was born in Vietnam. We had left Vietnam in late 1970s, and we stopped in Malaysia at the refugee camp and that was where I was born.

Ever since we've moved to California, we've been living in the same part of Los Angeles. We're on, I guess you could say the outer edges of Los Angeles. We have a little shop near the downtown Chinatown area, it's mainly an import/export firm. I'm happy to say we just bought our first house, and we're moving next week. We're really making that place nice, making our first home.

My involvement in the environment began when I was in the sixth grade which was around the age of 11, 12 years old. And up to that point I had a lot of interest in the field of astronomy and in science. I came to a realization that while we were exploring and charting all these planets and moons, and peering into our universe that we have a lot of problems here at home on earth that we're not really addressing as much as we should. And while space exploration is a valid interest, or something that we should really look into, we also need to focus on sustaining the natural balance here on earth. So that was when I really started writing letters, and calling other organizations, and trying to get involved as much as I could.

At that time, it was mainly my own personal interest. Near the end of the school year I had approached one of the teachers at my elementary school about being a sponsor of an environmental club that I wanted to start up at the elementary school. Being so late in

the school year, that was a little difficult in doing and we weren't really able to get a solid club going, but that was how my affiliation with Kids for Saving Earth (KSE) started. She (the teacher) had gone to Target, and saw the [KSE] information booth there, and she brought back club information. It's mainly like a K-Mart store you know, like where they sell clothing, and electronics. It's like a home consumer type of store. And they have an information booth there with little brochures and flyers and the *Kids for Saving Earth News* which is a little newsletter that *Kids for Saving Earth* publishes.

That was basically how I started with *Kids for Saving Earth*. And from that I became more and more involved, getting fed, literally all this information about the different programs they had. And so I was able to get a better understanding of all the activities and groups that were working on various projects, so that I in turn could get involved myself.

In seventh grade, which was about a year after I had got started in the environment, I volunteered at the *Fifth National Urban Forests Conference*, which was sponsored by American Forestry Association. The school released me for two days to go to this conference, as a volunteer and participant. And from there I met many people and established new communication links with various organizations, most of which were out of California.

The idea for the National Youth Summit was born at the conference I had volunteered at. And so it was really, really interesting. It was a conference for kids by kids. The steering committee was all youth, members of different organizations working on behalf of the environment. I've applied for a steering committee seat on the Southern California Partners for the Planet Youth Summit that grew from the National Youth Environmental Summit.

Alison

Although Alison lives in Baltimore, I met with her in Jamaica Plain, Boston, where she was spending several weeks collaborating on a newsletter and networking plan for youth who had attended a national conference to plan for Earth Day 1995.

I'm 17 and I live in Baltimore City, in a row house. And I've lived in Baltimore for seven years now. I lived in New Jersey before that. I go to school out in the suburbs, sort of. I've sort of been getting into environmental work in the last two or three years. I've been involved in several different things. It's been hard to try and get things started in my school. It's a White, upper-class school. It's been very interesting because it's a very different scene in Baltimore city than in the suburbs. I'm White. My parents are Protestant. They went to church when I was little, but I don't go to church. I'm just me, basically.

I live with my mom, it's just the two of us. She makes about \$40,000 a year but mostly it goes to paying the mortgage, paying the bills, paying college debts for my sister's college. We had to figure it all out because I'm going to college next year, and we figured out that after we pay off everything we have to pay we have 300 dollars left. So it's going to be really tough, trying to scrape everything together. I see [my dad] like twice a year, and he calls me pretty much every week, we have an interesting relationship. I don't feel like he really knows me 'cause I only see him like twice a year. And there's been a couple times when I talked to him when he said something and I just realized he doesn't really know who I am.

Chewonki, that was really my turning point, when I got there. It's a camp and a school [in Maine] and they have a semester program and I did that. That was my eleventh grade year. There were about thirty students from all over the U.S. and Canada. Chewonki was a really, really great place, because they take the things that you're learning, and they, (pause) everything you do you go out and do it, you know? They asked us "What issue do you want to study that's local, but also global?" And so there was a nuclear power plant just a couple miles away, so the first one we did was nuclear power.

For an Earth Day Project that we did for school last year I got 250 people together from six girls' schools, and we went into the city, to Weekan Park. Trust for Public Lands

is getting this greenway together that goes through Baltimore and there's a river that runs along that path. Right now it's just filled with dryers and cars and tires, millions of tires just everywhere, and they're trying to get this path built, you know, like the path that goes through Boston. So last year we went and for our token Earth Day thing we went and cleaned it up.

But this year, I got 450 people and I extended the group to be from Baltimore City, and Baltimore County and girls' schools, and boys' schools, and public and private. I got the heads of the environmental clubs. I called up the schools and said "Do you have an environmental club?" and I got the students' names, and I got an adult who would be an advisor. I gave them a call, and I had to be really organized about that (laughter). My school luckily supported me, because they saw it as an opportunity for them to get their faces in the papers. But, you know, if that's what I could offer them to help me out, you know so I could make phone calls. And I made up mailings, and I had to have meetings at our school.

We had to have trash bags, we had to have the city parks department coming in to clean up the trash. There's needles over in the park, and we had to do an education thing about "Kids, don't pick up the needles." We had to have nurses for people that fall down the hill and cut themselves, we had to have water so people don't get dehydrated. There were so many aspects of the project that had to be put together. [For organizing this event] I won the Youth Award for the State of Maryland for environmentalism.

Frankie

Frankie lives in Baltimore and works as a counselor with *KidsGrow*, a city-sponsored summer program for children that focuses on environmental education. He and Darnyell, who are both African American, were recommended by KidsGrow director Janet Parker. I spent a day with them and the KidsGrow campers visiting a local community garden and hiking in a city park.

My name is Frankie. I'm a senior, I attend Dunbar High School. I'm 17, I play football, JV, next year I plan on moving up to Varsity. I was born in Baltimore, Maryland.

Most of my family comes from South Carolina. Everybody's over the age of 21 in my family except me and there's six; I have two brothers and three sisters. [I live with] my mother, my father, my brother and my sister.

I'm in a project it's called *Project Raise*. It stands for "raising ambitions instill self-esteem." Me and 62 other kids, we were together from our elementary school. And now we're in this program, it's like a mentorship program. Each of us has his or her own mentor to like help us with our school work, and take us on trips and stuff like that, like a big brother, big sister type of thing. Outward Bound, Outward Bound Urban Resources Initiative (OBURI) they got in contact with Project Raise, and Mr. Johnson, he's like the program coordinator, he hand-picked some of us to be in this program. What the program is, is a six-week forestry study program, like testing quality of stream water. We planted trees, we [did] garden maintenance, you know like urban forestry. These tests you do, somebody go stand in the water with a net and put the net down in the water and lift up the different rocks and stuff in front of it right, and like mix it around and get up a bunch of dirt, stuff like that, and they flow through the net and then you can see what different types of insects you catch. And you could tell from that how healthy the water is, water quality.

This summer I'm in *KidsGrow*. Janet Parker, I think she got in contact with Mr. Johnson. I guess he heard about the program, and they needed like some experienced people around my age so they found me. People who have some training, not really training, but have some knowledge of the woods, environment, and somebody who's done the same type of program that the kids, the Kids Grow kids are doing, except we did it [before] and it was harder. Besides giving them something to do, [the kids] are being made aware at a young age. Hopefully they're telling their friends, it get back to their parents, and hopefully just keep going. Most of them probably spend most of their time in their neighborhood. [What's important is] letting them know it's another world out there, seeing it.

Some people think I should become an Outward Bound instructor, but I'm not too sure if I want to do that for the rest of my life. So I'm still trying to get my options together. The instructors, they think that what I was doing, the way I was guiding the kids when we were on Outward Bound for a week, they think that I should think about doing it for a living, 'cause I'm good at it, my knowledge of the forest and my leadership skills. I need to find out some more about that. I'm not too sure but I don't know if I want to do that for the rest of my life, spending weeks at a time in the woods, all year long. I don't know. I'm just not really a forest kind of person. I mean, I do it, but I like civilization. I mean I like the forest too, and nature, but I don't know about spending that amount [of time], a bigger part of my life in it.

### Darnyell

Darnyell, who also goes by the name of Cotin, lives in Baltimore and like Frankie, was involved in Outward Bound Urban Resource Initiative for two years before becoming a counselor with *KidsGrow*. At the end of the day, after I had spent time with and done individual interviews with Darnyell and Frankie, we joined two of the other *KidsGrow* youth counselors for a group dialogue.

I live in a quiet neighborhood, it's clean, 'cause mainly like old people live around. I like it here, its peaceful. Where I was living before, we had just moved there, my mother lived at Cherry Hill [a housing project ]. When I first moved I was like, "I am not living here." It is so dirty out there. They would sell drugs and all in front of your door. I was like, "I'm not living, I'm not staying here."

I've lived with my grandmother for seven months. She's like more my best friend sometimes than my grandmother, 'cause she be joking around with me sometimes. She would always be around when we was little though, and buy stuff, and I was always the first one to finish, and I'd be quick to put it in the trash, and my cousin and them just throw it around. And by me being the oldest and letting it sit there and don't say nothing she tells me, "Well why would you let them throw that there. Pick that up." And I would have to pick it up. So I got used to... I don't want to pick somebody else trash up, you know,

I'm going to throw my own away, and tell them you know don't put it there, put it in the trash.

Mr. Johnson (a mentor from an academic support program) and Frankie called me, and they wanted me to do the job [with Kids Grow] 'cause it's like the same thing that I've done, that we done last year with O.B.U.R.I. (Outward Bound Urban Resource Initiative) with hiking and stuff like that, so they just said well the only thing different this year is that we'll be the junior counselors, and we'll have control of the children, and were going canoeing. So they said like come on, come on it's a good job. I was like I'll check it out, 'cause I never been canoeing before and I wanted that experience. And I guess they convinced me 'cause I decided to do it.

They (the kids in KidsGrow) learn how to test different soils, which soil is good enough to plant a garden in, and how to take care of a garden. They learn about the Chesapeake Bay. Most of them probably just throw trash around, but I guess since they've seen where the trash goes into and how it comes out, they don't take it for granted anymore. We've been on a boat trip, along the coastline. They liked it. We were testing different waters and stuff, seeing why is the water so cloudy in certain areas, why is it clear in other areas. And then you find out that if it's cloudy in an area where it's like, sun just barely beaming on it, it's cloudy because the sun's not actually going deep down into it like it should.

Last year [with O.B.U.R.I.] we went hiking and stayed at a couple of places. We stayed at Johns Hopkins College, we stayed at like a boat marina. We just stayed at like different places, toured Baltimore. That's something that I never done, 'cause when we went I was like "I never knew this was here in Baltimore!" We went where these kids were building their own boats, and we stayed up there near the hillside and the water was further down. And I was just watching and I didn't think that people could actually be building it by hand. But they did it.

It was nice last year. We did a lot of stuff. But the only thing I was upset with last year was when they was getting us to pick up some heavy railroad ties. Those things are heeeavy. We was trying to make this environment more better than what it was. It was like behind peoples' houses, where used to be an old parking lot, and people just started throwing trash over there, on top of grass and all that stuff. And it just piled and piled up. We went in, we raked, we shoveled, we raked, we shoveled, put stuff in trash. I think we had about three city garbage cans, you know trucks. That's how much trash was out there. I think we worked on it for three weeks, and we finally got finished. I was like, I bet it won't be like that in a couple years. It'll probably go back to the way it was.

See most people that throw trash, I wish they could experience the stuff that we are experiencing. We put gravel and stuff down and we put railroad ties around. We made like a little garden but it wasn't a garden, we just made it you know, square like. We gave it steps and in one part we put flowers up around. It kind of made me feel like important, that if I was to go past this spot or something, I would know that I helped do that.

Eva

Eva and I met after school at the High School for Environmental Studies in New York City where she is a student. A faculty member, Eric Zinn, was very helpful in informing members of his environmental studies class about the opportunity to participate in this research, and leading me to Eva and Kiet.

I'm 16 years old, and this is my first year in this school, Environmental Studies. This is a new school, it's only been for like two years. I applied. They started last year, so there's only ninth and tenth graders. Next year they're going to build up and we'll be moving to a new building. I like it here so far, 'cause I have like environmental classes, and I also get all my academic classes. It's not that organized yet, 'cause it's still new. They're going to have more classes next year, that's really good, like electives. I'm going to be taking an ecology class, and marine biology.

I was born in New York City. I live down by East Houston, it's kind of near here, I can take the bus. [My mother and father], they came from China 20 years ago, something like that. I have a younger brother, he's in Brooklyn Tech, a Freshman, so he's like a year younger than me. We get along. We can talk, and he understands me, 'cause usually brothers and sisters, they always yell at each other. My mom works in a factory, she makes clothes, and my father works in a restaurant. I speak Chinese at home, that's how I learned my Chinese, but I don't know how to write it though, I only know how to speak it. Many people they don't know how to write it, 'cause its really difficult. Like, all those characters, it's really hard. But I try to speak more at home, so I can learn it, like improve on it.

I like this school though, I really do. Some people they go like, "Yeah, you're probably just saying that." 'Cause y'know, I really do, I go home, I get excited. During class time, we went out tabling. We set up a little table by the school. That was one we were doing on the lead (lead poisoning). Some kids, they wrote about noise pollution, they went down to the "L" train, with this, I don't know what its called, like a noise detector kind of thing, to see how loud it is. And they wrote a letter to the Transit Authority. I did a little survey form, like a survey saying what kinds of things pollute, like noise pollution. Like car stereos, they drive by and they're so loud and sometimes they just park there and they just play their music so loud.

I have an internship program, but it ended last week. I picked it and then I applied for it kind of and then they interview you, and then they pick you, and then you get to do it. It was for the Spring semester, second term. The Botanical Gardens and the Green Guerrillas, they arranged it for us to go. It's composting, and every week on Wednesday afternoons from two to three, I went to a second grade class and then I teach them about composting. And then we had to read a book, on composting, like how the worm recycles, and reproduction. And then we had to develop a lesson plan. From three to four when we come back, we develop a lesson plan for next week, so that's how we did it. Me

and two other students, we went in every week. I did second grade and Kiet did the fourth grade. I only had eight children in there though. Kiet had 24, and it was like a big class. Mine was a little class. I think, they were kind of like bilingual though. English as a second language. There was Spanish and Chinese in there. They didn't really know that much English, but they still knew enough. We had a worm bin in the classroom, and inside there's food scraps, it's another way of recycling. You put like food scraps, like potato peels, banana peels... the worms eat it and then like they recycle it. And then you can use the compost for plants. There were these two kids, they wouldn't talk, they were very quiet, but when it came to when, when this little boy named Jonathan, he's Chinese, when he saw the worms, he would just, like talk about it. And the teachers said we did a good job 'cause we got him talking. And then we felt proud, like you know he was really quiet. They wanted him to bring the worm thing home but then his father said no, 'cause he got rats at home so he don't really want that stuff.

Kiet

Kiet is also a student at the High School for Environmental Studies in New York. He met with me following his debate club meeting, and prior to studying for the Regents. He and Eva participated in a similar internship, and are both in the honors environmental studies class in their school.

I came from Vietnam in 1986. I think I was like eight, nine years old. A large portion of my family was already here. The father of my mother lived in the country side [in Vietnam], so I'd go there like three days, and then go to the city for like four days. I lived in both.

I live in Queens. My neighborhood is bad. I have two older sisters, two younger brothers, and one younger sister. When I was in junior high school, I was introduced to this school. I'm a sophomore, I'm in tenth grade. I learned a lot from this school. Especially in the field work, environmentally.

What happens is that our school actually works with 10, 20, 30, 40 organizations, environmental organizations, throughout New York City. I've done internships for two consecutive years, ninth and tenth grade. In ninth grade I worked for Operation Green Thumb and Green Corp. Operation Green Thumb was basically office work, they didn't actually let me go in the field and do much field work. But Green Corp., they actually helped students around New York set up an Earth Day Spring clean-up last year. Children and kids my age cleaned up South Street Seaport. We went from South Street Seaport all the way to Roosevelt Park in China Town. The media really came. *New York One* was there, *Channel One* was there, and 95 point something (radio station) was there.

I also worked on a project on deforestation with Green Corp. What happens on the areas in North West of the U.S, like the North of California, Oregon and Washington is there are still forests there, but we're noticing that people are actually cutting down these forests. Were trying to save the forest. And so what we did is we had a petition, and we sent it to President Clinton.

I just finished an internship. It was with Botanical Gardens, Green Guerrillas. They asked us to sign up to form a little small group of future teachers, teaching fourth graders and second graders, nine and seven year olds. The school is down the block, a few blocks down. We teach them about worm environment, life cycles in worms, how worms adapt, and like, what's the point of composting, and how nature has to recycle itself. We actually made a compost bin for the whole class.

Jason

Jason lives in Roxbury, Massachusetts, and is a daily volunteer at the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative [DSNI] in Roxbury. Trish Settles works with Jason on environmental issues and recommended him. He was interviewed on a muggy afternoon in the offices of DSNI, where he seemed very "at home" amidst a flurry of Friday afternoon activity.

My name is Jason. I go to the Washington Irving Middle School. I'm in seventh grade, I'm 14. I live with my mother, my two sisters and my brother. I'm in the middle. I have two younger sisters and two older brothers.

My father renovated the [Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative] office, and I was coming in one day trying to look for him and all these people were around me, so I sat down. It took me a week, and then they finally gave me some work to do. I've been volunteering for DSNI for about seven years now. I come in every day and do work for the staff. I get out of school around one-thirty, I get around here at two, and I stay until DSNI closes, after school, every day after school.

I'm half White and half Cape Verdean. Some of the staff here at DSNI, well one of the organizers she is from the Cape Verdean Islands and she wanted to know well when was I going there to see my father's family, and I said well, if you can pay for the ticket, I'll go. My mother's family is from Canada.

One of the things that I'm really interested in is working to make sure the community is back the way it was so many years ago. The house that we are living in now, right across the street [my mom] grew up in that house, which is now really boarded up and we're (DSNI) trying to get that resolved into rehabbing. We hope to rehab it and make affordable apartments in it, like it was about 10 to 20 years ago.

I know how to do everybody's job around here. A typical afternoon would be me coming in, talking with Ro, the executive director, talking with the organizers, seeing if there's any work to be done. And, if there is, I would usually do xeroxing papers, working on the computer, faxing some papers over to lawyers, putting postage on envelopes, and really just making sure that all of the events around here are being really calm.

I [also] work with the Environmental Federation of New England, in partnership with DSNI. They're an environmental group that works with environmental organizations all around New England. They're like a fundraising team. One of the things that I do over

there is the exact same stuff that I do over here. xeroxing and working on the computer, faxing, picking up the telephone.

I'm a very busy person. I'm busy with a lot of issues with Winthrop Estates.

DSNI is developing 38 affordable housing units called Winthrop Estates, and those are one of the first homes of Dudley Streets. I've been very active in that, I go there to the site once a week and I look at the trucks digging up the earth. They call me the "clerk in training" 'cause I'm also helping out one of the clerks down there.

Some people around here outside and inside [the community] come around to some of the vacant lots and dump on it. When people come here and they dump trash and oil down the sewers that really gets me kinda mad. "Why do you have to do that, is this your community? If you were living in this community would you do that?" They want a fast and easy way to get rid of all their junk and they don't want to spend money to go down to a transfer station and do it right.

One day I was coming from my house to come to DSNI and I saw this man in broad daylight back a dump truck up and dump on a vacant land little pieces of sheet rock. I got the license plate, came back here to DSNI and filed a report with the municipal police and the code enforcement. They came out that next week and the cop didn't know where it was out so they picked me up and they brought me over there and I showed them it. That same day that I got the license plate, one of the clerks that is working with the Winthrop Estates housing, he saw a pickup truck go back and dump the exact same thing. Him and some staff of DSNI confronted the man and the man said, "Well this is my land, I can do this." So when it was all over, the man that was dumping, he got a 500 dollar fine for dumping little pieces of sheet rock for landfill.

## Kalpana

Alison, another participant in this study, remembered Kalpana from the Earth Day Youth Leadership Council as "having some good things to say," and suggested I contact her. Jane Church, the founder of One Earth One People, an international environmental education program in Cincinnati, Ohio that Kalpana is involved with seconded the recommendation and directed me to her. I interviewed her over the phone at her home in Cincinnati.

My name's Kalpana and I guess it's June 21st., it's the Summer Solstice.

I'm 16. I'm going to be a senior this fall at a small independent private school in Cincinnati. My parents are both physicians in academic medicine at the University. I have a younger sister who is 13 who's also interested in the environment. She's also involved in *One Earth One People*. I guess other stuff I enjoy, I run cross country, I dance, that's my major thing. I do Classical Indian Dance, it's called Bharata Natyam. I love it, I've been dancing for I guess 13, 12 years. I sing also. And I guess I'm pretty dedicated to my school work.

My parents are from India. They met here. They came here in the 70s to do their residency in medical school. I was born here. I live in a pretty mixed neighborhood, racially. I'd say the majority of the people who live in my neighborhood are educated. I grew up in a very liberal background. As far as, even as far as politics go, other people, other lifestyles, other races, cultures or religions. My parents speak seven languages each. I never learned [Hindi] when I was a kid, But I am definitely going to.

In seventh grade I was part of a group at the zoo called the Junior Zoologist Club. The sixth grade science teacher, she told me about it and then at the beginning of seventh grade I applied for it. I applied and I joined and I loved it and it really changed my life in that respect. And I think that's where my interest in the environment itself started out, because I had always been interested in animals before. It's a two year course. They meet for two hours every week and you learn about, it's basically training you in science, in biology, habitat studies and to a degree environmental studies. My sister is in it right now. It's a really unbelievable program, in fact they leave for Belize in Latin America on

Thursday to study the rainforest habitat. I went to Trinidad with them. So the education that you get from that group is unbelievable.

One Earth One People is a very, very mixed group of people. We have teachers, we have corporate people, we have different races, we have very wealthy people, we have some very poor people, we have everybody. We have a lot of urban kids. I was part of its development at the beginning. I guess it was three years ago, a little bit over three years ago, at the beginning of my eighth grade year. It started out with this woman Jane Church. She had this vision about kids talking to each other about the earth. And that's what it was born out of. And for the past three years we've been working hard to develop this into a program that would get national recognition, international recognition as being a very worthwhile thing which we believe it is.

This April we had a celebration down at our union terminal, which was an old train station which is now the center for our museums. It was a huge event, we had a thousand students participate in designing these earth projects that were kids' ways of talking about what they saw as being major environmental problems. We established themes such as endangered species, our wasteful earth, our wasteful society, all that kind of stuff. And we had 275 kids come. We got money from corporations to underwrite classrooms who couldn't afford to send their students. We had a demonstration of the interactive TV that we'd like to put on with Mexico. We had students in Kentucky and we had students in Cincinnati and we had them talk about endangered species in their states. It was just a 15 minute thing but it was-- it really demonstrated exactly what we were trying to do. We showed movies on the Omni-max theater, we had a guest speaker come in and talk to the kids, and we had, we had a lot of important people there. The mayor of Cincinnati who's given us a lot of support was our initial person. She addressed the group at the beginning of the celebration. It went on all afternoon. There were TV people there, and I think we really touched a lot of people. It was an unbelievable experience.

Tam

I interviewed Tam at his home in Jamaica Plain, MA. We talked and walked amidst many of the environmental projects that he is busily involved in, then shared lunch and ideas with his mother, Mariba and Alison, also interviewed, who was there to collaborate with Tam on a newsletter and action plan for the Earth Day Youth Leadership Council that they are both involved in.

I'm a vegetarian, I'm 12, and I'm home schooling. As far as I know I am European combination, and maybe on my mother's side Nova Scotia Indian way back when. I think my ancestors tried to hide this from their children. I've been home schooling since last Christmas vacation. I was really unhappy with my life in school, in terms of giving kids a life outside of school.

Superkids was a group that a bunch of my friends were in and my mom organized. I think I was about four. We learned skills and stuff. We'd have about half the day playing around and running around the track, then we'd all sit around in councils, which I can tell you more about. We'd talk about what we could do to help the environment and stuff. It became a real, real organization when I was in fourth and fifth grade. My mom would come in for school I think once every two or three weeks. It was a wonderful program. It was the beginning of-- it would be the first step of the journey of a thousand miles.

And by now, I'm in a nationwide organization. December third, fourth and fifth, me and 26 other youth met in Baltimore at the Hyatt Regency. The original goal was to have kids plan the events for the United States Earth Day 1995. For a first meeting it went excellently. Me and the other young people gathered for hours. We came up with a lot and we agreed that we should each organize groups in our own town, and by the time of the next meeting we would bring two or three other representatives from our state.

Unfortunately, here on May 27th I have gotten one newsletter, reporting to everybody else what had gone on at the conference, and no communications from any of the other twenty-six people.

Lately I have been part of the New Day Neighborhood association, which is a group in this neighborhood which has been doing a lot of work, and we've had a lot of successes. We've been doing a lot of work with the local youth, between 10 and 20 depending on how many show up. We've been doing a lot of work like building plant beds. We had a cook-out last Saturday. We put seeds into flats and they're already sprouting, radishes, carrots, lavender, oregano, basil, parsley, all sorts of stuff. And it's by far the most exciting group that I've been in a long time

Once or twice a year, we have a big thing, like almost a city wide clean-up, which [my mother and I] didn't put together, but we've been the coordinators for this neighborhood. Recently, we brought all the tools down to the lot that we were going to clean up, and then we went up to a kid and I said "We've decided that this place needs some cleaning up, do you think that too? We can clean it up really fast if you get some of your friends." She brought all her friends down and then we just cleaned up the lot. Out of this small lot, we got 27 rather large bags of trash. We've been doing that kind of stuff ever since. There's a bunch of other vacant lots which kids play in, but they're playing in garbage, literally. We'd also like fencing to keep the trash out because most of it is not thrown.

[Painting trash cans] is an idea that came to me and my mom a couple of months ago . We get the really shiny silver cans. We have to galvanize them and take the shiny stuff off. Then you put a coat of white on, and then we put a base coat like red or something, then we turn it over to the kids in the community to give them the opportunity to paint the trash cans. We have I think 13 of them, funded by the businesses in the community. The basic idea is make trash cans that people will notice and have them in the community so that they will be made use of. We're trying to put them in the places that need them most, which there are plenty. We haven't gotten them out yet, we're still waiting for funding to get chains and stuff so they don't get walked off with.

Jessica

I spent a morning with Jessica and other members of the Earth Action Club at Central High in Springfield, first going with them to a junior high where they were recruiting members for next year, then interviewing Jessica and Zita back at the high school. A teacher and club advisor invited me to visit and speak with the club. Fortunately for me, I ended up getting to listen more than speak.

My name is Jessica, I'm 16, I go to Central. I'm a junior, I'll be a senior next year. I was born in Syracuse, New York. I lived there until I was about one and a half or two and then moved to Springfield, and now I live in Indian Orchard.

I'm a member of the Earth Action Club. I've been there since it started, I guess you could say I'm one of the pioneers. I play soccer, I like foreign languages, I'm going to Germany. I want my life to revolve around environmental stuff. I live with my parents and my brother. My sister just moved out, she lives with her boyfriend, or fiancée. She's gonna be 19; my brother is 13. I waitress. I won't touch cigarette butts, it's not part of my job description (laughter).

When I came [to Central High School] one person said, okay, I'm gonna start an Earth Action club. We were going to start a club at Cathedral (her previous school), but I knew I wasn't going to be going there, so I didn't want to commit myself to anything and have them depend on me for anything and have to leave, so I waited until I was here to join the club. This girl, she planned a bulletin in the announcements and said "okay, we're going to start a club". And it turned out that she didn't come to school very often, so as I was one of the first people to sign up on the list they gave me more priority because I went to all the meetings. They started saying "can you do this, can you do this," and I'm saying all right, I need to find some people to help me, and people just started to look to me for the responsibility and everything. It turned out this year I got voted as the official president, last year I was just kind of the leader. Next year I'm not planning on being president. I can't handle it, not senior year. Too much to do.

I started learning about the environment when I was little and it gradually came to me but this year has been the year that I've learned the most about it. It's just doing, getting a lot of literature on stuff, you have to have the time to sit down and think about it and go okay this is what's got to happen, is this logical, are these people being serious about opening a recycling plant down the river? We have run up against the wall with the recycling [project that the club worked on] and stuff with people saying okay, yeah it's a fire hazard.

My mom works for the state. She works in a house, a state home with retarded women, four of them, and her other job she works with retarded kids in wheelchairs. My father is a TV repairman, basically. I tried to get him to open up an earthy crunchy store. My friends were like "yeah I'd go shop there", but he just didn't. He's had two businesses, and they've never went very well for him, 'cause he bought one business [that] was already in debt when he bought it, and he opened up another business and he was paying off the debt from that before. So he was afraid to open another business, and he was like okay, well you can write to other earthy crunchy stores and you can find out how long they've been in business, find out how good their business is and I said okay.

Zita

Zita is also an active member of the Earth Action Club, as well as good friends with Jessica. Zita chose a make-up in Phys. Ed and missed most of her lunch so that she could participate in an interview. The interviews took place on the floor of a semi-quiet hallway and outside on the school grounds.

My name is Zita, I go to Central High. I'm in the environmental club. I'm 17 years old, and a junior turning into a senior. I live with my mother. I have a brother who lives in Chicopee, I have a nephew. My grandparents live here, and my cousins, they're just scattered all over the place. I really don't know too much about my grandparents, I don't know very much about their history or anything. [They're from] down south, they came up, they were like married and everything then they started a family here. My mother

is a certified home health aide, she's a private nurse. She works in homes a couple days a week, but she also has a night job. In September she's going to be attending Holyoke Community College. This will be her second year I think and she's going to be an eye doctor.

I'm concerned about the environment because I think it's a part of everyone's lifestyle because it's, you know, a part of your surrounding and that's something everyone should be concerned with. I think that, y'know, a lot of people should get involved and do a lot with the environment because there's so much wrong. I heard [about Earth Action Club] in the bulletin. I thought that because after school, I'm not really involved in a lot of things and I thought that this would be something that I would enjoy, so I just tried it and I liked it. And then I met Jessica and everything and her and I became really good friends and that made it more easier and fun, y'know, to be in the club.

Recently we've been going to different schools and talking to kids about how they can get recycling programs started in their school. We were just basically telling them how they can get programs going and the sort of the problems they would probably run into and everything. We had a recycling program that really didn't work out too well because we had too many problems. I thought [going to other schools] was really important because they're younger and they can do more, I think, than we can because they can grow up with it. I really felt good. I think Jessica and I and all the members feel good that we were able to help someone. We felt good that we were able to help someone and now they can go their way and do what they can for the environment. And just the fact of just going out there, just telling people, y'know, educating people.

My friend, my best friend Christina goes to school in Agawam and she doesn't even know if there is an earth club there. She never got back to me on that. But anyway, she thinks that it's really good that I'm involved in the environment. I think that she should start an earth club if there isn't one in Agawam, y'know, 'cause maybe then we can combine the two together and do a lot more.

Kenya

Tracy True with the Earth Service Corps of the YMCA suggested Kenya for this project. Because of her busy pre-college schedule, we were unable to meet in person, and after several preliminary conversations and scheduling attempts, we held our interview over the phone.

I live in Newark, I went to Eastside (high school). We moved [from Brazil] when I was six to New York, then to another town in New Jersey, and then to Newark. I'm the only child. My mom, she's a house cleaner, and my stepfather he's a software engineer. Most of my family is still in Brazil. One of my mother's sisters is here, and we have like two or three cousins, but everyone else is back there. It's been three years since I've been back and hopefully winter break during college, thank God for that month break, hopefully then I'll be able to go back and visit.

Eastside has an environmental club, and this past year I haven't been very active because I had to get ready for college, and so I didn't have too much time. I was in softball until Junior year. I was in the honor society. We did some tutoring for freshmen and sophomores, and some of the juniors and seniors. I was also working. But my sophomore and junior year I was pretty active [in the environmental club]. One day at school I was just walking down the hall going to class and I saw a flyer up and I was like oh that's cool, I've always been interested in the environment. I thought, this is something I'd have fun doing. I'm a nature lover, I guess that might be it. So I saw the flyer and I went to the meeting and I started going my sophomore year, it'd be three years ago. We would have guest speakers, and we would have related trips that would be with *The Corp.* (Earth Service Corps) and stuff like that. This past year wasn't very big, we didn't have as many members as last year. Last year we had like 90 members or more. That was my junior year, my senior year it kind of went down a bit, and we had maybe like 60 members.

We did a couple of beach cleanups, we helped plant trees upstate, we wrote lots of letters. There was an incinerator that was supposed to be built in the area right around the school, and we sort of helped stop that. There's already an incinerator there, there's a garbage incinerator there, but they were going to try and put up another one. We tried to do like demonstrations, and wrote letters to our councilmen and to the people at State Hall. We did everything we could. Not just the club, the rest of the community tried to get the word out. And luckily, they didn't put it [the incinerator] up, and that was good.

Last summer through the club and through Earth Service Corp. I went on a trip to Massachusetts. It was, that's probably the highlight of everything. It was a bike ride from Providence all the way down to the Islands. I went on a whale watch for the first time, and it was just great. We went to Martha's Vineyard, and we rode all around there.

### Summary

This chapter introduced, in their own words, the 12 young people who participated in this research. Their life experiences are diverse, as are their experiences of environmental activism and the factors that initiated their involvement. Their stories are included to celebrate their unique voices as well as to preface my interpretation. Now that each of the participants has been brought onto the stage, their stories can be taken to the next level; a thematic analysis of the conditions that motivated and supported their participation in environmentalism.

### Sculpting the Analysis: Notes on the Following Chapters

The piles of books and articles that surround me as I write greatly contributed to this research, and are essential in order to approach this analysis thoughtfully and critically. However, at some point they need to fade into the background. One day during a break from writing I picked up a copy of an art magazine, and flipped open to an article entitled "Reflections on Creativity and Collaboration" (Bodeker, 1994). Quoting an artist, the

author writes "After the frenzy of the intellect, an intuitive process takes over. In this, the intellect serves as a means of informing and directing the more intuitive process in generating art" (p.34).

And so, I approach this analysis as a collaborative effort of art that includes me, initiator, collector and sculptor-editor; the wonderful young people who shared their textural and colorful stories and ideas; the scholars and educators whose research and written work gave me foundation and insights; and the colleagues and friends who simply said the right thing at the right time, causing me to head immediately for the nearest piece of paper to jot down a few more ideas.

The purpose of this research was to explore conditions that motivated urban youth to become environmentally active in their communities in order to provide insights about experiences and settings which promote environmental activism and leadership and suggest directions for curriculum development and educational practice. In the process of listening to and transcribing the interviews I began to identify themes that emerged both in response to my questions and more organically. Some of these, such as the youths' definitions of the word environment, I had always intended to address and had therefore designed interview questions to elicit pertinent information. Others emerged as consistently significant themes that at times affirmed my evolving hypotheses and at others offered uncharted insights. The categories that surfaced initially numbered about 20, and were whittled and consolidated into 13 major themes, each of which will be elaborated on in the next three chapters. The second layer of organizing the material involved recognizing how particular themes were connected to each other, and how they had informed, impacted or were a result of the study participants' experiences as environmental activists. The analysis is presented in three interrelated chapters. Chapter 5 explores factors and conditions that shaped the youths' understandings, belief systems, initial thinking about and receptivity to environmentalism. It includes cultural and family influences, their perceptions of the places they live, and experiences of school. Chapter 6 follows the youths' emergence and journey

as activists, continuing to unlayer conditions that impacted their experiences and evolving insights. In this chapter, they offer their definitions of the concept of environment and identify environmental concerns. They describe their particular brands of activism, and factors that influenced these, such as significant adults in their lives, a desire for community and the compassionate service orientation that they exemplify. Chapter 7 explores the transformations that have occurred as a result of their activism; their emergence as respected leaders, ability to rethink their schooling, and clarity of direction in regards to higher education and careers. In the final section of chapter 7 and the analysis as a whole, new connections the youth made during the course of the interviews, and the meaning they made of these realizations offers a glimpse at their ongoing process and continuing evolution as reflective individuals, and in particular, reflective environmental activists.

## CHAPTER 5

### PAVING THE ROAD TO ENVIRONMENTALISM: RIGHT OF WAYS AND ROADBLOCKS

This metaphor of asphalt and road signs is appropriate to the lives and experiences of these youth as urban dwellers. Their path to environmentalism has not been one traveled through towering trees in silent forests, but of masses of humanity squeezing into rush hour subways. Their footsteps have landed on tar more often than pine needles, and they hear the chirping of car alarms perhaps more than warblers.

Like each of us on this planet, cultural and environmental influences have shaped who these youth are and how they perceive themselves, others and the places they live, locally and globally. This chapter explores some of these shaping influences, particularly as they influenced the study participants' receptivity and entry to environmentalism.

#### Cultural and Family Influences

The nature of the participants' relationships to their family and their expressions of cultural connection vary considerably among the group. One quality common to all of the participants was a strong and clear sense of self, describing themselves and members of their families with pride. Cultural experiences appeared as significant factors in shaping their identity, environmental thinking, and general worldview. At the beginning of each interview I asked each participant to tell me a little about themselves. Those who were immigrants or first generation spoke almost immediately of their ethnicity, including their native country in their self-introduction. Eva is one of the several youth who spoke readily of her cultural heritage and family languages when asked. Her comments about maintaining her mother tongue and her pride in her bilingualism were echoed by several others.

I want to be able to speak (Chinese) 'cause many people that I know, like my friends, some of them, they don't really know how to speak Chinese, I mean they feel proud about it. But I go like you shouldn't, 'cause it's your language you should know it too. And they go like yeah that's true, but then they don't really speak it. I'm Chinese, I should know my language. I mean, if you're Spanish, you should know like y'know Spanish, but I'm also learning Spanish too.

Biculturalism appeared to influence several of the youths' environmental understandings in that they were more able than others to make comparisons and assess situations from multiple perspectives. Kalpana, whose family is from India, incorporates her cultural background as she makes sense of her perceptions of environmental conditions in the United States. She demonstrates a global perspective both in her words and in her choice of involvement with an environmental group that has an international emphasis.

Coming from India, I saw, I saw the poverty, and saw the waste in America and it didn't make sense to me. So I guess that's where it came out of, especially in my parents. Especially because they came from India and they saw the poverty and then they came here and they wondered, God, y'know, why do people waste so much, what's the purpose. So that's, I mean I think that's where a lot of it came from. I think the major part of One Earth One People that's important to me is that it's an international effort, and I think being from India has just contributed to that because when I go there I see the need for environmental work.

She also explores connections between aspects of her culture and her interest in the natural world.

I'm Hindu. I guess there's something about the faith that has also affected me. If you understand the religion you understand that nature is a major part of it, and that respecting other creatures is a major part of it. It comes out of a very sort of primitive nature worship, you know, and it has definitely developed over the thousands of years that it has existed. But something that has remained has been a respect for other animals, for other living creatures, whether they be grass, or, an ant, or a hawk or a lion or a cow, whatever. There's a respect for that creature as a living thing. And I see that as being very, very important. So that has affected me also, I definitely would think.

Kenya relates her beginning interest in environmentalism not so much to cultural tradition, but definitely to experiences of family and a connection to her homeland.

I don't think that my coming from there [Brazil] had anything to do with it except for the fact that the views are great, and its beautiful, breathtaking. I live in a city, and it's called Belo Horizonte, "beautiful horizons," that's the name of the city. Over there my aunt has a farm and that was always one of my favorite places to be. I lived with my aunt. So we would go every weekend. It was very nice, quite a view at night.. The stars were gorgeous.

While she remains peripherally aware of environmental issues in Brazil, Kenya has not yet taken an active interest or involvement in work outside of her current community, perhaps because she does not see regular involvement with or access to her homeland of Brazil as possible or relevant to her current lifestyle.

Every once in a while when I see an article in *Newsweek* or see an article in the newspaper or see something on TV I stop and listen, whether it be about the rain forests or anything else. I keep tabs on it, but I really don't do much. It's kind of a long ways away, and there's not much you can do from here, and I can help and do other things here instead of putting all my energies to something I'll probably never be able to do much for anyway.

Kenya's dilemma is one that many bicultural individuals face: negotiating a sense of place and identity that involves two distinct lands and cultures. This challenge is further compounded by societal pressures to culturally and materially assimilate in the United States.

Six of the twelve youth interviewed live with both of their parents. Of the other six, four live with their mothers, one with her mother and stepfather, and one with her grandmother. Most described a reasonably to extremely close relationship with at least one of the family members with whom they live. The parents of the participants are involved in work that ranges from working poor and working class to highly educated affluent professionals.

Most parents, except those of Alison and Tam, are not involved in environmental work as their careers. Alison draws some connection between her parents' work and her own interests, while Tam sees a very strong connection. Alison's parents and her stepmother work in the sciences and are educators. Although she did not strongly identify either of them as the reasons for her environmental interest, her pride in her mother's work

is clear, and when questioned about her father's influence she recognized a possible connection from her childhood.

My mom, she's the head of the science department [at my school]. She's new, and she's really been trying to get things going. And my dad and my stepmother, they're all science teachers, and my dad's been getting grants and going down to the rainforest. I think that probably [his work has influenced me] in some way. Just going up there, and him taking me out to the woods when I was little. My mom's been more of an influence, because I've lived with her and my sister my entire life.

Tam speaks often of his mother in terms of her influence, the environmental and multicultural work they do together and the effect this has had on him, including his awareness of ageism and possibilities for youth empowerment.

I'm really tied in closely with the work that my mom's been doing even before she had me, a lot of environmental and multicultural action and stuff. Well, my mom cares, and I think it's because she has me now, but it also gave me the idea that adults, they're not all interested solely in making a buck. As soon as I was born she was completely dedicated to not only diversity, but age diversity, which is something. When you say diversity you think of having Native Americans, having Latinos, having Blacks, Oriental people in the movement, and you don't think of having five year olds. She's been really dedicated and I think one of my earliest memories of her was in Superkids which was a group that a bunch of my friends were in and my mom organized.

Kalpana, whose parents are academic physicians, describes the environmentalist lineage in her family with pride and respect.

My dad has always been an environmentalist in a very, you know, not in a high falutin' sense, but in the sense that he conserves in all facets of life. He's been talking about recycling before it was a big thing in Cincinnati. And so I guess I was sort of imbued with that. Actually my grandfather worked in the agricultural department in India. What he did was a lot with prevention of erosion, reforestation, all that kind of stuff. So, he sort of imbued that in my father. So it's been y'know, it's been a couple generations actually that this has sort of come through our family.

Kalpana's 13 year old sister is also active in environmental issues. Although she was modest about her influence, saying "we learn a lot from each other, I think she's taught me a lot," it was apparent that Kalpana felt good about being a role model for her younger sister and proud that environmental involvement is supported and practiced in her family.

Although he does not recognize or identify a connection as clearly as Kalpana does, Jason's interests in housing rehabilitation may be influenced by what he learns from his father, a contractor who supports the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative's work building affordable housing in Roxbury. In fact, he first visited the DSNI office while out on jobs with his father. Jason describes his mother as "somewhat active" in DSNI, which he believes he probably had something to do with as she became involved after he did. Zita describes her relationship with and respect for her mother as important, and notes her mother's interest in plants and animals. It is possible that she sought out environmental activities in part to be involved with something dear to her mother, and familiar to her home environment.

My mom supports me a lot, because my mother and I have a good, good relationship, it's like were sisters, you know what I mean. She has always encouraged me, if I took an interest in anything to really seriously get involved in it and do the best that I can. My mother loves, loves, fish, and she has a green thumb, y'know she likes plants.

Family experiences and interactions with the environment, both positive and negative have affected these young people in powerful ways. Eva's mother's work as a factory seamstress in Chinatown provides a very personal and real-life influence that sharpens her understandings of the complexity of environmental issues in a way that those without such experience may overlook.

I understand, I mean like factories, they pollute, but I mean if you close down the factories, like where are they going to work? 'Cause my mom, like she works in a factory, but if you close it down or whatever, then people will lose their jobs. That's why it's kind of difficult I think to solve many environmental problems.

Kiet talks about his father's work as a sort of oppositional spark that stimulated his interest in environmentalism. He can identify a relationship between his father's career as a logger in Vietnam and his early interest in nature, noting that he was "thinking then about it too."

To tell the truth is that my father used to be a logger in Vietnam. And I don't like logging that much, 'cause it actually destroys organisms' habitats.

Kiet expresses that he and his father "didn't talk much about it then, or now."

Maybe 'cause its like the past, and since he don't log anymore, I won't bug him really. [Now] he works in a restaurant.

However, his experience of his father's work seems to have left some mark, likely influencing his current interest in deforestation and identification of it as an environmental issue of great concern.

Several other parents, while not specifically involved in environmentalism or activism are involved in service related work, including health care and education. For these youth, having a family member in an environmental or science related career is not a necessary pre-requisite to the development of an interest in environmentalism. However, parental involvement in these or other service-related professions often coincides with environmental and/or humanitarian values in the family that have had an influence on these young people.

Values of respect for others and the environment were often learned informally through the everyday actions of family members or a significant adult figure and impressed on them throughout their lives. Darnyell talks about her grandmother's influence on her, retelling a familiar lesson from her childhood. Her tone is reverent and respectful as she illuminates this environmental code of ethics that she had been taught.

I don't throw trash around or anything like that, or try to violate the ground or nothing. My grandma always telling me, if I buy something from the store and if I put the trash on the ground, that must mean that I didn't want the paper, or I shouldn't of bought it in the first place, if I didn't know what to do with it. I think she don't like to see a dirty area. I always put it in the trash, even if it's not mine and it's just laying there, I pick it up, put it in the trash.

Even when the youth identified family and culture as positive influences in shaping their values and identity, there is perceivable discomfort in some of their voices when they speak of their "uniqueness" in their family and among their peers. Their expressions of

this waver between excitement and a sensitivity to being, as David says, "the Black Sheep in the family."

Coming from our background being I guess Asian, I find a lot of people of our, from the Asian background tend to lean towards the entrepreneurial side. I felt that particularly in my family. I find that they tend to lean more toward the business area, rather than towards the sciences. My brother right now, he's a senior at UCLA and he's doing investment banking, and my sister is doing international law and public policy, and I'm like the black sheep in the family going into science.

Alison describes the differences between her and her sister.

I have an older sister, and she graduated from Yale last year. We're very very different. I mean, I'm out here in my overalls and she would never be caught dead with overalls. She's a very snappy dresser. [She] really likes to make money and be able to spend it and go dancing,[she's] into the city life. She's working um, what is she doing now, investment banking. And I'm sort of out here, y'know, a much more laid back person.

These youth recognize that their interests and desires are different from many others around them, including members of their families. Although they exhibited an intermittent undercurrent of alienation, their recognition of differences does not appear to sway their interests or career intentions, and has perhaps even strengthened their evolving environmental understandings by raising some questions about how they will negotiate their interests within the context of a technologically and materially driven society.

The youths' cultural lenses uniquely shaped their environmental perceptions, the experiences they had access to, and the nature of the comparisons they drew. The African and European American youth in this research were not as able as the others to draw direct connections between their ethnicity and how this might have influenced their relationship to their environment and environmental interests. In contrast with those who immigrated as children or are first generation, the African and European American youth are from families that have lived in the United States for several generations. All live in communities where they are not ethnically isolated. While still faced with the ramifications of racism, classism and sexism, they have not recently encountered the same radical shift in cultural and geographic conditions that those who are recent immigrants or refugees have. Therefore,

they may not have as many contrasting environmental and cultural experiences with which to make comparisons and develop multiple understandings, nor the experiences of negotiating an environmental identity that encompasses at least two geographic realities.

The participants in this study are culturally diverse in all but two realms; their common culture as "youth" and "city dwellers." In the next section, the youths' common culture as urban dwellers is considered in relation to how they perceive and conceptualize their environment.

### Where They Live: Perceptions and Reflections

In this section, the youth describe the actual physical surroundings and character of their neighborhood, and how these affect their feelings about where they live. This study focuses on the conditions that motivated these youths' involvement in environmental activism more than environmental perception, which is a study in itself. However, some insight as to how they see and relate to their environment is essential in order to provide a foundation for the environmental concerns they identify in a later section. In addition, their reflections on the places they live begin to shed light on their sense of identity and efficacy within their communities.

The youth described their neighborhoods in terms of physical characteristics, how people relate to one another, and certain qualities that they feel make it the place that it is. For Darnyell, cleanliness and quiet are determiners of a "good" neighborhood and seem to represent safety. After describing her neighborhood, she expands her sphere of thinking to include the city of Baltimore. Once again, she uses a comparison of a clean place that she knows and has had fond experiences in to think about what constitutes a "good place."

I live in a quiet neighborhood, it's clean, 'cause mainly like old people live around so they usually clean it up all the time. Where I was living before [with my mother], when I first moved there I was like I am not living out here. It is so dirty out there. And you can clean in front of your door and it still will get dirty, people don't care, they will come and throw it in front of your door and know you live there. It's like a certain part of the neighborhood, they don't care. If it's the easy way for them to throw some trash out they throw it out in a minute. I was like mmm,...

they would sell drugs and all, in front of your door. I was like I'm not living, I'm not staying here. Baltimore, I think it's the worse, the worse city. I've been to some, but the ones I've been to, nothing compares to here. I've been to Cape May, New Jersey. You can walk around with no shoes on without getting cut, or without stepping on anything, and certain parts of Atlantic City you can do the same thing. Baltimore has some nasty beaches. If I was visiting, I would never go to their beaches 'cause they're just so dirty. I don't even know if they put effort to try to clean them up.

Kiet describes his transition from a shocking arrival in New York to becoming used to it. He uses the word "bad" several times to describe his neighborhood and the city as a whole.

[When I first arrived from Vietnam] my uncle drove me down the highway, and I see all this light, and I was like, oh my God, I never seen buildings that tall. But now since I'm used to it it's nothing to me. I live in Queens. My neighborhood is bad. The kids there are bad, people there are actually bad. That's commonplace in New York.

While he appears somewhat complacent and accepting of this all around 'badness,' Kiet's feelings about New York have not appeared to impede his active involvement in community building and beautifying projects and education, perhaps because they are driven by a desire to recreate what he knows from his past experiences in another land and culture as 'good.'

Tam and Jason, both of whom have been actively involved in neighborhood organizations for several years, describe their communities optimistically and note improvement in terms of community cohesiveness. Both focus on social features and interactions in their descriptions of their neighborhoods. Says Tam, "[My community is] improving; formerly depressing, [now] closely knit and communal." These comments are interlaced with his excited sharing of several neighborhood organizations he is involved in that have helped bring about many of these changes. Jason describes an increasing level of care and responsibility for the neighborhood. They both seem proud to be a part of the revitalization that they identify. Jason describes his community as:

Fun to live in, getting back up on its feet. Colorful, very colorful. It's a very fun neighborhood, with so much history inside of it. It's really now that people in the community are getting responsibility. People are really starting to come out and help DSNI (Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative) out to get that vacant lot turned into a new home. Some people go along and they don't know that to do with the used oil out of their car. So what they do is they just pull up near a storm drain and drain their motor oil in there and some people have stopped [other] people putting oil down drains.

Alison, who was not born in the city, talks about the physical characteristics of her community first, then describes the ethnic make-up of the neighborhood, and her process of moving to a city and coming to like it and feel comfortable there. She concludes her 'sense of place' narrative by talking about "her two sides," the country side and the city side, something she brings up at several other points in the interview.

Baltimore is just blocks and blocks and blocks of row houses. They're about 15 to 16 feet wide and sort of long and skinny, and a couple trees here and there along the side, cars parked along both sides. My community... it's been coming together a lot more since I've lived there. It's mixed. It's White, Black, Asian, Hispanic, everything. When you go a little bit more to the left, it's predominantly Black, one block over, and lots of shootings, lots of violence, graffiti, stuff like that. So I don't walk around after dark alone. The usual sort of city -safe stuff. I really like living in the city. The crime, I've gotten used to it now, you know. When I first moved there it would bother me. I was right next to the hospital too, there were ambulances going by all the time, helicopters flying around the house with their searchlights going all the time. I've sort of gotten over that, and I like being in the city, I like being able to walk everywhere. You know you just kind of bus around town, and everything is there, and you've got all your neighbors right around you. But at the same time I like, I love going out camping, and that sort of stuff. So I've got sort of the other side too.

Kalpana uses the word "educated" several times in describing the character and demographics of her community, presumably to talk about socioeconomic class which is a major defining characteristic of her neighborhood (and most others in this country). Like many of the others, she has a keen sense of the disparity that can exist only a short distance away. Her perceptions of her community bring attention to the complex and pervasive messages that youth receive about their own lives through living with the often painful awareness of socially informed borders.

I live in a pretty mixed neighborhood racially. I'd say the majority of the people who live in my neighborhood are educated. There's a Chinese person who lives

not far from me, we're Indian, a lot of Jewish families, Black families, all educated. I mean the majority of the people who live in my neighborhood are educated, but a variety of different ethnic backgrounds. On the other hand, the neighborhood that borders mine is one of the poorest in Cincinnati. One of the highest as far as single woman pregnancies, drugs, poverty, no housing-- all that kind of stuff. I live right near it, I see it everyday. So I guess, I can't take for granted what I have. I mean I see the problems. I see the kids on the street, it bothers me. But I mean, I still have been raised in a neighborhood that is (pause) racial harmony has never been a problem in my neighborhood. I think it's sort of starting to develop into one now.

Growing up in urban areas has undoubtedly impacted these youth. "Urban Dweller" can be considered a cultural category and is therefore infused with lifestyle experiences, patterns of interaction, and images that may be intimately familiar only to those who are a member of the urban culture. Of course, within this vast membership are multitudes of difference characterized by regional, demographic, age and social categories; all lenses that make one's overall environmental perspective unique.

Like cultural understandings and family lifestyle, the neighborhoods that one navigates and explores while growing up are extremely influential in shaping identity and perception. There is another major influencer and shaper of perceptions, experience, codes and values that that occupies many hours and days of most youths' lives throughout their childhood and adolescence. The institution, process of, and place called school adds yet another complex layering of cultural, environmental and social information to the negotiating table.

### Experiences of School

Throughout the nine years of education that I've gone through so far, we never had much exposure to our natural environment, the different parts of our environment, why that balance must be kept the way it is and what's going on now that's effecting that particular balance, whether directly or indirectly. At my school, I don't see many people, know of many people who are interested in the environmental movement. A lot of [peers] don't realize right now how important the environment is.

Darnyell

In the interviews, I asked the youth several questions in order to gain information regarding their experiences of school and how these did or did not pave the way for their interest in environmental issues and activism.

At the time of the interviews, all but one of the youth were either in high school, about to enter high school, or had just finished their senior year. All but two attend a city public school. Kalpana and Alison attend private day schools. Eva and Kiet attend a public high school in New York that, for the last two years has been an environmental studies focus school. Tam, the youngest of the group, attended a mixture of public and private alternative schools until he began home schooling last year. While only a few speak enthusiastically about their schools, all have academic aspirations.

For five of the youth, involvement in environmentalism was initiated through school-based clubs, classes or internships. The other six got involved through local and/or national organizations or jobs, and receive little to minimal support from their schools. One, David, falls under both categories as he is actively involved in both school-based clubs and projects as well as regional and national organizations. While he receives support from his school, he was and continues to be the primary initiator of many of the school-based environmental activities.

Their experiences of school, particularly the levels of inclusion of environmental education vary considerably. Only two credited their school curriculum with being instrumental in supporting their environmental interests, Eva and Kiet who attend the high school for environmental studies in New York. Kiet excitedly lists the classes that his school offers.

There's a class that every one in the school has, a class based on environment. This year, were going to have marine biology, environmental law, environmental media, ecology, and lots of things.

Frankie said he had learned nothing in school about environmental issues. Jessica and Darnyell had each had one related class which neither were overly excited about. Jessica

describes the one ecology class offered at her school with much less enthusiasm than Kiet exhibited.

My ecology teacher is boring, the only reason I get along with him is because I kissed up to him last year. He's been teaching for 15 years and does the same thing all the time, same exact thing every year. I mean, if you took a test that he had last year, copied it, you would do the same exact thing next year. He doesn't change anything. And that's what's boring about it, I mean you can get an A in that class as long as you do your homework. He goes by the book, he reads out of the book, he does his thing every day, he doesn't do anything exciting.

While she does not think highly of her ecology class, Jessica feels that the Earth Action Club, which she is actively involved in is well supported in her school.

The teachers that I know, the teachers in the whole school are pretty much, "The Earth Action Club is really good, I'll give it support. [They say] if you need me to do something, I'll do what I can do."

Like Jessica, Kenya identifies her school club, rather than a class as central to her experience of environmentalism. "My sophomore year when I took biology, we talked a little bit about the environment but besides that, no. It was basically just the club. It was very good though."

While school clubs seem to provide these youth with a sense of community and interesting and active learning opportunities, they often relegate environmental learning to an extra-curricular activity. This is different from Eva's and Kiet's experience of how environmental studies can be integrated across the curriculum. Eva speaks enthusiastically about her experiences at the High School for Environmental Studies in New York.

I have a class five days a week, it's called environmental studies, and that's where we talk about this stuff. Lead poisoning, we learned about that, and noise pollution, endangered animals, and asbestos. 'Cause I mean we went out, like during class time, we went out tabling. We set up a little table and then we had flyers. And the citizens, they passed by and then we went, "want to protect your kids from lead?"

She describes how an environmental concern, asbestos in the school buildings, was incorporated into the curriculum.

This building is really old, and we had asbestos here. So we had to go to school in another place. We moved around during the first few weeks, so that was kind of bad. During that time was the best time to learn about asbestos. We were talking about that, and we did like a whole chapter on it, like why they use it and why it's bad, like the effects and all that stuff.

David, Kalpana, Eva and several others struggle to understand how science and environmental education are connected and how they are different. David differentiates between school science and environmental education. He recognizes a connection, but also sees them as fulfilling different roles in the curriculum.

We do have environmental management classes, but they deal more with the hands-on, like science. It's more like learning a science than it is voicing your opinions, and doing something as far as activities outside of the school.

Kalpana does not feel that there are courses at her school that teach about environmental problems, nor does she feel that her (private preparatory) school could successfully integrate environmental studies across the curriculum in a way that wouldn't be oversimplified or presented like a science class.

Biology is the furthest it goes [at my school]. I wish there were [environmental courses], but I think I understand why. Because to really consider the scope of environmental problems you can't just talk about science. You have to understand sociology, psychology to some degree, religion, y'know of the different areas that you're looking at. I think that to try and teach environmental sciences in high school would be far too simplified.

Eva struggles to figure out and articulate how and if science learning and environmental education are related based on her school experiences of both. She seems to be trying to appreciate science through her positive experiences learning about environmental issues.

I was never really into [the environment before] 'cause I didn't know much, like no one taught me about it. All I did was science and like biology, that stuff. I didn't really even think about the environment. But I guess after I come here, the teachers and the classes, it gets me more aware. So it's basically the school that inspires me. I don't really like science that much, but I think that's important to us, probably something environmental like trees, like plants, botany. If you have like a science foundation, you have a better understanding of environmental issues, but if you don't really know much about science than it's harder.

None of these youth talked about their school science classes as intricately connected to their environmentalism. Even one of the youth who enthusiastically attends a high school focused on environmental studies expressed her dislike for "science," and became flustered when she tried to explain similarities and differences between science and environmental education. Another enthusiastic environmentalist described her school's ecology class as boring and unchanged from year to year. The youths' disassociation with school science, even in the midst of enthusiasm for extra-curricular environmental "science" may be reflective of still-rampant approaches to science education that focus on book learning and performing pre-determined laboratory experiments. Although there are innovative science programs and educators that are effective in drawing connections between current environmental concerns and science in schools, studies in the 1980s revealed that most teachers were using a science textbook, page by page, more than ninety percent of the time (Yager, 1992). These youth support the basic charge that science in schools is often presented, in terms of both content and pedagogy, without connection to relevant social and environmental issues that affect students' lives and communities.

Uncertainty about what niche or subject environmental issues should be categorized under is not only in question for students but for many educators as well. These youths' experiences show environmental concerns as sometimes relegated to after-school clubs, sometimes to a short term unit in a science class, and very occasionally core to the curriculum. This inconsistency is not only confusing to them but to educators who are trying to negotiate how, where, and when to address environmental issues in the curriculum, and what constitutes an environmental issue.

## CHAPTER 6

### BECOMING A YOUTH ACTIVIST: CONNECTION, EXPERIENCE AND SUSTENANCE

This chapter continues to build upon previously articulated insights regarding the cultural and environmental influences that these individuals have encountered thus far in their lives. Chapter 6 is an exploration and comparison of the ways in which this diverse group of youth are (re)defining urban environmental issues and youth activism, and the internal and external factors that promote and sustain their involvement in environmental activism.

#### Environment Broadly Defined

Usually when I think of environment I think of big forests... but then I look around. I guess there's two definitions for myself. There's the stuff that I can't really do directly, like going out to the forest up north or whatever, and planting trees, or cleaning up. And then there's the community which would be like the incinerator and the area around.

Kenya

A colleague who has researched children's' connections to their environments asked me whether I had found direct contact with nature to be a significant factor in inspiring environmental involvement among the youth I interviewed for my research. When I responded that it did not appear to have been incredibly significant he said, "well, that blows one of my hypotheses."

Although I did not find that an intimate connection with nature precipitated environmental awareness and activism among these youth, some noted "nature contact" experiences such as tree plantings or camping trips as meaningful. These experiences were not, however, essential to their ability to develop and articulate their current understandings of the concept of environment. All of the youth in this research made reference to

interpretations of the word 'environment' that focus on the natural world. However, they did not automatically assume these. Rather, they assigned a meaning to the term that was more relevant and significant to their own lives. In fact, several of the youth pointed out that environment is not limited to, as Jessica says, "earth and woods and stuff."

Di Chiro (1987, p. 25) posits that:

We define [environment] by use of our own individual and culturally imposed interpretive categories, and it exists as the environment at the moment we name it and imbue it with meaning. Therefore the environment is not something that has a reality totally outside or separate from ourselves and our social milieu. Rather, it should be understood as the conceptual interactions between our physical surroundings and the social, political and economic forces that organize us in the context of these surroundings. It is in this sense that we can say that the concept 'environment' is socially constructed.

The youths' responses to the task of defining environment demonstrated that they were able to use some related vocabulary comfortably, and articulate their thinking in a way that would allow them to be informed contributors in any of the current arenas where adults are currently rethinking and redefining 'environment' as a dynamic, socially constructed concept created and transformed by those who give it meaning.

In addition to establishing a foundation for the identification of environmental concerns, the process of assigning meaning to the term environment illuminated where the participants situated themselves within their own definitions. Most of the youth located themselves within their definitions, recognizing themselves as part of rather than separate from the interactions within a place. For many, this meant within their immediate community, while others had a sense of themselves as being part of a larger whole. If I drew Frankie's definition, it might look like concentric circles beginning with his home and radiating outward to include what he considers his broader environment, his state.

"Environment is the place where you live. Your surroundings, your home. My house, and my neighborhood, really the whole state, the state of Maryland." David also describes the environment as a part of his life, but his concentric circles extend out a bit more broadly

and quickly than Frankie's. "It's a part of life for me. I feel that without the environment, my life wouldn't be possible. So in general I would define it as our home the earth." Unlike most of the others, Zita's concentric circles move in the other direction. She starts by naming the earth then moves to the more personal. "The definition of environment? The earth, your surroundings."

For most of the youth, my inquiry was not the first time they had thought about or discussed the term "environment," in particular the urban environment. Alison responds to my question about the meaning of environment by referring to a recent dialogue she was involved in.

We were talking about this at the Youth Leadership Council. Most people, when you say environment they think you know, the trees and the air. What was really, really great I think about the Leadership Council, is that we said "that's not all to it." Urban problems, that's just as important and all part of the same definition of environment.

Half of the youth used the word "surroundings" in articulating what environment meant to them and included in their definitions what is clearly most familiar to them as urban dwellers, the social and built environment. The idea that the environment is, as Kiet says, "nowadays, not always nature" was reiterated by almost all of the youth, implying an ability to recognize traditional perceptions of environment as associated with the natural world as well as expand on this definition to acknowledge their own urban-based experiences. Darnyell describes two kinds of environments and their components. "Nature, Community. [Some have] grass, trees and different kinds of things. Some got water, sewer holes, streets." Jason focuses on social rather than natural features in his definition of environment saying simply, "my community around me." Like Jason, Eva associates surroundings with community. She connects a "hurt" environment with a "hurt" community, rendering inseparable people from the place they inhabit.

Our environment, oh, that's like where we live, our surroundings, our community in a way. People do things to hurt our environment, which is like, they hurt our community, like the people.

These youth incorporated their cultural experiences and understandings, particularly that of urban dweller, to make sense of the concept of environment and articulate what it meant to them. There were many similarities in their definitions. None seemed conflicted about using the term, asked me what I meant, or restricted themselves from talking about the city as an environment. In other words, their definitions did not fall into stereotypical interpretations of "environment" as synonymous with "nature."

### Rethinking Environmental Issues

At several points in this thesis I suggest that there is often conflict between "traditional" environmental movement agendas and those of the urban environment and its inhabitants. In the opening chapter, I tell an anecdote about some skepticism I encountered related to urban youths' level of concern about environmental issues. As the previous discussions on environmental definition and perceptions demonstrated, the youth in this study were able to define what the concept of environment meant to them as urban dwellers as well as note the existence of multiple types of environments without negating the concept of "environment" in the city. In fact, many asserted the need for others, within and outside of the city to recognize and become educated about environmental issues in urban areas. In this section I present some of the primary concerns identified by the youth and connections they have made between these issues, their own lives, and the health of their communities.

In the literature review on urban environmental issues I note some commonly identified problems based on what I found to dominate current books and journals. These include pesticide use, air pollution, lead poisoning, housing, energy and transportation, asbestos, siting of nuclear power plants, incinerators and hazardous waste production, storage and transportation. Several of these, such as air pollution, are more "visible" than others in that their effects are quite noticeable on a daily basis. The environmental issues that these youth identified and spoke about were those they had become aware of through

regular personal interaction, family and cultural knowledge or meaningful investigations and actions in and out of school.

When environmental problems were learned about as relevant to their lives, communities and cultural experiences, the youths' interest in environmental issues was intensified. For example, Eva spoke extensively about how an asbestos problem that delayed the opening of their school initiated a unit on asbestos followed by another on lead poisoning. Kenya's participation in a community protest of a planned incinerator alerted her to the implications of this siting in her neighborhood. However, even when they had had structured experiences such as these that supported them in gaining knowledge on "less visible" problems such as lead poisoning or pesticide use, it was often those they encountered in their daily lives that the youth they initially identified as concerns.

An issue that I did not include in the literature review was noise pollution, although this was later mentioned by several of the youth. Jessica, who is well versed in several environmental issues, immediately names noise as well as litter in her neighborhood among her primary concerns.

Pollution, noise and air. Mostly noise around my neighborhood, people make a lot of noise. And ground [pollution]. I like to go places where it's nice and clean you don't have to worry about picking stuff up. I mean just walking down the street I'll pick up bottles, cans, wrappers.

Eva has been exposed to several environmental study units in her school courses. When asked to name environmental problems she quickly names ocean pollution, then immediately transitions to discuss behaviors associated with pollution as she has observed them in her familiar environments of school and neighborhood.

New York? I think it's pollution. Throwing things in the ocean and all that stuff. Like see our hallway, people litter, and I hope they don't do that next year cause they're going to be going to a new building. When people litter, they just kind of throw it away, they don't want people to notice them. I think people just don't even want to walk over to the wastebasket, they just want to throw it on the floor. I think littering is a big problem, cause New York City is really dirty. And Chinatown is really dirty too.

The youths' lack of mention of less tangible yet major urban environmental issues such as those resulting from pesticide use or hazardous waste disposal is understandable. It makes sense that what is experienced as unpleasant on a daily basis would permeate one's thinking most thoroughly. Without concrete experience of disease or destruction caused by less apparent toxins such as pesticides (which many medical professionals would not even suggest) nor the education or awareness of the effects of pesticides (whose "family" includes insecticides and rodenticides, commonly used in urban dwellings), they would have no reason to consider this invisible demon a major environmental and health concern. In addition, many of the youths' families likely use these poorly labeled (and often in English only) insecticides and rodenticides, rendering the education about their dangers a sensitive yet important topic.

Jason is very aware of and immersed in environmental issues in his community. His comments contradict assumptions of environmental issues as related solely to wilderness and whales. In fact, he has very little interest in issues beyond his urban community at this point.

One [environmental concern] is the Asphalt plant. TEDESCA Asphalt company wants to build a Asphalt plant near the new Suffolk County corrections facility. [The plant would mean] more traffic, trucks coming down the streets pollution, air pollution. Really not that many jobs will go into this. [There are] some other issues about if you do work there, how many toxic things would you be brought to.

When I asked Jason if there were national or global issues that interested him as well, he replied, "I'm really into the community."

David and Kiet are deeply concerned about deforestation. While both noted the intensity of this problem in the Northwest United States, they were able to draw connections between the effects of deforestation on city dwellers, particularly as related to air pollution, and discuss future ramifications of these continuing practices. David bemoans the lack of understanding about how events can "directly or indirectly affect

something else," and notes that people in urban areas have misconceptions about the environmental movement.

I don't think many people, many youth understand how one event can either directly or indirectly affect something else, either in the present, immediately, or somewhere along the line, maybe in the future. I'd say that a lot of people, especially in urban areas have misconceptions about the environmental movement. They think it's not where they are living now, it's off some distant place where maybe not many people live or out in the forest where the animals roam. They don't understand that it also affects where they are living now within the urban area. One of my greatest concerns right now, mainly in the urban areas is the air pollution that has been created by all the vehicles that are found in the urban area. I also find deforestation an important issue because that ties into the air pollution problem. When I think of deforestation I mainly look towards the Northwest, but we could also apply that deforestation term to the city area, the more populated areas also. In Los Angeles, I would have them drive up to a nearby mountain and have them look down at the city and see if they could see anything out in the city. They would most probably see a thick brown layer, and [I would] ask them "now what do you think causes that?" Air pollution, it's not going anywhere. "And do you see any trees around there?" No. And trees give off oxygen and absorb the carbon dioxide and all that smog. In recent years we've had the term 'urban forest' pop up, and in a lot of the cities now they're beginning tree planting projects in order to help absorb some of that smog and pollution and to help cool down the city. So [deforestation is important] both inside the city, in the populated areas, or out in the wildlife areas where we have a lot of the logging also.

Three of the youth, all from Baltimore and with diverse environmental group affiliations each noted with lingering amazement their recently acquired learnings that the street gutters in their city all drained into the Chesapeake Bay. Suddenly, that which they saw as pollution caused by some unfamiliar source became intimately connected to their own neighborhoods. Alison explains:

Everything that goes into the gutters drains into the Chesapeake Bay, in the harbor. So all the stuff that you see floating in the harbor, everyone thinks there's people in the harbor pitching things off into the harbor, but it's actually not.

Interestingly, several of the youth name ignorance and lack of awareness as actual environmental problems. It was intriguing to me that they had gone beyond cause and effect in their thinking and inquired into what might be at the root of pollution-creating actions. Frankie says that "people have to be aware that we shouldn't pollute," referring to

the source of much of the pollution in the Chesapeake Bay. His statements imply that these understandings have increased his own level of environmental awareness and perhaps resulted in personal behavior shifts.

And that's the problem, people are not aware. And that's why there's pollution. I wish the harbor water wasn't so dirty, wouldn't it be nice if there was a day we could go swimming in their harbor. But then they throw their soda can down, and it washes into the gutter, and it washes into the harbor. People don't know that by throwing... . People just need to be made aware, that's the biggest problem to me, awareness. Exhaust from cars, like smoke, air pollution. I mean, everybody drives just about. A lot of it, half the drivers don't even know what the smoke that's coming out their exhaust pipe does to the environment.

The identification of individual ignorance as an issue is extremely valid and relates to the personal actions and behavior shifts that are an important part of developing an environmental consciousness. However, in the youths' descriptions of urban environmental issues I did not hear extensive mention of politics, analyses of consumerism and capitalism, or finger pointing at corporate industrial giants. Another level of inquiry for these youth might be to investigate how political and corporate spheres selectively facilitate or restrict public access to information. An example of this would be the silence that envelopes the existence and effects of industrial toxins, chemical warfare and nuclear waste, while efforts such as curbside recycling that can mask institutionalized destruction by focusing attention on individual responsibility are actively promoted.

While I did not hear in-depth analysis such as this, several of the twelve study participants and other youth I interacted with at conferences clearly recognized and articulated intersections between social and environmental issues, and drew important connections between problems that have often been differentiated as either rural or urban.

Says Alison:

[I think of environmental issues as] the crime, drugs, teenage pregnancy; all that people separate completely from pollutants. We formed an entire group at the leadership council to look at urban problems, because we think that's part of the environment too, and that should be considered in with environmental issues. You can't come into the inner city neighborhoods and say 'we've got this problem out here in the county and it's got to do with pollutants from the farm that are going into the stream.' I mean you have pollutants here, you have the industry, that are

you know, dumping things in the water, same as the pesticides on the farms that are going into the water. It's (pause) they're all related and no one sees them as related. So that's one of the things we (the Earth Day Leadership Council) focused on, pollution chemicals.

Kalpana identifies a lack of green places as an environmental problem that directly relates to the social health and the social issues of her community. She speaks specifically about a poor neighborhood near her own where she has done a lot of volunteer work.

The kids that I see, they don't have parks, no safe parks to go to. I think the lack of green space, lack of places for kids to go, for anyone to go just to relax is very important. I see problems with crime. It saddens me to see these kids with nothing to do all day. Their environment is concrete. There's nothing warm about it. There's nothing comforting about it. And with the problems they have to deal with, there needs to be some way for there to be something comforting in the environment. I guess environmental problems for me is a much broader scope than just the ozone layer and pollution of the oceans and that kind of stuff. It seems so overwhelming to me at times, that I'm not really sure where to stop defining environment and where it gets into social problems.. do you see what I'm saying?

These youth demonstrate understandings that reflect urban culture sensibilities combined with varying levels of environmental awareness and literacy. They have experiential knowledge of urban social and environmental issues that many environmental professionals are unaware of. However, although they are all able to find vocabulary to discuss the concept of environment and readily identify environmental issues in their urban communities, these youth did not consistently convey in-depth knowledge of ecological principles. It was apparent that they had not yet had the years of experience, reflection or educational support that might expand or deepen their current understandings about environmental issues locally and globally.

Leff (1978, p. 285) describes "ecological systems thinking" as involving both "an understanding of ecological processes and a continuing awareness of how these processes operate in one's own life and surroundings." He posits that such thinking involves seeing oneself as part of a larger system coupled with an active consideration of interrelationships rather than seeing causal connections between isolated events. Systems thinking implies a

cultivated process that must be supported multidirectionally and consistently over an extended period of time. As elaborated on in the earlier section that describes their experiences of school, most of the youths' formal learning has been through hours of exposure to school curricula that has no basis in ecological systems thinking. However, it is interesting to note that the several youth who are from Eastern cultures exhibited more familiarity with the concept of interconnectedness than others, suggesting that forms of cultural knowledge that are rooted in non-linear, relational thinking may render internalization of ecological principles more accessible if they aren't already ingrained.

Although their current understandings may lack multifaceted complexity, this has not excluded these youth from authentically contributing to discussions on environmental issues, or to this study. The recognition of these youths' current environmental understandings as dynamic and maturing is useful to the overall goal of this research. These insights can inform educational thinking about designs for culturally and developmentally appropriate environmental curricula and programs as well as validate the process of evolving ecological understandings and identity as a gradual journey shaped by experience and reflection.

#### Activism: Taking it to the Streets

In his book *Young Radicals: Notes on Committed Youth*, Keniston (1968, p. 106) suggested that the student antiwar activists he interviewed came to realize that they were radicals as a result of their activities, rather than deliberately setting out to become radicals. He describes radicalization among his study group as a gradual process whose underpinnings vary, but may have begun in early childhood or when they saw themselves as part of a movement, in this case the antiwar movement. As I discuss in more detail in other sections of the analysis, most of the participants in my research seem guided towards environmental activism by one or a combination of the following: interests and/or values that they had seen reflected in their families or a significant adult, an ethics of care and

service, a search for a sense of community, or as a way of gaining skills and holding positions of responsibility in preparation for adulthood.

While Keniston uses the word "radical" in his study, my intention was not to define my research group as radicals, both because the term "radical environmentalist" already has meaning within the environmental movement, and because I wanted to explore and allow "activism" to take on meaning based on the experiences of this particular study group, an ethnically and culturally diverse group of urban youth in the 1990s. The meaning of the word 'activist,' like 'radical' varies depending on the perspective of the person using it and the community, nation, and/or time period within which it is used. In his essay *Radical Notions*, the witty pundit Daniel Lazare suggests that the terms radical, activist and alternative are "nebulous content free words that people use when they don't wish to offend" as opposed to terms such as feminist or socialist have meaning and are more likely to trigger strong connotations (1994, p. 118). I believe that the definition of an activist varies over time and by interpretation. In this research I asked my contacts, most of whom were adults, to suggest young people whom they considered active in environmental issues in their communities and allowed that to guide to some extent how activism was interpreted, which had its benefits and limitations.

The environmental actions described by the participants could be categorized as one or more of the following; maintenance and improvement of natural and built environments, protection of individual and community health, and education and dissemination of information about current issues. The approaches include letter writing, surveys, leafleting, clean-ups, protests and festivals. The techniques resemble some of those employed in the civil rights, labor, anti-nuclear and peace movements among others, and can be associated with nonviolent social activism. Examples of these approaches to activism are best described by the youth themselves.

Jason is proud of his reputation as an activist, or as he calls it "a phantom of DSNI". He appears confident in his ability and right to act on what he considers

community and environmental violations. He has also gained skills in identifying the appropriate enforcement agencies to contact.

I go around, I see people do things, I come back here, and I write letters and I send them to people. I've sent about ten letters over probably a three month time. Some people from downtown, they call me a phantom of DSNI. I send all these nasty letters to them, well stop this person from dumping. I've sent some to the code enforcement, and I also did one to the chief of the municipal police.

Like many of the others, Jason express how important it is to become knowledgeable about the whole context of the situation before taking action, reflecting a conscious and well thought through brand of activism. He approaches a situation by informing himself before taking an action, in this case familiarizing himself with a lease before writing a letter, and then follows through, keeping tabs on their response, and letting them know he is serious.

Madden is renting the lot to a person named--- and in the lease it says nothing about putting dirt and asphalt on the site. It was only for trucks and machinery to be stored on it only. I sent [a letter] to the Madden Asphalt company when they were dumping all their dirt down there. When they were finally cleaning it up I sent a letter saying well, I like what you're doing down there but could you please have your trucks cover up the loads? 'Cause there was like these rocks sticking outside of the dump truck and it looked like if it hit a bump it would just fall on somebody.

David has started youth environmental clubs and held leadership roles in many school and community organizations in the Los Angeles area, and repeatedly spoke of the need for more youth representation and voice in the environmental movement. His reflections support the position that there are many different points of view, and therefore many forms that activism can take.

Voicing interests and opinions about different issues, that is something very important. There are many different points of view on the environment. Whether it be learning about it in the classroom as I mentioned earlier, or going outside and actually like protesting or writing articles about it or going to these youth summits, or doing beach clean-ups or planting trees. There are many different forms of taking actions on behalf of the environment, many different ways you could do it.

Kenya describes an action that her high school environmental club participated in with community members in Newark to block the building of an incinerator. The outcome of her involvement was positive, in terms of both community cohesiveness and the personal and collective pride that resulted from successfully altering the course of a potentially hazardous toxin producing monstrosity in her neighborhood.

Basically we wrote a lot of letters, and we had demonstrations. We would go out to the [incinerator] site and we would have our signs. I went to one of the demonstrations. Unfortunately not a lot of people came out to that one, but I heard and it was talked about at the meeting after, that at the second one there was a lot more people, because it was organized by the community, and the club also joined in. Luckily they didn't put [the incinerator] up, and that was good. It felt good, you know, it felt really good because we had done something, a little something. It was... it might have been almost nothing but it was something. We had a little hand in it, something to be proud of.

Successful outcomes can result in feelings of efficacy that may be significant in sustaining involvement in activism. Jason describes his role in the formation of a neighborhood youth group that remains very active in the community. When he showed me the mural that includes his own image, he was proud and exhibited a sense of involvement and ownership over this visual and public expression of the presence and power of youth in the community.

A bunch of the youth in the neighborhood came together as a youth group called Nubian Roots and they make decisions about most of the things that effect youth in the neighborhood. I'm one of the founders. We came together saying well there is really no voice in the neighborhood for youth, and we wanted to be that voice. I worked with [two local adults]. The Nubian Roots youth unity mural took two years in the process of design work and painting it.

The opportunity for youth to participate in and organize events and actions has multiple repercussions, including emotional ones, that are stimulating and invigorating. The enthusiasm and passion with which the young people I interviewed and the groups I met with shared their stories of activism was noticeable and inspiring. Kalpana talked about an event she helped to organize and run with the group of which she is student director, *One Earth, One People*.

This April we had a celebration, it was a huge event. It was a really, really exciting afternoon and day for me. I was just full of adrenaline, pumped the whole day. I mean I came to the Museum Center at nine 'o clock in the morning with my sister and with about ten other people we set up the whole day. Y'know all the earth projects, everything, we set everything up. We changed into our clothes at the Museum Center and it just blew by and by the time we knew it was ten 'o clock.

With the exception of the two who attend a magnet high school whose entire curricular focus is on environmental studies, most students did not identify school classes as significant to initiating their environmental activism. Some described experiential and relevant activities in school-based extra-curricular activities as instrumental to inspiring their environmental involvement. Others clearly stated that their environmental interest and activism was stimulated in contexts completely separate from their school day, and in fact were able to use these significant learning experiences to recognize the ways in which their schools had not promoted their environmental awareness or activism.

Darnyell can only name one class, and in particular one hands-on activity that related to her environmental interests.

I had a urban growth class, and we talked about the environment, our environment that we must live in. We had some projects with like, 'what would you think by the year 2000 the world would look like if we still pollute it?' My group did a model, where we got some black dust and put it in a box and had it all on the top, and we had like bits and pieces of tape with like trash put around it, old food particles, it was a nasty...it was a nice project but it was just nasty. We set it outside by the school there, and the flies were around it, so we just put all of it in a bag with the flies, and when we brought it in we sat it on the tables.

She noted that she would have liked more out of the classroom activities, saying "We could have did like, went out, and discovered stuff, but it was always an in-class kind of thing." This suggestion is likely informed by her extracurricular involvement in an ecologically oriented research project and work as a counselor at an environmental education camp.

As an initiator, organizer and leader David has gained access and respect in his school, enabling his ideas and plans to be supported and taken seriously. Through his

outside involvement he has been able to gather and share information with other students and faculty, who have been receptive to his activism.

The administrative staff at our school and the teaching staff is very supportive of the different interests of the student body. The school really tries to build upon those interests. In my case they were willing to make these exceptions and allow me to go to these conferences. I brought back a wealth of knowledge that I passed on to the environmental club we had at the school. We call it *KARE* which is an acronym for The Kids Army to Rescue the Earth.

Alison compared her experience at a special semester-long program (where she first became really interested in environmental issues) with her experience of school. Like David, Alison has tried to introduce projects at her school, which she describes as "a classic private school, where you pretty much study dead White males and take four years of Latin." Unlike David, she has not felt genuine support, but that they used her efforts to do their "one-day environmental thing" and receive media attention.

We only did two issues at Chewonki. We spent so much time just going into them in depth, and then I went back to school and a couple of them got brought up back at [my school] and just the depth of which [the issues] are gone into is no comparison. All aspects just don't get addressed in just regular school. And people just form their opinions like that. There's no, like research. I do the Earth Day, because no one else would do it. This is my third year, so, I don't know what's going to happen when I leave, that's sort of their one day "look what we did" kind of thing, and "let's try and get it in the news."

It was apparent that Jason felt very little connection to his school, which is in a neighboring community, not his own. He is not involved in after-school activities, leaving immediately each day to go to work at the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative. It is this connection in his own community that seems to give him not only strength, but a contrast to what exists at his school by providing a model of leadership and collective action. He did, however, attempt to reach out to the principal and vice principal. It seems he might seek more involvement in his school if student participation and leadership were supported.

They don't have that many projects inside my school. My school really doesn't have a student council, so there's really like no real leadership in my school. It's

like "well I'm the teacher you're the student, I'm gonna teach you things." I've been talking with the principal, and the vice-principal of the school, and they really like the idea [of starting some environmental programs] but they really want to do a step at a time. They really like blew it out of the water. So I think it's probably gonna be taking a few more years.

The examples of youth activism illustrated by the young people in this study, and the effects this activism has had on their ability to think critically about their education contrasts with the passivity that too often characterizes school learning environments; what Freire (1985) refers to as "domesticating education." Many of the excerpts in this section of the analysis provide examples of what Nieto (1992, p. 219) describes as "critical and liberating education, education that encourages students to take risks, to be curious, and to question." Some of the youths' actions were supported in their school communities, others through community and national organizations.

Forms of activism such as letter writing, boycotts, clean-ups, marches, and protests are examples of participatory and democratic citizenship that can reflect multicultural and environmental perspectives. They hold promising potential for adaptation to public school curricula. Bloome (1993, p. 658) suggests that in our society, there is a close connection between democracy and literacy. In an article he co-authored with two young people (one being his daughter) about their process of researching and developing a petition, he concludes that students need to learn "genres of reading and writing associated with a democracy," and learn them in such a way that they are not simply another skills exercise, but help them understand and gain access to the "social and political strategies in which genres like petition writing are embedded." Many of the young people I interviewed participated in school and community-based activities that developed environmental literacy by increasing their knowledge of resources and political strategies, genres such as petition, leaflet and grant writing.

Eva shared an experience of political participation in her community which enabled her to gain a better understanding of negotiation and decisionmaking. While it was a

constructed opportunity, it obviously had an impact on her, both in terms of self-esteem and getting an inside look at aspects of political decision making. It simultaneously demystified aspects of a political process, creating a sense of intrigue while also affecting her perception of herself as capable of political participation.

In June, June 3rd, I went to City Hall. Me and two other students from the school went [and] we acted as city council members. It was city wide, there was like two or three students from each school, each high school. We sat in [the city council members] seats and we looked at three issues. One was about gambling, not only like gambling, that's too general, something about a law that they want to pass, and whether or not they should, and another one about tobacco, like smoking. I felt important, 'cause first of all I was selected from the school, so then I felt proud, and then I got to meet the Mayor. He was busy so he only said "you know I'm proud of you guys," and something like that, and we met the public advocate, like these important people I guess. And then I got to go inside, and then I had the feeling like, wow this is what they do every day, its so political.

Alison describes her experience at meetings and conducting surveys to learn about a nuclear power plant.

We went to all these hearings to hear what the people in the town thought and to hear what the scientists thought and then we made up a questionnaire, and went around the town and asked everyone in the town what they thought about it and did they like having Maine Yankee as the power plant, did they like having it so close, what did they think was good about it, what did they think was bad about it, would they have a problem with it being a storage site for waste, and why and why not. And it was really interesting to hear what people said.

Although this investigation was part of a semester exchange program miles away from her own community, the knowledge and sense of efficacy Alison gained paved the way for her increased involvement when she returned to Baltimore, demonstrating that once initiated, skills gained in organizing and activism may be applied to and further developed in a variety of situations.

A recurrent theme, whether in the discussion of leadership, the acquisition of knowledge and resources or activism is that in order to develop these qualities and grow from the successes and the challenges involved, these youth had to have opportunities to partake in these experiences. As David became more and more involved in environmental

activities at his school and in his community, he seems to have gained confidence, leading him to begin to question the importance of youth representation in the environmental movement.

Back when I volunteered at the Urban Forests conference, I was walking down the halls through the various seminars and conferences and down in the exhibit area and the one thing I noticed was the absence of youth. I figured well what happens when all these adults are in their old age and they can't do much more? When us kids will be adults, what will happen then? So I mentioned to the volunteer coordinator I mentioned to him, I go, "you know it would be nice if you saw more kids here." One of their youth directors mentioned that also and from there on they started getting more and more support from the different exhibitors that were there, mainly the American Forest Association. They heard the idea. They go "hey, you're right, that is a good idea." They had the conference two years ago, in Cincinnati, Ohio, the National Youth Environmental Summit. I wasn't able to go, I wasn't able to get the monetary support. Ever since that summit concluded, I've been waiting for more news about the next conference, hoping there would be a next conference, with the huge success that they had at the first conference.

Those who I interviewed had been referred to me, usually by adults, as "active in environmental issues in their communities," and had been involved in this work for at least two years, and in some cases as long as six years (substantial for a 14 year old)! The length of time of involvement appears significant in that those with less experience are at a point in their process where they are still gathering knowledge and at an earlier stage of exhibiting leadership as activists. They participate in group events, but have not necessarily initiated events or actions. Others who have more experience have taken more initiative, such as starting environmental clubs, organizing large scale events, speaking at conferences, and representing youth on committees and councils. As these more seasoned activists spoke of their own progression and shared advice on leadership with others (included in a later section), their early stages of activism resembled what I heard described by some of the less seasoned among the group. This discrepancy in experience and in levels of activism may further complicate the question, "what defines activism," perhaps most significant to this study is the documentation of the process of youth becoming and realizing themselves as activists, particularly environmental activists.

Much of the literature on student activism is based in movements of the sixties, mostly the student anti-war movement. In many of these studies (Keniston, 1968; Knott, 1971; Flacks, 1971) the youth are often college-based from middle class families who, in conjunction with their activism also reject materialism and "the system" to some extent. An abundance of research based on the sixties and early seventies reflects the academic intrigue with the psyche of these students activists, and what drove their commitment, not only to the antiwar movement, but as allies in the struggle for civil rights. There is less documented research on Black and working class student activists of this era, perhaps because their marginalized history in this society makes their revolts easier to comprehend, or because the histories and herstories of these groups is often under-documented.

The youth I interviewed did not focus on rejecting educational institutions or materialism, nor did they speak in revolutionary terms. Instead, most of them were intent on pursuing a college education and a high powered career track, and applying their beliefs to careers in research, education, policy and law. This goal was consistent among the interviewees, regardless of whether they had had positive experiences in school or not.

There are a few reasons I hypothesize why their activism might be channeled into more mainstream directions. For one, many of them have come from poor, working-class, and lower-middle-class backgrounds, and/or are immigrants or children of immigrants, and may be the first in their family to attend college. Rather than reject academic and material success, working within the system to gain education, access, and tools for power becomes an important goal for them and their families.

Secondly, in the 1990s the career possibilities that deal with environmental research, policy and law, organizing and education are vast. Hence, one's values and beliefs can be channeled into a feasible career, whereas with other movements of past and present such as the peace and civil rights movements, actual jobs within these movements are harder to come by, less stable, and often low paying. Of course, not all environmental

careers are of an activist nature, but environmental activism may expose youth to the multiple organizations and career possibilities available.

Finally, the activism that emerges among youth in this era does not have the model of student activism of the 1960s readily accessible, except in books and movies. Even if they did, each era commands a new form of activism (or apathy) depending on the issues of the times, the nature of the population and the political climate. Most of the youth I interviewed were not yet aware of the growing movement of people and organizations of color challenging the "mainstream" environmental movement. However, some of the older (20 year-old) college students I spoke with at a conference were aware of the emerging environmental justice movement which they identified as sparking their environmental interest and activism.

In considering youth activism in the 1990s, it is essential to recognize that some of the most effective models of activism in this era can be witnessed among groups and individuals that seek to eliminate some of the major civil and human rights and environmental protection policies that have been put into place over the last four decades. These include well-funded private interests as well as congressional majority members. Right-wing groups and spokespeople are incredibly skilled orators and have successfully accessed media networks. Educational efforts to promote social and environmental activism must be accompanied by values that promote respect, understanding, equity and justice, as well as knowledge about the efforts and methods of the "opposing sides." Effective communication and mediation skills are going to become increasingly important for activists in order to build bridges, or non-violently agree to disagree with those with very different ideologies and agendas.

## Adult Support and Inspiration

From their stories, it is clear that all of the young people interviewed had an adult figure in their life, familial or non-familial, in school or out of school, from who they received encouragement and support, gained skills or exposure to resources that supported their learning and activism, and were challenged to excel. As a group, the adult "mentors" that the youth identified fall under the categories of what Freedman (1993) describes as *primary relationships*, where there is an extraordinary level of commitment, emotional bonding and intensity. Frankie and Darnyell's Mr. Johnson, who had been a mentor to them over many years, and consistently worked with them by helping them maintain their grades or recommending them for jobs exemplifies this relationship.

Freedman also describes *secondary relationships* which are friendly and supportive but with no deep lasting emotional involvement. Examples include David's teacher, who helped him write grants, and Kenya who describes the teacher involved in her high schools environmental club saying "She's really nice, a very good person. She likes going out and doing stuff; most of the trips, she went with us." I would suggest that a third category might include short-term interactions with, or even observations of particular adults who somehow serve as invigorators or inspirations for youth. Alison glowed when she described meeting all of "Mariba's funky friends" who were involved in projects that opened her eyes to possibilities that she had not thought of. Such encounters, though brief, may leave their mark during this formative period of adolescence. The qualities possessed by the adults that the youth in this study identified included positive and healthy approaches to life and leadership, conviction and commitment to a cause or causes, knowledge about particular topics, and the willingness to both support and challenge youth.

The role of family, particularly parents, appears significant in regards to supporting and responding to their children's environmental interests, or perhaps interests in general.

Frankie, whose father is a foreman in a Baltimore factory and whose mother is at home, describes a supportive family who regularly question him about his environmental interests.

They ask me about it all the time. Like everyday they ask me, what did you do today, or what did you learn today, or how was the experience, did you have fun? [My parents] love me, they just a little too bit overprotective though.

In several cases families respond to their children's interests through a willingness to take actions at home. As Kenya describes:

They're pretty good, they're pretty supportive my mother and stepfather. Like at our house, we recycle. I made a point that we recycle. I was like, we need to recycle. We went out the same day and bought like little trash cans, to recycle aluminum, and those are our recycling bins.

In addition to receiving encouragement from family members, several of the youth contributed to an atmosphere of support by educating others in their family. Although he feels that some of his family is "already brainwashed a bit" Kiet is committed to sharing his environmental knowledge, particularly with his younger brothers and sisters.

My little brothers and sisters, they're too small to understand, so they're actually not paying attention, and that's why me myself I chose a program in educating little kids. My older sisters, they're too old, and their head is already brainwashed a little bit in a way. [They think] this nice city, and they love and used to it and not care about anything else.

The support evidenced through a family's changes of behavior in the household, and their positive responses to family members' efforts to educate within the family may further the personal satisfaction and sense of efficacy that environmental involvement has added to the lives of these youth.

When asked to identify role models, several chose family members, often explaining their choices based on high standing of character. Darnyell identifies three female figures in her life. She notes their generous spirits and strength, and their ability to be giving while at the same time command respect. Darnyell moves the conversation back

to herself, comparing her own strong will and strength to these women she admires and has been supported by.

I would choose my Aunt Veronica 'cause she don't let people talk her down. She has her own house. I respect her to the utmost, because she just does a lot for people, and most people don't say thank you. It's like my grandmother the same way. And my aunt in New Jersey, her too. [Aunt Veronica], she want to learn for herself. I guess that's where I get my attitudes from. You know, don't tell me, I want to find out for myself, I don't want you to tell me.

Frankie identifies his father and oldest brother as role models in his life, particularly in that they both motivate and challenge him.

I see the things that they did, and how they did it, and I see I can do it. You know, they motivate me. They push me. Y'know my father, my brother he like show me [how] he did things, make me see it's not that hard so I don't travel down the wrong path, find the easy way out, sell drugs, crime and stuff like that.

In contrast, Frankie describes an experience he had with *Outward Bound* (an outdoor challenge-based program) where he describes feeling patronized and disrespected rather than challenged by the group leaders. While he speaks of his *Outward Bound* experiences as positive in many respects, Frankie did not name any of his *Outward Bound* instructors as role models.

When we went on the Outward Bound, the instructors tend to talk to us like we were children or something, like when we were asking how many miles do we have to go now, [they] tell us like "we'll get there when we get there, be quiet" or something. They tried to muffle us over. You ask them a whole lot of questions, they get frustrated.

Frankie's story and comparison of what he considers supportive and non-supportive interactions is illustrative of his desire to be challenged and, to use his words, "pushed and motivated." Many educational researchers and scholars suggest that supportive and academically rigorous learning environments are essential to the creation of multicultural learning environments. This position is related to research that indicates low expectation on the part of the teacher affects academic performance (Nieto, 1992; Spring, 1985). Assumptions about performance have often been directed at youth of color, those

who do not speak English as a first language, the poor and working class, and women (Anyon, 1981; Nieto, 1992, 1994).

All of the youth in this study expressed a passion for learning, and many named as role models adults who not only offered knowledge and resources, but challenged them to excel and to take active roles in gaining access to information. Kiet names his teacher, noting his knowledge of information and resources as factors, and appreciating his directness, and the challenging academic environment he creates.

A role model? Well, I think it would be Mr. Z., my science teacher. Because he's actually shown me the knowledge he knows, and he's helped me in the environmental field. He has a whole bunch of connections. So I learn a lot from him. And he actually inspires me more, as I learn from him. He's straight (direct), he only picks the honor kids to be in his class. He wants people that are serious about it. He's going to start a college [level] course in ecology.

Jason names as role models two staff members of the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, where he is a daily volunteer. Jason's comments suggest that Trish, whose focus is on environmental issues, is significant to him in that she has supported and exposed him to resources and involvement, and Rohelio, the Executive Director of DSNI, for modeling conviction and community organizing.

Two people [have served as role models] Trish S., and Rohelio the Executive Director at DSNI. Trish has taken me on many meetings about the asphalt plant and about some other issues about the environment, and when I go to those meetings I learn a lot about where I'm living and what's going on. Ro (Rohelio) takes the leadership and says well "I don't really want that asphalt plant there, I'm gonna really fight." So, that's where I get my inspirations from. One of the things I would really like to do is take Rohelio's job. He knows that and he said "well any time Jason," so I really want to follow along in his footsteps.

Jason and Kiet's respect for and appreciation of these adult figures is apparently mutual, as it was the adults they identified who recommended these young men for this research.

Kalpana identifies her parents and two other adults who she has known and worked with in environmental related activity as inspirations and sources of support. She enthusiastically describes the founder and director of the organization she is involved with, *One Earth One People*, noting the qualities of spirit and conviction that she admires.

I think my parents, most significantly. Stan R. who is the guy who runs this program at the zoo was very important for me. Jane C. could incite anybody to activism. She's what started *One Earth One People* and her spirit has sort of been put into the program. I think she is very motivating. She's really an unbelievable person. I love working with her. Despite the fact that there's times when financial support is low and all that kind of stuff that keeps an organization kicking, she always brings the belief that things will turn around. And they have to, they always do. And I think in part that's due to the fact that she keeps our students very motivated and willing to work. Willing to believe, willing to go out and talk to people, willing to educate. Her positive spirit, and her understanding of people, I think she understands character very well. I think she's a great leader. And her heart, she's just a good person. She's a lot of fun to work with.

Kalpana identified four significant adults including two family members as significant to her evolution as an environmental thinker and activist, whereas most of the other youth identified no more than two. Of the group, Kalpana is one of the most well versed and mature in her thinking and leadership skills, causing me to wonder if a high level of confidence and success as a youth leader might be in part attributable to having access to and meaningful relationships with multiple adult figures, familial and non-familial.

All of the youth that I interviewed displayed hope, vitality, and a strong sense of self, even in the face of many of the environmental challenges and institutional inequities that many of them must negotiate on a regular basis. Some educators and researchers describe such young people as "resilient youth" (Garmezy, 1985; Lefkowitz, 1986). These researchers find recurring themes in their stories, including the personality and social responsiveness of the youth, and close knit, supportive families. In my research, all of the young people had at least one family member from who they received emotional support, and at least one non-familial adult who they admired and/or also received support from. Lefkowitz, author of *Tough Change: Growing up on Your Own in America* (1986), says that a repetitive pattern among the 500 young people he interviewed is that "the kid who managed to climb out of the morass of poverty and social pathology was the kid who found somebody, usually in school, sometimes outside, who helped them invent a promising future." The relationship between resiliency among youth and the role of significant adult

figures may be likened to a 'which came first the chicken or the egg' question. As Rhodes (1992) suggests, it remains unclear whether resilient youth do well because they find mentoring relationships, or because they have another quality which enables them to find these relationships and use them well.

Freedman (1993, p. 42) describes a wave of mentoring now gaining strength as a movement with a focus on "disadvantaged children and youth" as a target group, and the mentors as volunteers drawn from the professional class. Most of the adults identified by the youth in my research were not, with the exception of one, assigned mentors per se, but instead had somehow evolved into that role.

Freedman also describes the role that neighborhoods have played as environments where "fictive kinships" could be established, with multiple adult members of the community supporting or watching over the youth. While many urban neighborhoods are in a state of impoverished and violent decay, some are being reclaimed by community members. Alison and Jason both identified "neighborhood elders" to whom community members turned. Jason's elders are honored on a neighborhood mural. Tam described his mother and their home as a safe place for neighborhood youth to hang out and work out personal problems.

Having non-familial adults in their lives who serve as inspiration, role models, and mentors may be more comfortable and familiar to those whose cultures tend to be extended family oriented than those whose cultures are nuclear-family based, or tend towards privacy. As part of my research, I spent an afternoon with twelve youth who are involved in a peer education project on tobacco and health in Holyoke, Massachusetts (HEAT). I was impressed by the ease of relationship between the adult facilitator/mentor and the youth, and the family-like atmosphere of the group, all of whom are Puerto Rican. In another scenario, a young woman I met and spent the day with at a conference in Roxbury was very reserved for the first hour of our interaction. Over the course of the day however, she opened up about her life experiences, as a Haitian and an immigrant living in

the United States. She also shared her reasons for being wary of strangers. Young people who have experienced violence such as domestic abuse or war may be understandably wary of trusting strangers, e.g. those assigned as mentors. These perspectives are important for educators and organizers to understand in developing culturally sensitive and informed opinions about why some young people may be more or less responsive to non-familial adults in their lives. Recognition of these perspectives might be useful in building successful mentoring programs and mutually beneficial relationships between youth and adults.

When structured with the intention of being a supportive place for multi-generational learning and working, schools and grassroots organizations can serve as communities where youth/adult mutually beneficial relationships can arise and flourish, such as those described by Jason and Kalpana in their organizations and by Eva and Kiet in their school. Although this section focuses on adults as role models, it should also be noted that peers may serve as inspiration for each other as well as for adults. Zita speaks highly of Jessica as a leader within their environmental group and Kalpana was recommended for this research by Alison, who had met and heard her speak at a national youth conference.

Mentoring in its many forms, adult/youth, peer, through planned programs with assigned tutors and naturally arising in neighborhoods, schools and organizations emerged in this study as significant forms of emotional and educational support. The next section focuses on an important and related finding of this research; in many cases it is the longing for and benefits of community that invites and sustains these youths interest in environmental activism. The desire for meaningful connection with individuals and groups evidenced by these young people challenges us to look beyond competitive, isolated and isolating institutions and recognize that the education of our youth is not the responsibility solely of teachers and parents, but the society as a whole.

"It Takes a Whole Village to Raise a Child"

(African Proverb)

For many young people, adolescence is a time when one seeks to belong somewhere, to be part of a group. This may take the form of participation in school, community or religious clubs, sports, identification with fashion styles or genres of music, or membership in a gang. In this section I suggest that common to all the young people in this study is a desire to be part of a community. This theme of community, or desire for membership in group activities emerged repeatedly, both in terms of what initially attracted these youth to involvement in environmental activities and what maintained their involvement.

Experiences that support positive self identity are vitally important to youth and can be beneficial to all ages as members of a species who are by nature social creatures, but currently have few accessible models that present an option to our pervasive social paradigm of competition and individualism. If we accept that adolescence is a time of openness to, and often longing for group involvement and support, then it is a social and educational responsibility to create opportunities for youth to participate in clubs and organizations that focus on peaceful, constructive and community renewal oriented activities. These also provide options to the many forms of group involvement that are destructive, competitive and breed substance abuse, such as some gangs, the military, and some fraternal organizations.

In half of the scenarios, it was the school that provided or supported community-oriented opportunities for these youth through classes or clubs. Kiet and Eva's experiences are perhaps the most striking in this respect. For David, there was no environmental club to join, but because of his interest and perseverance he has been able to get support for the clubs and group activities that he organizes. For others, the school environment was completely separate if not a stark contrast to their positive experiences of community in the organizations they are involved in. Interestingly, Kalpana and Alison, the two who

attended the more affluent private schools found very little support for environmental activities there. One hypothesis is that this re-affirms that environmental education, as with multicultural education, is often considered extraneous to "serious academics." Another is that these particular individuals, having held positions of responsibility in diverse, stimulating groups were not satisfied with the more homogenous groups and superficial activities available to them at their schools.

Eva was looking for safety and made this a priority in choosing a public school to attend in New York. While there she developed her knowledge and interest in environmental issues, activism and education. In addition to a safe community and a new found interest in environmentalism, Eva has felt successful academically.

It was a new school, so I just tried it out. If it didn't work out I guess I'd of had to go to my zone school [and] I didn't really want to go there. I went to these (other schools) and it was scary. I don't really like the people there. I hear stories, saying that it's bad and everything. I didn't really know anything about here, but I just wanted to try it, give it a chance, and I don't regret that. The teachers are nice, and everyone one is... I like it cause I have friends. The teachers are friendly, and then I learn, and I get pretty good grades. And the teachers, they stay after school for you. And the kids, they want to learn too, some kids. They care about the environment too.

Eva is committed to helping to improve her school, perhaps as a sort of reciprocity for the support she has received. She sees her involvement in her school as more than grades and academics.

I mean, you might get 90s but all you did was sit there, and then after school you go home. You study, y'know you read, but then I mean if you're not involved, you can't really do much for the school. That's why I try to do more for the school. Not only study, y'know.

Tam, who is home schooling, works with his mother in community and environmental activism, much of which is based in their home. He implies the need for safety and community as he describes his home as sort of refuge for local youth.

[Me and my mother] have been doing a lot of work with the [neighborhood] kids. They've come to know us as a safe haven from all the troubles of garbage and the typical way of teenagers interacting. We want to buy this house and make it into a clubhouse, for kids to come and relax, hang out after school in a safe place.

Kalpana was looking for a committed and cohesive community that shared similar interests as she, which she did not find in her school.

I go to a small private school, it's primarily wealthy kids, y'know affluent backgrounds. I was looking for something that would allow me to become involved in a group that was really interested, people who were really interested in what I was interested in, which was the environment. And, I guess that's what drew me to *One Earth One People*, was the idea that I'd be working with other students and advisors who were very, very interested in what I was interested in. And so, I went, and here I am now.

Many of the youth described particular experiences they encountered through their group involvement that were affirming, or made them see things in a new way. Darnyell noted a particular experience in Outward Bound that taught her something about working closely with others to fulfill a task.

We were going down hill, and we couldn't stand up, and we was just sliding down, and we probably could have broke our necks if we wouldn't of stand and help each other. We had to get up somehow, hold hands, and walk slowly down a slope that went straight. I learned it is good to stick together, 'cause you never know what might happen to you when you need somebody else. There's a lot of stubborn people around here, like "I don't need nobody else." But actually, deep down inside you will, and you do. I think [the facilitators] did it because they knew that once we start, we can't start back, and we gonna have to cooperate with each other. They try to get you to open up to that person no matter what. So I was like well, that is true, I never thought of it that way.

Kalpana gained important understandings through her active participation in a group that is made up of people from many sectors of society. Because of the diversity of ages, ethnic backgrounds and professions represented, it provides her with a microcosm of her actual community, as well a model of youth/ adult partnerships and organizational decision-making processes.

The way the board is set up is that we have a student and an adult working together in a particular area. Jane is my advisor. So we have an advisor /student system set up which allows the student to learn from the advisor as well as the advisor to learn from the student. They 're from all sectors, we have people from IBM, we have

housewives we have lawyers, we have insurance representatives, we have everybody. And all of our decisions are based on discussions within the board.

Several of the youth exhibited an understanding of negotiation, communication, and compromise. These are qualities that can be learned through involvement in a group that is committed to healthy dynamics. An interest in developing these qualities in one's life may draw some youth towards community oriented involvement, such as participation in clubs or organizations. David describes his philosophy of compromise, and how it has been useful for him in mediating and negotiating.

Most of the time, I try to work out a compromise, and sometimes I wish that other people would try to work out compromises also. When there's like conflict, then we try to reach a settlement which is like midway between one or the other. You know because we both have valid points in our arguments, and there's no use in sitting down and arguing all day and trying to make one do the other. We could decide on certain things that we could work on as far as our difference, we could work those out one at a time later on. This compromise thing, it works out a lot, at school also. You know I could be sitting down talking to a teacher, and he could be wanting one thing and the other teacher could be wanting another. And I could be sitting there, "well why don't we take a little bit of your idea, a little bit of you idea, and try to reach something in the middle where both sides are happy?" I try to do it whenever possible.

Most of the youth projected a strong sense of responsibility, perhaps resulting from their experiences in groups in which they were an important part of a vital whole, or maybe reflective of qualities they already possessed that led them to group involvement in environmental causes. Zita joined a club looking for extracurricular involvement and found more.

After school, I'm not really involved in a lot of things, and I thought that this would be something that I would enjoy so I just tried it and I liked it. And then I met Jessica and everything and her and I became really good friends and that made it more easier and fun to be in the club. When you're involved in a club and something as serious as the environment, it really takes a lot on your part to know and do your part. If you don't then everything is just going to collapse and not a lot of things are going to get done, so I think that a lot of team work is very important. And communication, that's one of the biggest things that we can come to learn that is very important.

Even through the frustrations of lack of communication or action, the positive feeling of being part of a group can remain. As Tam describes:

One of the most exciting is being part of a group that feels that they can actually do something. "Well I think we should do something, and I propose that at the next meeting, we decide when to decide to do something." And we keep going through this cycle of deciding, yet never actually doing something, but being part of a group like this, you feel like you're actually part of something.

Heath and McLaughlin (1993, p. 24) found that successful youth organizations share several characteristics. They involve youth of all ethnic groups, promote pride in the "unique and specific accomplishments of the organization and its membership," and tailor program content and institutional processes to the interests of the young and involve them in participatory roles. Their research conveys what the youth in this study also express, that being a member of a group noted for accomplishment can promote increased self-esteem, and the experience of being an integral member of an organization can lead to a sense of belonging and efficacy. Irby and McLaughlin (1994, p. 301) describe successful youth organizations as "urban sanctuaries" where "young people find themselves in a training ground for adulthood and they develop the values, self-confidence, competencies and attitudes that engender hope and enable them to create a positive future." Their suggestion that adolescents are looking for group as well as personal identity, and their findings about what makes for a successful experience in an organization resonate with lessons learned in this study. As this section illustrates, the youths' involvement in environmental issues was often motivated by a desire for and/or maintained through positive experiences of community. The examples of successful group experiences described by the youth in this study may be useful in establishing other clubs, programs and entire schools that provide safety and community while developing communication and group building skills in a stimulating learning environment. Because of the caring and justice oriented ideologies of many organizations with environmental or humanitarian

agendas, they are uniquely suited to promote healing and positive action not only in their agenda, but in their structure.

In the next section, I describe a quality of character that emerged among all of the youth, an ethics of caring and compassion for others and the natural world. Their caring values and life-positive moral orientations strengthen the argument for the development of school and community groups, organizations and programs where they can share their concerns with others and transform these into socially and environmentally responsible and service oriented actions.

### Caring and Compassion: Exploring Service Learning

One of the recurring themes that emerged in my interactions and interviews with the participants in this study was a strong sense of caring and compassion for humanity and the natural world. This "ethics of care" (Noddings, 1984) was evident in all of the study participants, male and female and across ethnicity and class. This theme emerged organically and repeatedly in the youths' responses to values-oriented questions, in examples of their actions and in self-descriptions such as Darnyell's.

I like to help people out. I guess you can call me sentimental, softhearted. I can just meet you and if something's wrong, I try and talk to you, you know, take you through stuff. It's just me, something that I do. I just see if somebody need help, I help them.

One manifestation of an ethics of care that emerged was a community-minded spirit and a willingness to work for the benefit of the whole, such as in Eva's obvious commitment to her school community.

We're the first ones [at a relatively new school], we have to sacrifice, that's how it is. But I know the school's going to be really good, I know it will. But by that time I won't be here. I have to help make it good, and you have to sacrifice a little bit.

It is difficult to determine the conditions under which one evolves an attitude and an ethic of care although this topic is an avenue of inquiry and discourse for several scholars and researchers (Eugene, 1989; Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984, 1991). Engagement in action with a service orientation that exposes one to models, both peer and adult, who are caring and compassionate may support the development of a moral orientation of caring among young people, particularly if the seeds of such an ethic already exist and have been nurtured in some way. Noddings suggests that people develop a moral orientation of caring through direct contact with those who need to be cared for and that in order to learn the skills of caregiving and attentive love, "one must engage in the activities of care, preferably under the loving supervision of an experienced caregiver" (Noddings, 1991 p.165). Noddings draws from the work of Black feminist theologian Toinette Eugene, who sees an ethic of care and its style of engagement as liberational in that it "requires all people to care, to respond to expressed needs, and therefore should lighten the traditional burden on women" (p.160).

Many of the young people in this study identify family members, teachers, and adults they interact with in the community and environmental organizations with which they are affiliated as significant figures in their lives. Through these adults they have gained knowledge, support, and encouragement, as well as observed manifestations of commitment to and concern for all life. These adults may serve as the models of "experienced caregiving" that Noddings refers to. Tam, for example, became aware of the sacrifice and rewards associated with his mother's caring nature and related perseverance.

I think that people [can] cooperate with each other for the best possible goal. If people cooperate for the common good, instead of well, I'll do this but only if I can make a buck on it, anything's possible. A lot of the work that my mom has been doing has been completely volunteer. Even doing like weeks and weeks of proposals, and then at the end of two months she'll get like a hundred dollar grant, which is kind of discouraging. When you've been given a task by your own mind, [when] your mind goes, "I have to do this to make this community a better place," it's almost guaranteed you're going to get through it.

In discussing what they considered environmental problems, Kiet and several of the others identified "not caring" as of primary concern.

I think the nature of harm is ignorance between people. Not caring. I mean if you don't know about something, you won't care about it, so that's why this environmental high school is here, to show kids and to make them care, by teaching them more.

The notion of an ethic of care in regards to cultivating one's understanding of and relationship to natural ecosystems is not a new concept or practice. Many cultures have traditions strongly connected to a reverence for the earth. Kiet, who was born in Vietnam, makes the connection between his practice and teaching of martial arts to his relationship to and understanding of nature.

That's also why I like the environment, 'cause martial arts, especially Japanese martial arts are based on [having a] loving nature, and how to deal with nature. And the Chinese Tai Chi actually involves harmony, and how nature and things works. There's a new style called Tri -Harmony, 'try to find harmony.' [Martial arts forms] use the environment. Something like a forest, a forest environment. I actually feel energy coming into me, and it's sort of like an internal sense that you have, it's something emotional for martial artists.

The concept of an ethics of care has often been discussed in relation to interpersonal, human relationships. Might the presence of an interpersonal ethics of care also signal a sense of compassion for and connection to nature? Theologian and educator Mathew Fox (1990, p. 24) suggests that "to develop compassion means to develop an ever keener awareness of the interdependence of all living things." He adds that compassion is closely allied with justice making and requires a "critical consciousness" in that it involves a search for "authentic problems and workable solutions." Both Fox's words and the caring and compassionate attitudes expressed by the youth interviewed are useful in contemplating how humanitarian and ecological values may be interrelated in individuals, and promoted in educational curricula.

Service-related work is a natural extension of an ethics of care. Community and religious organizations have long been centers of service work. More recently however, service learning has emerged as a valid and successful part of the curriculum of many

schools. Some communities and states strongly support and even mandate some form of service as part of the schooling process. Lewis (1992, p. 1) identifies the many benefits of urban service programs saying that "well designed service learning promotes academic achievement, competence, self-confidence, and self esteem. It creates empathy for others and builds skills in problem solving and working cooperatively." For those students who benefit from participatory approaches to learning, service learning is a form of experiential learning that can lead to increased success.

Service learning's increasing popularity as an educational movement draws attention to the question: "What constitutes service learning?" Rollo May (1972) outlines five types of power; exploitative, manipulative, competitive, nutrient, and integrative. Nutrient power is characterized by openness to others, by inclusion, care, connection and nurturance, by giving as well as receiving. May says that "nutrient power comes out of a concern for the welfare of the group" (p. 109). Nutrient power is what service learning can be about. Well designed service learning programs can exemplify such collaborative models of power if they are based on caring practices, mutual learning and socially just and inclusive support structures. Lewis (1992) suggests that youth service programs can be school-based or offered through non-school groups, and that these programs go by several names, among them experiential learning, service learning, and voluntary youth service.

Many of the twelve youth interviewed are involved in service oriented activities in their schools and communities in addition to their environmental (service) work. Kenya tutors freshmen, sophomores, and some of the juniors and seniors in her school. Kalpana volunteers on a van that helps to provide prenatal care and education to teens and women in what she defines as "high risk areas." She also sees returning to her family's homeland of India to do volunteer work sometime during college, particularly to work with grassroots projects focused on, as she says "empowering women." Caring and service work can help one to feel involved in a mission or process, and be affirming to the individual. An is

example of this is Jason who, through his volunteer work at a community organization believes that he "really helps out the staff people to really get the goal that they want."

As part of their school's curriculum requirements, Kiet and Eva served as interns in public elementary schools, an experience that presented them with the opportunity to participate in mutually nurturing educational experiences with young children. Their internships were not identified as "service learning" per se, but the process and outcomes resembled those that many service learning programs strive for. They had meaningful, real-life experiences where mutual learning took place, and simultaneously became connected to organizations and resources outside of the walls of their school building.

Many students have difficulty participating in service-activities that are not integrated into the school day, or do not offer a stipend. Darnyell's and Frankie's involvement in environmental and community work came partially as a result of their eligibility for summer jobs available to youth based on economic circumstances as well as skill and prior experience. Zita and Jessica both asked me about summer jobs with environmental organizations but named the need to make money and travel as problems, as the jobs they identified were not in their own communities. Many of the most successful programs provide students not only with skills and knowledge, but provide stipends and /or educational bonuses. *Food from the 'Hood*, for example, is a student-run retail food company that began as a garden at a high school in South Central Los Angeles. Twenty-five percent of the profits are donated to the homeless and the rest go to a college scholarship fund for the "student owners," who also receive support in selecting, applying for and preparing for college.

Environmental education has long been associated with experiential learning, and experiential learning with service learning, yet the link between environmental education and service learning is largely under-explored. Zita articulated a connection between environmental work and community service that makes it appealing to her. "Working with

the environment you're usually outside and I'm the type of person that likes to go places. It's also part of community service and I like to help people."

In my initial networking to identify young environmental activists, I did not seek out young people involved in service learning. It became clear, however, that much of the work done by these young "activists" was emanating from an ethic of care, and the projects with which they were involved could be considered community service learning.

The potential for increased connection between environmental activism and service learning is one of many lessons learned through the process of conducting and analyzing this research. It, like other significant findings of this study implies a merger and movement forward towards new ideas and alliances. The following chapter focuses on understandings that these youth have gained as a result of their activism, and how these have resulted in an ability to share their insights, experience and wisdom with others.

## CHAPTER 7

### TRANSFORMATION: LEADERS AND VISIONARIES

Transformation. Shifting seasons allow dormant foliage pigments to emerge and gain vibrancy. Slow moving leaf munching larvae gain wings, flight and new perspectives. Earthly changes and time turn mud into rock, maintaining embedded memories in its new form. Transformation: to undergo a change in form, appearance or character. From conception and birth to infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, death; throughout life, internal and external forces gently ease and radically plunge us through a dance that is miraculously choreographed yet continuously unfolding and unique.

With the passage from adolescence to adulthood comes remarkable and often tumultuous change; biological maturation, increased awareness of self identity and social expectation, internal drives and external pressures. This research focuses on the stories of young people in the midst of this major life transition who have sought and found forums to gain knowledge, hold positions of responsibility, develop skills and participate in collective and caring actions. Chapter 7 explores the results of their environmental activism; how their involvement has informed their understanding of leadership, enabled them to reflect on their schooling experiences, directed their future visions, and assisted them in making sense of their experiences and perceptions.

#### Leadership as a Collaborative Process

I asked each of the youth I interviewed for this study to describe what the word 'leader' meant to them, and whether they considered themselves leaders. All were able to construct a vocabulary for leadership using words, stories, and incidents that reflected their personal experiences. All but two were willing to identify themselves as being leaders or having leadership abilities. Frankie considers himself a leader, and describes leadership as:

Being aware of the situation better'n anybody else so you know what needs to be done. Your people, your followers, you have to respect them so they respect you. You got to keep the spirits alive, so they have faith in you.

Kiet seemed to have some predetermined ideas that lead him to reject the word leader. His tone was mischievous.

Actually, I hate the word leader, that just gets to my head. The first thing that pops into my head, is how to be future tyrants, dictators. I'm taking global studies history, based on monarchs, tyrants, dictatorship, like Hitler. So that just pops in my head.

He was able, however, to come up with some other terms that he seems more comfortable with that imply collaborative rather hierarchical relationships. "An instructor. Or, a guider.. a person that guides, not leader. 'Cause leader is the right word, but it just gets in my head, the word leader."

Darnyell most strongly rejected the idea of being a leader, even though she begins by saying that others see her that way. She equates leadership with having to be perfect and seems to have some understandable discomfort about being able to meet these expectations.

I know Janet and them think I am, but I don't think so. I don't want to be no leader, I don't want to be nobody's leader. I just want to do stuff for myself 'cause I want to do it. I mean, I see it like if you're being a leader at something then those people get so used to you being a leader at things, and you know, always look for you to be doing something, or always look for you to be perfect, and no one's perfect. So I rather not people think that I'm a leader.

In contrast with Darnyell's perceptions, others describe leadership as helping to organize, facilitate, and guide a group process. Alison sees leadership not so much as a position of control, but rather an ability to work within a group, clarify direction, and make something happen.

What does the word leader mean? It's not to me someone that can just take control and say "you do this and you do this." I think it's someone that can see something that they want to do, or that they think needs to be done, and make it possible. You can be a leader by coming into this chaotic YLC (Youth Leadership Council) meeting that we had, and sort of see that it's complete chaos and turn it around and get people organized.

Several of the youth have had quite a bit of leadership experience and express pride in their accomplishments. David's activities have expanded beyond the environmental clubs that he initiated into schoolwide and regional leadership positions. He notes that a camping trip he organized was previously done by adults. That he specifically pointed this out was a personal affirmation of how his skills have evolved, and a celebration of his accomplishments.

Another trip that I planned was weekend trip and we took a group of about sixty students up [to the Los Angeles National Forest] and they learned all about the wildlife and creatures, they had animals there. I did almost all the planning for it. In previous years, the adults would plan it, they would plan what activities they would do at what time. This past year, I've planned several field trips. The camping trip was like a major trip I had to really plan. I've [also] done assemblies, school activities. I've really learned a lot this year from being student body vice president.

When asked if he considers himself a leader, Jason proudly says "that's what some of the people say when they introduce me. I play leadership roles everyday so, it's really a part of my life." He, like many of the others, sees leadership as a way of making sure things run smoothly, and a process of "guiding people through things" rather than control.

Jessica described how she handles leadership, and emphasized the cooperative nature of her high school environmental club rather than it having "one big leader."

I don't talk to them in a cold manner the way my teachers do. I look at them, talk to them, call them on the phone, go out with them, become their friend. That's the leadership skill that everyone needs, you have to have a good relationship with people that you're talking to. You're not just talking to them in a manner, "okay this is what I've got to say, you're going to listen whether you like it or not." Our full club has their own responsibility its not like we have one big leader. Like people say I'm the president but it's not that way. Getting stuff done, it's not really the leadership part, it's finding somebody who is going to be responsible for the stuff that needs to get done, telling people what they need to do, helping them if they have a problem.

Zita describes the leadership qualities that she sees and respects in her peer, Jessica. These qualities resemble those that the youth admired in the adult role models they identified.

People listen to Jessica. I think it's because she knows a little bit more about the environment than we do. A lot of people look to her in the club because she knows a lot and you can ask her just about anything that I wouldn't know and she can give you straight answers.

She also alludes to a difference between *power with* and *power over* (Kreisberg, 1992) when she says:

She talks to you, she doesn't boss you around. I mean you're in other clubs and next thing you know, everybody wants to be over other people. And with Jessica y'know it's like friends, like best friends sister -type thing. It's a lot of fun. Plus, she laughs a lot.

The youths' experiences as successful leaders and the models that they have had access to have resulted in comfort in defining, or redefining leadership as a collaborative, shared process and rejecting models and portrayals of leaders as domineering and omnipotent. Some of the youth are newer to leadership, but excited about the possibilities of gaining more leadership skills. Eva expressed enthusiasm about an up-coming class at her school related to developing leadership skills.

I'm going to take a leadership class. It's going to be like things that we can do to improve our new school, 'cause were going to be moving and we can plan some things. And [we will] look at other leaders, and what makes them a good leader, and learn from them.

She associates leadership with being a noticeable figure who is motivated and motivating. Her interest in acquiring these skills is related to a desire for recognition as a capable, unique individual.

[A leader will] get people up and doing something. Like stop sitting, do something, stop complaining, 'cause if you keep on complaining it's not going to help. Get up and do it. I love attention, and I like to talk and I like to get people to notice me. I want to be a leader. I want teachers to recognize me and notice that I'm alive; I'm not just a girl sitting in a classroom studying, I'm not.

Eva's perceptions of leadership seem closely tied in with her sense of self, as do Alison's, who describes her recent leadership efforts as a shift from being a more "passive person," expressing humble excitement in the realization that perhaps she has "what it takes."

I've always been sort of a passive person, and with this Earth Day thing that I started, its got me going. And this Youth Leadership Council thing, you know I'm sending out the first communication in five months and I've sort of been thinking you know, maybe I do have what it takes, and I can be a leader, and this is what I am interested in and look at all the ways I can take it. And look at all the stuff I can do if I keep on going the way I've been going. So, I'm just really psyched right now.

Participation in leadership roles may serve to help counter the drop in self-esteem that occurs for many in the transition from childhood to adolescence. Research shows this descent as particularly significant among young women as they face the demands of a culture that simultaneously "idealizes and exploits the sexuality of young women while assigning them roles that are clearly less valued than male roles" (American Association of University Women, 1992, p. 11).

Young people in the midst of negotiating identity transitions to adulthood may be attracted to leadership roles as a way to have a voice and participate in activities that require responsibility and teach them to, as Kalpana says, "handle the same types of things they'll have to deal with as adults." In an article about an event organized by the environmental group that she is involved in, Kalpana explained that she was initially attracted to joining *One Earth One People* because it was run by students and the idea of student leadership impressed her. She was quoted as saying that in the organization, "Students are empowered to handle the same type of things they'll have to deal with as adults" (Cincinnati Inquirer, 4/13/94). Kalpana makes a connection between caring for the earth, leadership, and responsibility.

[*One Earth One People*] is student run which I believe is the most significant part of it. It teaches students how to care for the earth. It gives them the ability to learn

about the responsibility they're going to need as adults. Especially those interested into going into environmental studies of some kind.

Kalpana describes her leadership role as student executive director of *One Earth One People* as being multifaceted, and takes her responsibility within the group and in representing it to outsiders very seriously.

I guess I see myself as a leader in more respects than just, y'know running the monthly meetings. When finances are low or whatever, I have to keep the spirit going because that's what really defines us. I have to make people realize that what we're doing is worthwhile. I'm sort of a spokesperson in that respect. I do all the public stuff, and I talk to the students. That's most important to me. [Student executive director] is a tough role because I find that people have so many ideas, and I guess what's really important about my job is that I have to keep the focus of the group. In the group and out of the group I talk to schools about us. I do all that kind of stuff, and its very important to me because I sort of see myself as being the spokesperson for a lot of really, really vitalized and spiritual people.

When the youth interviewed in this study were asked what advice they would give to other young people who wanted to become involved in environmental issues, the responses tended to resemble their own processes of becoming leaders and activists, and what they had learned about accessing resources, handling responsibility, organizing and group dynamics. Their leadership has taught them practical skills that they can share with others and fostered in them the confidence necessary to articulate opinions on activism. David emphasizes open mindedness coupled with conscientious and critical thinking.

I always start writing letters first, and getting information, and then maybe contacting a group and getting information, maybe one or two particular groups. Start working with that particular group, which shares a common interest of your, of yourself. And then from there on, go about the activities as you see fit. I would tell them to make sure that they have a clear understanding of the background of the particular subject or issue that they were interested in. Maybe sending out for information from certain groups, getting their points of views. They [should] have an understanding of both sides of the story, the side of the environmentalist, and the other person's side, so they have a rather clear understanding of everything that's going on with that issue. Then try to decide how they want to go about addressing this issue, whether it be a firm stance, or trying to do something in between, not too radical and not too soft either, on the issue.

Many of the youth stressed the importance of gathering adequate information and engaging in discussion with others in order to decide what one's interests and possible

directions for environmental involvement might be. Jessica and many of the others describe in their own actions and advice to others a sequence that may be loosely translated as: Find out/research, share information with others, and seek out approaches or solutions.

Well if they said recycling you could say find out what you can about it, go to the library, do a little bit of research. You don't have to do a big research project on it, just find out what is recycling, what can be recycled, where can you recycle it, and then just start telling somebody else about it, and like pass it along, this is what's got to happen. Find some solutions. I mean it doesn't take very long.

Jason maintains that an optimistic attitude is helpful. He also emphasizes information gathering as important to any action.

My advice is to be, to look always at the positive, of the environment. Don't ever look at the negative 'cause it will just send you down a rocky road that you would not like. Go to as many meetings as possible and learn more about the community. When I go to those meetings I learn a lot about where I'm living and what's going on. Learn more about what your interested in the environmental field. If you're interested in recycling, you should really like go to conferences about recycling and why it is so good for the environment.

Tam's suggestions reflect an acquired confidence to negotiate bureaucratic channels and demystify and gain access to the political world.

When you're dealing with city officials, have the kids talk, and the adults listen. It sets the impression in the adults mind that the kids really mean it. Most people think that working with the environment is really, really hard because you have to go and get a whole bunch of permits and stuff, and that's just not true. All you need is to make up a little flyer that says 'I give so and so full permission to work on this city lot, and I give this group full permission to do what they see fit with this lot.' The kids write this, then get the signatures that they need from [for example] parks department people. And then, ask for funding from them, to get tools, seeds, fencing, then you do it.

Darnyell's economic status both necessitated that she be compensated for her environmental work, and enabled her to participate in designated projects and youth employment programs. Therefore much of her [and Frankie's] environmental involvement was on the job, so to speak. Darnyell refers to the need to gather knowledge and

recognizes that there is a level of seriousness, of maturity required for participation in environmentalism.

I would tell them to look in books and stuff. Like forest rangers, they say you could volunteer for stuff about the environment, get jobs and stuff and teach you about this stuff. Some of the forestry people came for the kids, and they were telling us, well me and Frankie, if we really wanted to learn more about the environment, just give them a call. I tell [interested youth], do that if they were really interested and not you know, joking around.

The emphasis on collaborative participation is expressed in Zita's advice, as she assures those potential activists that they have "family and friends to help."

Any kid that does concern about the environment y'know don't hesitate, don't feel like you're alone, because we assure you, you have family and friends to help you. But at least try, try to get something started, try to make a difference, and if you do something that will encourage other kids to follow you and I think that'll kind of pave the way and maybe the adults will see. Basically just don't be afraid and just y'know, kind of push yourself.

As many of these examples offered by the youth demonstrate, participation in leadership roles in school and the community may promote empowerment and citizenship while building communication and organizing skills. In the literature review on "Empowerment and Pedagogy" I refer to the scholarship on power relationships and reconceptualizations, particularly in relation to the education of women and students of color.

Delpit (1988) asserts that a "culture of power" exists in the schools (and of course, society as a whole) and that the masking of power relations may disenfranchise already marginalized students and make it even more difficult for these students to figure out how to gain access to the culture of power. Included in Delpit's discussion of the "culture of power" are the premises that there exist "codes or rules for participating in power," which are a "reflection of the rules of the culture of those who have power" and that acquisition of power is made easier if the rules of the culture of power are made explicit (p. 282). She

suggests that students, especially those who are not currently members of the culture of power, need to learn how to participate in it while simultaneously learning how to reflect critically on the power relations of which they are a part. Delpit's assertion that it is important to teach young people how to access the "culture of power" is useful in considering how youth leadership might be conscientiously promoted in the curriculum and general climate of the school to support more students in gaining access to and assuming leadership roles.

Cummins's (1993) insightful analysis of power relationships as coercive or collaborative illuminate why the concept of leadership may promote distasteful images for some young people who view it as a misuse of power, perhaps due to their own experiences of being the victims of such misappropriation. As many of the youth suggest, their engagement in leadership roles such as holding positions of responsibility in clubs and organizations, peer and community education, and public speaking have supported their access to a culture of power by demystifying the dialectics of leadership. Their successful experiences as leaders have empowered them to consider and be considered for further leadership roles. Their impact goes beyond successful outcomes and their continuing evolution as leaders. They are redefining leadership in non-hierarchical terms, providing other youth and adults with positive models of collaborative efforts and collective possibility.

#### Advice to School and Teachers

"In twelve years of school, I never studied anything about myself"

(AAUW Report, 1992, p. 61).

In the interviews, I asked the youth to suggest a design for a class or classes and include what would be taught and how it would be taught; and to offer advice to teachers and principals on how to best support students in becoming interested and involved in

environmental issues. They did not hesitate when asked to suggest ideas for curriculum content and approaches to teaching, using their positive learning experiences, in and out of school, as well as those that were frustrated by to formulate suggestions. They were ready with advice about how classes and learning environments could be improved, specifically to support environmental education and activism.

Their curricular envisionings served both as a contrast and a link between what these young people had experienced and what they would like to experience. Asking them to offer advice was my way of getting them on the soapbox to tell what worked for them and what did not, particularly in terms of pedagogy. Among other things, I heard over and over a desire for more experiential learning and an appreciation for educators who demonstrate knowledge and enthusiasm, and respect students as well as command respect. Many of their suggestions arose from what was missing rather than what they had actually experienced in the classroom. It was often their learning experiences outside of school that informed what could be created in the classroom. What was strikingly apparent was the strength and clarity with which these youth articulated the conditions that they felt would help them to learn, and how they want to be treated as learners.

Jason poses that other youth might become more enthusiastic about environmental studies if they sense enthusiasm from their teachers.

The teacher has to know that learning environmental things can be fun, so then she can pass that on to make sure that the students learn the environment in a fun way. 'Cause if the teachers [teach] in a boring way, like "well there goes the air, that's environment," kids are gonna get really bored, and start really losing interest in the environment. But if kids look at it like the environment could be really fun, they would learn a lot more than if it was boring. [My advice to teachers?] keep it fun and keep it interesting, for the student and for you.

Several of the youth noted that they appreciated educators that had high expectations of their students, and incorporated the knowledge and interests that the students brought to the classroom. Kiet respects teachers who are simultaneously clear and knowledgeable as well as warm and caring.

Try and show, tell the kids what you know, and what you are planning to teach them to know. Show them what you want them to know, in a sense. Be more casual, talk to the kids more, have more understanding.

Darnyell believes teachers should be knowledgeable. She expresses resentment about being treated like she is not capable of having input or has no previous knowledge.

Before [teachers] try and teach children about the environment I think they need to know more themselves about the environment. Most teachers figure, "well she don't really know what she's talking about, or he don't really know, we could tell them anything, they'll believe it." Not me. If I know something, I get in a conversation with you quick. And shock you, before you try and shock me, 'cause I don't like to be shocked. You know, because most kids already know more about the environment than teachers.

She gives an example of the children she worked with at an environmental day camp.

"These kids, they knew stuff that I didn't even know about the environment, and when some of the guests came and talked to the kids about the environment, they'd be so shocked."

Kenya suggests that teachers should take risks and seek out new resources, "Try different things, not just stick to the material, but ask the class and see what the kids are interested in," while David's extensive involvement in environmental issues has actually made him familiar with available resources for teaching and learning. He is not only able to use this information for his own education, but is in a position to participate in the creation of his curriculum by suggesting resources to teachers.

There are a lot of environmental resource centers in the [nearby area]. I know that there's one out in Pacific Palisades, which is about a four or five minute drive from here. They have a library of books and curriculum ideas and all sorts of things on the environment from kindergarten up to twelfth grade. And it's just a matter of calling them up and asking them if they have information on a particular subject. We have environmental management classes, so that would be great if a teacher did that. For the schools who don't have such classes, maybe they want to start up a little special interest club, or encourage schools to start up classes like that and start by educating them before they actually start getting into the activities, grass-roots activities.

Jason explains that his teachers are from outside of his community and expresses what many multiculturalists say, that it is important that the school staff, teachers and administrators is reflective of the community, or sensitive to the cultural experiences of the population and the issues they face within their community and society.

I go to school in Roslindale, and most of those teachers they come from the Cape, and Springfield, and they come over to Roslindale to teach. So they have just been finding out about DSNI and Roxbury. Teachers in my school, they really are just getting to know this community that I am from. One of the things that I would first do is get a teacher that really knows the students and really get a feel for what their interests are.

Contrary to many assumptions about today's youth, all of these young people readily expressed that they do want to learn, they just want to learn in ways that are exciting and challenging. Jessica sums up what many of the youth expressed: "Just keep it exciting, keep their interest. Teach them what they want to learn." In the following discussion, they describe what that might be.

I asked the youth to design a course at their school on environmental issues, including what topics would be covered and how it would be taught. They all seemed to enjoy this envisioning process, which I presented as a scenario in which they were asked to act as student representatives working with teachers and administrators, chosen because of their knowledge of and experience with environmental issues.

Earlier in the interviews, they had described and in some cases shown me their neighborhoods. They had been asked to give meaning to the word environment, and they identified significant environmental problems in their communities and how they felt these were connected to their own lives. Their designs often resembled positive learning experiences they had in and out of school, involved participatory, experiential, and inquiry-based pedagogy, and included topics that they had identified as environmental concerns in their communities and in their lives.

Alison draws from her positive experiences with a program that initiated her interest in environmental issues and encouraged her to develop informed opinions in order to consider how she would approach teaching in her own community.

I would really like to see something like what we had at Chewonki. Before you can say "this is what about it I want to study," you have to get a global view of the problem, so you can figure out "what about it do I want to focus on?" So that's what gives you a chance to get a broad view of it, and then focus in on the one part that interests you the most. That was what they did for us up at Chewonki and that made it really interesting. Lately people [in Baltimore] have been doing a lot of stuff about the bay, the Chesapeake Bay. Our harbor is the heart of Baltimore, right on a branch of the Chesapeake Bay. [If I was teaching a course], I'd probably do something to do with the bay. But I'd want to leave it a lot up to the students.

I asked Alison what she thought might be on a list of environmental topics generated by students. She addressed a need to present the course in a way that would make it appear relevant to the students, and invite their participation.

I would like to see on the list things to do with the community and the environment. I'm not sure if that would come up on to the boards, depending on how people view the word environment. So every course that you have would have a course description, so I think that a definition [of environment] should go into the course description. It would talk about the expansion of the definition of "environmental," and talk about how you can study the bay, you can study the environment of the inner city, you can talk about the environment of the school. If you want to focus on environmental problems real locally, you can look at the community right around the school.

Frankie suggests that it is important not only to learn about specific environmental concerns, but why these are even important to the lives of the students. He identifies several field trip sites that he became aware of through his day to day life and involvement in structured research and clean-up projects.

I guess it would be like this. It would have different units. Well first of all, before we even get started, before we even get started teaching about different parts of pollution, you must be taught about, be made aware like why, why are we going through this, why are you teaching us about pollution, I mean what's the point? You need to teach them why we need to know about it for the future. 'Cause we may not have a future, if people don't become aware. So I guess it would start with that and then move onto different types of pollution, then maybe go on sight to see some of the pollution, different field trips. Like in the neighborhoods where there's like a back lot filled with glass and stuff like that, you could see that. Find

some polluted streams. And show them what happens when you throw something in the gutter and how like eventually everything is going to wash off of the sidewalk, into your street and wash into the gutter.

Like Alison and Frankie, Jason also emphasizes helping students to develop personal understandings of "what the environment is to [them]." He suggests field trips in the community, naming sites that he is well aware of through his activism work, and is able to give specific examples of problem-posing investigations that can stem from these explorations.

I would first look at the positive of the environment, what the environment is to you. I would make sure that there is a lot of trips from the classroom to the environment, like outside the classroom, really teaching them, hands-on teaching about the environment. [I would take field trips], maybe down where the asphalt plant was planned to be. You could take a group of kids down there and look around and say "well what else could we do with this land?" That would be one of the things that I would go, 'cause that's like a really hot issue around Roxbury, Dorchester, South Boston, and South End. You could learn a lot of things about the environment that you never knew. You could go down to a waste site and see what's going on down there. A lot of the environmental stuff could tie into investigations. Like, "well why is that person dumping over there? I want to go investigate it." I know any kid would love to go on a field trip, would love to just get out of a classroom, a hot and muggy classroom and go out and learn some things about their community or other communities.

Eva suggests hands-on approaches, simultaneously reflecting on what has worked for her as a learner and what she has observed when in the role of a teacher to younger students.

It should be more hands on, 'cause I think that's important, like doing more laboratory stuff and then going out on trips. I mean we've all seen trees but you could bring us out and actually look at one and then ask more about it. I mean we know that's the trunk but then we can feel it. Like for my internship, every lesson we had to have an activity for them 'cause their attention span is really quick, like they don't really want to listen to lectures. So we had to think of little activities that we could do to make them understand it. So I think activities would help.

David longs for a forum where multiple views can be expressed, opinions formulated and shared, and issues discussed that students pick from "their everyday lives." He speaks from the first person, ready to facilitate such a forum himself. He sees this forum as being a foundation for action.

I would try and make it a free-form class and not feel as confined as the traditional classrooms, where you have everybody sit at their seat and pay attention to the teacher. What I would want to do is make it an open forum. Throw out some issues, and try to get the students to start talking about their feelings towards different issues. I would hope that the students would be able to start thinking of [environmental topics]. I hope that if I throw out a couple issues, maybe it will get them thinking and they'll be able to pick out certain things from their everyday lives, whether it be within the family, where they don't recycle their cans, or their local newspaper not printing on recycled paper, and what kinds of effects that would have on the forest life and different things like that. And when they start building up their point of view, their stance on their particular issues, then we could start working on providing solutions on each different issue, whether it be deforestation, pollution or a multitude of different topics. Then have them devise a plan of action, where they'd be writing letters, going out and working in the field, going on trips or going out in the mountains hiking and observing certain things. It would be more of a hands-on class more than book learning.

Kalpana feels that due to the complexity of environmental issues, a series of courses is necessary. Her recognition of this complexity signals her own readiness to probe more deeply into environmental issues, and raises the question of how environmental education can be integrated in the curriculum in order to provide students with multi-faceted yet accessible learning opportunities. She draws from a model that involved students in debate and decision making that she experienced during a visit to a class at a university, as she has no such models in her own private high school.

I guess what I'd like to see would be maybe a series of courses. I guess the initial one would have to look at the actual science behind the stuff, behind the problems behind pollution. And then you'd have to tie in, somewhere along there maybe in the second course, economics. You know, simple economics, profit motive, whatever, into that. It would be so easy just based on science to fix our problems, but it's not that easy. You have to look at the economics, you have to look at the sociology. And I guess course by course you could tie each of those things in. I was at Brown University this spring break doing my college visiting and I visited a course in the environmental studies school there, and it was really interesting. They were looking at case studies, and they were in environmental policy, and they were looking at problems with the ozone layer, and greenhouse effect. They were legislators, and they had been presented with the scientific information for a way to lessen the greenhouse effect, and each of these students had to decide which way they'd vote on this bill, should they go ahead with this plan or not. Based on the scientific, based on the economics, based on all that kind of stuff. And I guess I'd like to see that sort of thing drawn into a model. I think that would be the best way to handle an environmental studies class.

Like Kalpana and many of the others, Tam understands that environmental topics can and must be approached from multiple angles and with this understanding explains how environmental topics can be integrated across the curriculum.

If the schools work in an environmental medium, they can teach almost anything. Math, like okay, if this is the heat level of this day in this season, and if this is the requirements for this kind of plant, when should you plant it? Then the kids sit down at their desks trying to figure out the proper equation for heat and time. In biology, trying to figure out photosynthesis, the conversion between the energy of the sun and the pH of the soil. Trying to figure out like what bioregion is the best place to plant. Geometry, constructing efficient low waste houses, redesigning schools to use much less energy. English, writing proposals and reports trying to get funding for any number of stuff. Social studies, the study of this man who created the arboretum and his endeavors. It's kind of frustrating when you think gosh, look at how much we could be doing right now as opposed to how much we are doing.

Zita approaches her design from the perspective that education can simultaneously prepare people with skills and career training, an important educational concern for her and many other youth.

I would create a series of workshops. One [workshop] could work with pollution, one could work with water, one could work with wildlife. I would have a variety of things cause not everyone wants to do the same things. So if it's a variety then everyone can say "well I like this or well, no I don't, I'd like to try this." Everyone would go to each workshop just to get a feel of it. Also, have a training program where they could work in hands-on training as well as going to a class. And at each workshop there would be a time when they would train and have hands-on experience in that field.

Darnyell's experience with *Outward Bound* and *Kidsgrow* involved many trips in and around the city of Baltimore. She incorporates these experiences with how she would teach, through which she also expresses how she would like to be taught. She is a dancer and involved in Black youth culture, and suggests that youth might be interested in learning if they could express their knowledge and questions through rap or dance.

I would take trips to show them how garbage actually becomes compost and stuff, food garbage, paper garbage, and teach them how to recycle. I'd probably try to do anything to get them to realize that what they doing now is not right. If I was gonna do something, if somebody leave me in charge to give you this instruction and I think its boring, I'd be like "how can I make this interesting for them." Jazz it up some, don't be so dull about it, just try to experiment or ask

them questions on how they could fix [the environment] up. [To] some people you could say "give it to me in a rap, how would you put it if you was a rapper, or how would you put it if you was a regular singer, or a dancer?" Most of my teachers, they have problems with the kids dancing and stuff nowadays, 'c'ause they're dancing more body-wise. Dancing's just a form of expressing your body, just like if you was to fix up the earth; it's just a way to express how you want to live.

In this section, young people identified many factors that helped them to learn about environmental issues, most of which were experienced beyond the walls of the classroom. One result of their involvement and activism is that they are capable of envisioning and articulating, without hesitation, what and how they would like to learn about the environment in school. Their ideas include classes, workshops and forums where they could gain knowledge, engage in dialogue and participate in school and community based actions. Across ethnic backgrounds, gender and socioeconomic levels I heard over and over again the desire to be challenged by teachers they respected and who respected them, and an interest in topics and learning experiences and environments that related to their lives and prepared them for their futures.

While experiential learning may not work for all students, depending on personal and cultural learning styles and how educators frame and develop these experiences, these youth all suggested that hands-on, participatory activities and those that developed skills in inquiry, dialogue and research were of great interest to them. They were able to identify what they feel they and their peers need to become more environmentally aware and knowledgeable, and develop skills to take action. The suggestions they made, advice they gave, and the curriculum designs they envisioned offered some creative and sound suggestions for education. Without being asked to specifically do so, many of their suggestions bridged environmental and multicultural education perspectives in the pedagogical approaches they posed and provided me with food for thought.

Tyler (1947, p. 35) raises the question, "Should the school develop young people to fit into the present society as it is or does the school have a revolutionary mission to develop young people who will seek to improve the society?" These youth are among

those who wish to improve society and the ecological condition of their immediate communities and beyond. When given the opportunity to express themselves, they are capable of offering concrete advice as to what schools might do to support their learning, and perhaps foster interest in the environment among their peers.

### Future Visions

I asked each of the youth what they saw themselves doing five years from now in order to get a sense of how and if they saw their environmental interests as a serious career path. Their responses also provided me with additional insights into their self-perception, how they saw themselves making the transition into young adulthood, and how they anticipated manifesting their visions and ideals.

The youth in this study group are of mixed socioeconomic background and from families with varying levels of formal education. Half of the group are immigrants or first generation. All have high academic aspirations and shared a goal of attending college, and in many cases identified a desire to obtain advanced degrees. Jessica, who is from a working/middle class family and currently works waitressing after school, articulated a well thought through plan of action in regards to her education and career interests.

I see myself in Maine, that's where I want to go to college. Five years from now, I think that'll be my fourth year in college because I'm skipping a year. I'll be off for a summer [because] I'm going to take the summer off after my fourth year and then I'm going to go back for another four years and get my doctorate. Maybe I can find a job in the environmental field while I'm going to college. Maybe wildlife fisheries or at a waste water treatment plant or something.

Like Jessica, most of the youth were able to identify career interests, most of which were in an environmental field, law and policy, service professions, or education. The few youth who are of middle and upper-middle-class, college-educated families may be expected by their families to pursue higher education. Three-quarters of the group would be the first ones in their family to attend college.

The youths' desire for higher education and professional careers is significant as we reconsider what student activism in the United States looks like in the nineties. Literature on the student activism of the sixties (much of which focuses on White, middle-class anti-war activists) describes a desire to reject rather than strive for material wealth and career stability. The youth interviewed for this study embrace a blend of education, career goals and humanitarian and environmental ethics. Almost all plan to continue to pursue their environmental interests in college, most through courses and careers and others by joining or remaining affiliated with clubs and organizations.

A couple of the youth question whether they want to continue to live in an urban area. Others have not looked that far in advance, or have not, for family or cultural reasons considered the possibilities of location somewhere other than where they currently live. Some are clearly connected to their communities and intend to stay there. David seems pretty clear about wanting to leave Los Angeles and explore a variety of regions in the United States.

I would like to live in a more rural area, given its lower degree of environmental destruction. [There are] less environmental issues facing the rural areas compared to the urban areas. Five years from now I see myself probably still in college and studying. I've thought about going back East for college, probably environmental management. I mainly see myself working in a lab, maybe working out in the field around the different environments we have in the United States, different ecosystems.

Jason is clearly committed to continuing with his interests in community organizing, and staying in his community.

[In five years I see myself] going into college, probably BC (Boston College), and probably studying community organizing. One of the things that DSNI has done, and they'll put in writing is they're gonna keep a little place here for when I'm ready for a job. One of the things I would really like to do is take [the executive director's] job. He knows that and he said "well any time Jason." So I really want to follow along in his footsteps.

Several of the youth talk about their interest in policy and law, which I find intriguing, and perceive as reflective of their commitment to righting the social and

ecological injustices they have known or witnessed in their own lives coupled with their experiences of activism and leadership thus far. It also signals that they see themselves as people who can and will articulate their views and beliefs. Kiet describes himself as "a law kind of person." Darnyell also plans on becoming a lawyer.

Five years from now, hopefully in my last year of college. I want to go to UMBC (University of Maryland, Baltimore county), and major in criminal law. My grandma used to tell me I got the mouth for it, 'cause I would debate everybody, all the time about everything, anybody. If I feel it's just not right, or something you should say around me, I just comment on it.

Tam does not mention college, perhaps because he is only twelve, perhaps because he has not had positive experiences of school recently. His vision of the future involves creating an alternative, community-designed high school, perhaps because he wishes such a place existed so he could attend it.

I could see starting my own high school, well not my own. Building a high school that is built by community members so that they learn the stuff involved in creating something that is architecturally sound, has solar panels, waste water management, recycled materials as much as possible.

Eva's positive experiences as an environmental education intern and the support she has received from her teachers at the High School for Environmental Studies appears to have influenced her career desires. She wants to be a teacher and even talks about returning to her future alma mater.

I really do want to be a teacher. I've always wanted to be, and then some people go like yeah right, you're not really going to be a teacher. And my teachers said that, they encourage me, they go like "you'd make a good teacher." I was talking to Mr. Zinn. I said that I'll come back, and I'll teach here. I said "are you going to hire me? Are you going to get people to hire me?"

Kenya talks about her two fields of interest, medicine, a caring profession in its truest sense which combines her interest in science with her love for children. And if that fails, environmental engineering.

I definitely see myself in school. I'm going to commute to Stevens in (Hoboken). I'm pre-med, so my major will probably be bio-chem. I love kids so I want to work in Pediatrics. If it's too difficult, I'm planning to major in Environmental Engineering. If the medicine thing didn't work out, and I hope it will, I think I'll fall back on environmental engineering

Frankie's interest in becoming a police officer seems to emanate from a desire to contribute to his community, do something that is considered reputable within his family, and as way to exercise leadership. He also notes that it will enable him to take college courses, which is a serious financial consideration for him. Frankie has not had as much exposure as some of the others to professional possibilities in the environmental or community organizing fields. He was told that he could become a leader with Outward Bound, but does not seem to be interested in or perceive this as a valid or feasible career.

When I graduate I plan to try and see what I can find in the Police Department. [I'll enroll in their cadet program, and hopefully become an officer. When you become a police officer it benefits your family. And it's something I can do when I get straight out of high school. My sister did it. She enrolled in the cadet program, so I figure If I really want to go to college, I could do that. While you do it you could take college courses at the same time, while your in the cadet program. I could [be an Outward Bound instructor] but I don't know if I could just take off for a week (laughing) "oh I got to go, my dog is sick, I'll be back in a week."

When asked about what she saw herself doing after college Alison described a professional research scenario that demonstrates her awareness of, and interests in relationships between nature and culture.

I would really like to see myself in some rain forest somewhere. Not like, not studying katydids or something, but studying the life that goes on there, the people that live there. Because I just think that's what's drawing me, you know, the insects and stuff, the people and the life that they live. How they live and why they live that way and what's affecting them and how that affects us and how we affect them, and how everything fits together. That's where I'd like to be.

Zita wavers between exploration and establishing a financially stable situation for herself, weaving the ideas of establishing a business and job training with her

environmental interests. She reflects a process of recently becoming aware of the environmental career possibilities available to her, balanced with her economic situation.

I would like to open up my own business. I'm going to pursue a career in the environment. I like fish and wildlife. I want to get my doctoral in it. I can see myself studying at UMass, I plan to attend at UMass. I'm interested in fish and wildlife, I also want to get my doctoral and work in laboratories. Hopefully I'll be working in the field that I'm going towards. I understand that a lot of colleges with the environmental program you can get training, y'know work experience, and that's why I plan to do that and open up my own business later on.

The interest in environmental careers evidenced by these youth makes me reflect on my own experience of coming into environmentalism over fifteen years ago, when I was at the life stage that these youth are at. At that time, there was not such a huge array of environmental careers to choose from and most environmental work was done as a volunteer or an intern. The strong career focus that they evidence, coupled with thinking about the academic and career aspirations of immigrants, working-class and first-generation Americans makes me reconsider some of my earlier thinking and writing that de-emphasized career-track learning and focused on the learning process. This research has served as an affirmation that providing students with knowledge about science and environmental education careers and helping them prepare for these careers in secondary school should be actively supported in the curriculum. As their responses to the questions about what they see themselves doing five years in the future indicates, these young people appear to want opportunities to learn and share with others in order to expand their knowledge about environmental issues and they also want resources for directing and focusing their energies into careers. I now believe that stimulating and challenging environmental learning experiences in and out of the classroom can expose students to career opportunities while adding to the excitement of the learning process itself. This new way of thinking on my part prompted me to get them each a book on environmental careers as a gift.

## Making Connections, Making Sense

The interviews involved participants in a process of recalling experiences and making sense of these in the context of their evolving knowledge of environmental issues in their lives and communities. As they gave voice to their perspectives and experiences, there were moments when they made new connections and from these formulated questions. These instances involved a confluence of ideas, identity and direction that may signal a developmental shift in the process of becoming a reflective environmental activist and an insightful adult.

As the participants in this study demonstrate, young people who have had the opportunity to dialogue about and explore environmental issues in creative and participatory ways may expand their own views and understandings, as well as develop skills in critical thinking. Exposure to multiple perspectives, particularly those that illuminate another person's cultural understandings or experiences may be important in becoming a self-reflective, and culturally and environmentally aware individual. Alison describes how the opportunity to explore multiple perspectives regarding the siting of a nuclear power plant impacted her perceptions of environmental concerns and her process of formulating views and opinions.

You can say nuclear power is bad because of this, and how long will stuff hang there afterwards and what if you have an explosion. But then it's really interesting to see how it affects people on economic lines. [The community] didn't like it, but the thing was that taxes are a lot lower because of Maine Yankee, and property values... everything was effected. Here are all these people in Maine who know a lot and have totally different opinions and values. I'd go and I'd talk to someone that lived right next to Maine Yankee and hear what they had to say about it, and I was like you know, this is true. And then I'd go and I'd talk to a scientist, who's working on getting it shut down, and I'd hear what they had to say, and you're like "yeah." It was really interesting to go back and read in my journal afterwards because it's like my opinions were changing daily. It was real interesting to hear all the different viewpoints and figure out, you know, what can we do, with all these different points of view? There is so much more than my view of the world. And so often you just look at something and directly form, you know, someone says something to you and you just say this is good, this is bad, you just like, judge it right away. But there's so much more to all these issues that come up.

Darnyell engages in a conversation with herself to try and make sense of her observation of a man littering, an action that made no rational sense to her. She draws from her knowledge of the impacts of littering to try to comprehend the event. She then uses this observation and internal inquiry process to clarify what she would like to create in her life.

I saw a man like last week, just walk to a sewer drain, and throw a bottle in there. And the trash can was sitting right on top. I was like, "why should he do that?" I said, I don't know, he can't be blind to see that the trash can is right there. If he only knew where that trash was going and how it actually look going to that place, he wouldn't be putting trash there. I really want to live in a neighborhood where people don't put trash down, but I know you can't get everything you want. So.. I'd live in a place where the garbage men are always on time, separate the trash, 'cause in New Jersey they does that. It is so pretty up there, no trash nowhere, in the malls, around the malls, no trash.

Through this process, she arrives at another related question:

And I don't understand why in another city, people can keep their city looking nice for other people to come up, but why can't this city do that? Even though they try, but they don't try enough. And they got money, believe me.

In constructing this "conversation," Darnyell moved from an initial personal experience; a stranger's actions and her reactions, to a line of inquiry that implies more complex thinking about authority, economics and politics.

In response to a question about an environmental issue that affects his life, David shared his experience of being interviewed for an article that presented several viewpoints on deforestation from a youth perspective. He explains how this prompted him to think through the issues carefully and from multiple angles. In the process of articulating and giving meaning to this experience, he contemplates his own life in order to try and make sense of those of others, and ultimately of the larger issues at hand.

I feel [deforestation] affects not only my life, but the life of many others also. Not only within Los Angeles or California or the United States, but worldwide. I was interviewed for the *Science World* magazine on this issue, and when it came to press there were two other youth for the logging industry, and two youth environmentalists for the trees. I was one of them. After reading their comments, I gained an even better understanding of the two sides of the environmental story.

One was a young lady, a daughter of a logger, and another one was the son of a logger, and they both came from logging families up in the North Western region of the United States. I was here in L.A. and the other young lady, I forget where she was from. But we were all within the same age range. I personally had never been in a logging family. I don't know what its like to be dependent upon the logging industry. My family isn't dependent, my family's every day life isn't influenced by what happens with logging. Where as if logging was to be outlawed tomorrow, it would really adversely affect those other two kids. And they have those feelings, you know, "you can't do this to us, you know you can't do this after so many generations of being in the business. This is the only thing we know and will ever know." We have a lot of people and a lot of families whose lifeline is dependent upon the trade of logging, and I feel that we can't come to a definite solution at this point in time, that we have to gradually move into the solutions that we establish for certain problems. I found it very interesting that within the same age group answers varied across the spectrum on that one subject from within the same age group, and with us being just teenagers. A lot of people don't expect those type of feelings towards something at our age.

As he articulates his process of gaining a better understanding of the issue of deforestation, David captures the essence of some of the major conflict within the environmental movement as well as touching on his experiences of ageism. Being asked to contribute his perspective for a magazine article and read his voice among others clearly had an impact on David. The process of revisiting the scenario after a period of reflection deepens his understandings of the multifaceted nature of deforestation.

You know saving the environment, for some it's one sided. They see the environment as something that we have to absolutely save at whatever cost. And there are those people who see that there is another side to 'environment' also, where if we tried to solve everything at once, you may help the environment, but in turn you may be hurting other people in the process. So, I believe we need to work and introduce things. You need to be very careful, because it is a delicate, delicate subject. And if we're not careful, we may end up causing more harm than is needed.

Eva draws directly from her own personal and cultural experiences to describe the complexity of environmental concerns. Like David, she has an economic understanding of the implications of environmental regulations, and the need for sensitivity around these issues. Socioeconomically, she is similar to the children of loggers that David mentions in that her mother's income is dependent on factory work. She poses problems as questions which suggests that she, like many of the others, is in the midst of an important identity

shaping process of trying to connect and make sense of who she is, what she knows and what she is learning in order to evolve an ecological world view that fits with her life experiences and understandings thus far.

When I was in the ninth grade, we were talking about pollution, and my friends were saying that factories and some other big industries, they pollute and everything. I understand, I mean like factories, they pollute. But then if you close down the factories, where will our moms work? 'Cause most of our mothers, they all work in factories in Chinatown. My mom, she works in a factory, but if you close it down or whatever, then people will lose their jobs. That's why it's kind of difficult I think, to solve many environmental problems.

Jessica draws from her current understandings to make connections and attempt to understand the uncaring actions of others. She uses an experience from her work as a waitress as a metaphor for how she feels about her school's aesthetic environment, and perhaps the natural environment in general. Her use of this scenario at her workplace as a bridge to her home and schoolyard implies an evolving environmental ethics of care and personal responsibility, as well as a willingness to critique the less conscientious actions of others.

At work, when I see people at a table, when I wait on them and everything, I fix their meal the way I would want it to look when I was at home and make sure their table is clean the way I want it clean. And if it's not the way I want it, then they're not going to be comfortable. I don't want to eat off a table that has cigarette butts and stuff in the ashtrays. I mean, this isn't the way I would want to see my school, (looking and pointing around the area we are sitting). If I was coming up to this school for the first time, and I came and I saw all this stuff around here... they just, there's a tree over there, and one down here, they stripped the bark off of it. If I was coming here for the first time I'd think God, these people are pigs. Y'know, I'd say what's the matter with these people, why can't they pick up their cigarettes, what are they doing smoking in the first place?

Kalpana has the capacity to think about environmental issues on many levels, locally and internationally, perhaps attributable to her strong sense of biculturality and time spent in her family's homeland of India. The environmental organization that she has chosen to be involved with supports this focus on international environmental issues.

Perhaps symbolic of being strongly identified with two different societies and environments, Kalpana is very excited by a project her organization is undertaking that also links two cultures and regions.

For different countries, environmental problems are very different things. Because what we believe is that the environmental problem is not limited to one area. It's not limited to one state, one city, one country, it's not limited to that, it's international. And therefore our solutions for the problems need to be holistic. I mean they really need to be all encompassing. Which is a huge thought, but what I see as the beginning of that is an understanding of cultures, and of problems in different countries. Right now, what [One Earth One People] is working towards is the dream of a sort of interactive TV between kids in one country and kids in another country, about their environments. We'd like our topic to be water. That's what our goal is for this year before Earth Day 25, with Mexico. What we'd like to do is have a video filmed by kids in both areas, and have the kids see both videos, and then discussion to raise awareness of culture.

Kiet is able to make connections between the current situation regarding deforestation and how present actions may impact the future. This type of reasoning reflects a holistic understanding that may be informed by his knowledge about forest ecology, as well as his culture's emphasis on family and the Buddhist philosophy of interconnectedness.

[Deforestation] doesn't really affect my life now 'cause I'm in the city, but it affects the future people, my grandson, my grandson's son. I mean if we're cutting down these trees, by the time they are here, by the time my grandson's son is here, they won't get to see a lot of organisms that I see now. There's a lot of extinction occurring because of the destruction of habitat.

In describing some of his experiences with an urban *Outward Bound* program he was involved with, Frankie draws from childhood memories to gauge his developing understandings about the Chesapeake Bay. This process of connection-making allows him to see a familiar place with a new lens and simultaneously think about how others might replicate the same belief systems that he did before he had access to more information.

I never really thought about the water, like the drains at the side of the street. They go out to the inner harbor, and that's why the inner harbor is so polluted. Y'know when I was young I never even thought about that. I thought people just walked by

and just dumped trash into it while they walking down the harbor. But it made me aware.

The excerpts in this section were included in order to suggest that processes of making connections and making sense require some level of reflection, internal inquiry and verbalization that can lead to the development of new and more complex understandings. Through their experiences in environmental activism and school and community-based learning, all of the youth in this study have had opportunities to explore social and environmental issues and work with others with similar interests. While the extent of their exposure and involvement has varied, all demonstrated some ability to look critically at issues and a willingness to expand their own perspectives. Observing them locate and use a vocabulary to express the connections they made was an illuminating part of the process for me, and I believe for many of them as well. The participants appeared to further internalize their experiences as they accessed and told their stories. They asked themselves some new questions as they were encouraged to piece together seemingly fragmented events and experiences. In this way, the research process itself emerged positive as a means of supporting young people in validating their own stories as knowledge and catalyzing new and meaningful understandings.

### Summary of the Analyses

The three chapters that comprise the analysis are the result of the identification and sorting of significant stories, concepts and observations. Each of the major themes presented insights about conditions that were significant in promoting environmental activism and leadership among the twelve urban youths that participated in this study. Although presented separately and sorted into three chapters for the purposes of manageability and clarity, these themes are interrelated and dynamic. At times it was difficult to know where to place an excerpt or interpretation as each piece of information was pertinent to more than one aspect of the whole.

The major themes presented in this chapter were built on the information, stories and insights the youth offered in the interviews, as well as that which was not directly said. These unspoken insights surfaced as I looked at the data over and over again, like grasping innuendoes of a poem after reading it for the hundredth time. At times, my own lenses of weathered and worldly experience or naive and humble ignorance offered me the ability to read between the lines and increase the value of this research for me and hopefully others. Probing at silence, inflection and memory of gesture added intrigue to the process of analysis and provoked many questions for further inquiry. Validating the spoken and the unspoken reinforced the importance of "a process" in itself, be it developing ecological understandings, becoming an activist, or awareness of cultural and social identity. Each of these have clearly been forces in shaping these young peoples understandings and actions thus far, and likely the directions they are now headed.

Insights gained through the analysis process help me to think more deeply about a model that I have proposed in previous work and included in the literature review in this thesis. In this model, I suggest four levels of integration that broadly define some existing approaches to and possibilities for environmental education. The third and fourth levels, "Connections and Contradictions," and "Socioecological Consciousness," are those least practiced in educational settings and of most interest to me. In addition to being useful in evaluating or developing multicultural environmental curriculum, these stages can help gauge how extensively social, environmental and cultural frameworks are intersecting in an individual's psyche and actions. These youth have each helped me think about where they are currently located on this spectrum in terms of these intersections, what conditions have supported their evolving interests, and what has been missing from their formal and informal educational experiences.

Ideally, at the fourth level, Socioecological Consciousness, students are actively engaged in critically and creatively examining social and environmental issues in their lives, and developing skills and tools to become knowledgeable and conscientious members of

their communities and beyond. The brand of environmental activism demonstrated by many of the participants in this study exemplifies this goal. Their involvement is radical in that it disrupts perceptions and stereotypes perpetrated by many traditional environmentalism agendas and discourses. However, although these youth are involved in social and environmental change, what they are creating differs from many past student movements. Rather than "dropping out" of the mainstream, the constituents are seeking access to tools for change and social power that include higher education and careers in environmental, service, and policy oriented fields.

Links between environmental activism and community service work may hold keys to promoting activism, leadership and constructive community involvement among other youth. A significant lesson learned from this research is that these alliances need to be strengthened, and in many cases forged. Is community service learning representative of the character of student activism of the 1990s? If so, we must ask how can service learning projects be designed and structured to include a social and political critique so that service-based actions are not construed solely as individual acts of kindness, but as inter-connected efforts that have meaning as part of the youth movement for social and environmental change.

Youth environmental activism has the potential to grow as a culturally inclusive, non-violent social movement that explores relationships between ecological deterioration and oppressive social and economic conditions, many of which these youth are personally and acutely aware of. Their participation is mutually beneficial. They develop skills to help negotiate the passage to adulthood and gain access to educational and professional resources as they add their informed and diverse voices to a larger movement that must include their perspectives.

The popularity of community service learning, the rise in grassroots urban environmentalism, a surge in youth activism after the sluggish eighties, and definitions of leadership that embrace collaboration and mutual learning suggest a potent combination that

may characterize an important new paradigm. In addition to promoting environmental activism among more youth, this paradigm has the potential to play a significant role in multicultural and environmental curricula development and teacher education in particular, and educational discourses in general.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 primarily addressed and sought to illuminate the first two research questions: What do young people of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds see as key environmental issues facing their lives and urban communities, and what causes these young people to become concerned about and take action on environmental issues. In a sense, the youth have done their work. The remaining chapter presents a challenge to educators and society as a whole to respond to the following research question: What can educators learn from environmental youth activism and leadership, and what are the implications for school curricula and community programs?

## CHAPTER 8

### WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

The purpose of this study was to gain insights about conditions that promoted environmental activism and leadership among urban youth in order to suggest directions for curricular development and educational practice that reflects a multicultural and environmental perspective. In the analysis of the data presented in chapters 5, 6 and 7, findings were discussed within the thematic interpretations. The first part of this chapter takes these lessons learned to the next level by interpreting what they might imply, generally and specifically, in regards to education in schools and community programs. The implications are framed as considerations. In the second part of this chapter, these considerations are carried yet another step in order to pose specific recommendations for educational practice and further research.

#### Implications of the Findings

*Assumptions about environmental issues being of no concern to youth or irrelevant to city dwellers need to be challenged.*

Rather than defining environmentalism from a White, middle-class adult perspective and expecting those who do not fit this particular social configuration to participate, this research implies the need to redefine "environment" as a socially constructed concept that reflects a dynamic interplay among social, natural and built constituencies. In this study, those visiting and defining the concept of environment and exploring environmental activism are a group of culturally diverse urban young people. Their perceptions and interests and stories of success and frustration are instrumental in conceptualizing environment and environmental issues from an urban youth perspective in order to appropriately inform related education and activism.

*More youth of a variety of ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds may become environmentally active if they have a venue and a voice, and if they see environmental issues as pertaining to their own lives and communities.*

Environmental pollution and destruction threatens human health and ultimately existence. For those without information and resources, this often happens more directly and subversively than for others in the form of toxins in and under homes and neighborhoods. Educators and activists must locate the keys that help students recognize the existence of environmental problems in their communities and beyond and how these are connected to their lives. In order to engage more students in environmentalism, educators must be willing to shape programs that reflect the interests, cultures and languages of the youth, rather than fit them into existing models that may not reflect their experiences. The inclusion of more diverse youth voices implies a need for increased outreach and environmental education to urban communities and school systems. Environmentally active youth and adults from within these communities may be ideally suited to shape and implement such educational efforts.

*The confusion and frustration that the youth expressed in regards to science classes implies a need to develop school science curricula that is pertinent and applicable to current social and environmental issues as well as inviting to more students.*

The youth in this study managed to develop environmental understandings even though most did not attribute these to school science curricula. However, for most youth school science classes will serve as the primary forum for anything that resembles or verges on environmental education. While there are teachers and school systems that actively integrate environmental education in the science curriculum, most still relegate environmental activities to extra-curricular clubs and groups, or community projects, as this research supports. The National Science Education Standards Draft (1993) includes

goals that describe experiential and critical pedagogy such as mentioned by the youth in this study, as well as attend to issues of cultural inclusion and social relevance. However, the implementation of these goals apparently still needs much attention. The division between science and environmental education that the youth in this study expressed coupled with their tendency to feel frustrated with and alienated by their school science curricula implies a continuing need for discussion among educators regarding the role of science in schools, and particularly the relationship between science and environmental education in our schools and society.

*Unless community environmental education programs are implemented and better funded to service more youth the majority of youth will not receive environmental education if they do not get it in school.*

These youth have become interested in environmental issues even though their school experiences have not, for the most part, supported this. On one hand, this implies that the school is not an absolutely necessary factor in promoting environmental concern and activism, and that involvement in clubs or community organizations may be the most effective forum for environmental education. However, such programs do not currently exist or receive funding to the extent necessary to accommodate all of our nation's students. Public schools are the most widespread means of reaching young people. This implies the need to first address whether the primary responsibility for environmental education lays with schools, and secondly, what teacher education practices, curricular mandates, and organizational alliances are necessary to ensure relevant, quality environmental education for all students.

*Youth environmental activists are in favorable positions to knowledgeably contribute to environmental education curriculum development and program design in schools and community organizations.*

The participants in this study were enthusiastic and knowledgeable about suggesting how environmental education, and education in general might be shaped to appeal to more youth. This suggests that experienced youth activists can provide educators and community organizers with insights on curriculum ideas and programming for other urban youth. In addition, serving as advisors and working on committees to help make decisions about educational agenda may validate knowledge and promote leadership skills among already active youth.

*Youth/adult alliances can lead to mutually beneficial learning experiences and support systems as well as promote links between environmental activism and community service.*

Each community has adult resources that are undertapped as educators. In this research, familial and non-familial adults were important to each of these youths involvement in environmentalism. Elders and retirees, business people, politicians, craftspeople, religious leaders, artists and those active in science and environmental fields and community organizations can serve as mentors to young people. Mentor-apprentice relationships may be a real-life way to teach youth specific skills as well as providing them with a non-familial adult for personal guidance and support. Youth adult alliances can be mutually beneficial as they connect the lives and experiences of two generations.

*There are many considerations in promoting social and environmental activism in the school curriculum and community programs.*

Approaches to activism may be influenced by an individual's cultural understandings as well as the political climate of the times. Family and cultural histories and experiences may be factors in the level of interest and safety one feels in taking part in social and environmental activism. For example, experience or fear of political and religious persecution may cause an individual to feel safest with approaches to activism that do not put them at risk of feeling targeted, or they may not wish to not take part in public

activities. Some youth may come from activist families and feel comfortable with voicing opinions, working with groups, and various forms of protest. Others may have been brought up with cultural understandings that dictate how they relate to authority figures, such as not to make direct eye contact or raise question, which may come into play in activism oriented scenarios such as a public debate. When educators attempt to promote social and environmental action as part of the school curriculum, they should consider the possibility of cultural factors arising in order to support the students appropriately.

In addition, the images of activism available as models in the nineties cover a wide spectrum ranging from those that non-violently promote justice and civil rights to those that employ racist, sexist and anti-Semitic practices or incorporate violence as a tool to draw attention to their cause. Educators can introduce many existing models of activism as is age and culturally appropriate, and support students in making critical assessments so that they can make well informed, conscientious decisions about those they may wish to participate in.

*If we know that young people are searching for community during adolescence, we can use this knowledge to inform the creation of environmentally oriented clubs, neighborhood centers and networks that provide support and promote creative, empowering and constructive endeavors.*

If youth are looking for community, they will inevitably find it. However, some forms of community may not be healthy, constructive, personally satisfying or empowering. There are certainly youth who, for a multitude of complex reasons, will consistently participate in self-destructive actions, individually and in groups, regardless of how many seemingly positive options there are. However, the youth in this study are only a fragment of those seeking involvement in group oriented, life-positive endeavors. The connection between desire for group and community involvement and participation in environmentalism that was apparent in this research supports the development and

maintenance of youth organizations, groups and clubs that provide community while engaging youth in positive action.

*Experiences that promote values of respect and caring may be particularly appealing to youth whose lives and values reflect these qualities, as well as evoke them in those youth who have not known loving, caring relationships in their own lives, and subsequently may not know how to engage in such behaviors.*

Participation in environmentalism may evoke or be precipitated by caring relationships and values of respect and reverence for nature. Many of the youth in this study were drawn to and maintained involvement in environmentalism because it supported caring values and a service orientation that was appealing to them. It is likely that there are many other young people who embody a strong ethics of care but haven't had the framework within which to express and develop it who would benefit from service learning experiences such as those that the youth in this study described.

*Participation in relevant , experiential learning may have lasting effects on a young person's grasp of environmental issues and development of environmental literacy.*

All of the youth in this study had acquired some level of environmental literacy through participatory explorations in their own communities. Their own life experiences coupled with involvement in "real life" research, public forums and community organizations and events gave them the tools to be knowledgeable participants in discourses on the urban environment. Without follow-up research over the years, the only information that we have to predict each of these youths' futures in environmentalism is the personal directions and goals that they suggested when asked to describe where they saw themselves in five years. Almost all described careers and continued learning in environmental fields such as policy, research, ecology, education and law, all of which clearly imply increased knowledge acquisition and literacy in this arena. Of course, not all

young people will be interested in the extensive involvement in environmental issues that the youth in this study demonstrated. However, if schools promote learning opportunities that teach basic ecological understandings, and provide students with tools for inquiry and a working environmental vocabulary, more youth may become literate enough to make conscious choices about their lifestyle, and voice opinions and recognize and take action on environmental issues that threaten the health of their lives, families and communities.

*Educational experiences and support structures that are grounded in an socioecological paradigm of living and learning may be particularly beneficial during adolescence.*

Emery (1981, p. 15) advances characteristics of an ecological paradigm of education. In his model, educational practice is focused on cooperation between learners, and co-learning between teachers and students, reality centered projects, community settings and an underlying principle of discovery. In terms of a student's personal development, he suggests that in the ecological paradigm, respect for individuality takes precedence over conformity and dominance, homonomy (equal consideration of self and others) over self-centeredness or autonomy, and a general perception of learning as living.

If adolescents are exposed to learning experiences that reflect an ecological paradigm and encouraged to contemplate their existence as instrumentally connected to larger social and natural systems and networks, they may have an easier time negotiating a life period that is often characterized by confusion and alienation.

Rosenthal posits that during adolescence "concerns with other directed morality, with ideals and social issues and ultimately with one's place in the world become paramount" (1987, p. 157). In terms of ethnic identity development during adolescence, she suggests that "the ethnic consciousness that arises from socialization experiences not only within the family but also as a member of a distinctive and strong community will be translated into an integral part of one's self definition" (p. 161). The social and political contexts within which one is coming of age, particularly if not a member of the dominant

group, may become particularly pronounced as youth extend outward into the world as they begin their passage to adulthood. Educators need to consider the interplay between internal (biological, moral, and cultural identity) shifts and external (social and environmental) factors in evolving appropriate learning paradigms for young people in this diverse society.

Perhaps a socioecological paradigm would characterize the intersections of models advanced by ecological thinkers and those of developmentalists whose focus is on cultural and social identity. Socioecological paradigms of education may offer frameworks for providing relevant, stimulating and empowering learning experiences, promoting cultural awareness of self and others, and easing the passage through adolescence.

*Environmental activism may lead to careers for already involved youth, while others may be attracted to environmentalism if they see it as a viable career option.*

While curriculum should not be designed solely with careers in mind, adolescence is an ideal time to expose youth to constructive opportunities to develop skills and experiences, hold positions of responsibility and leadership, and explore future possibilities. Students who express an interest in environmental issues and activism may be more apt to continue on that tract and take their accumulating knowledge more seriously if they see their involvement as a means to further academic pursuits and job possibilities. Those have not yet gotten involved in environmentalism may be enticed if they see it as opening doors to careers.

### Recommendations for Educational Practice

This section poses recommendations for educational practice based on the lessons learned from this study. They are organized into three sections: Rethinking Curriculum in Public Schools, Teacher Education: A Socioecological Perspective, and Beyond Schools: Alliances. These recommendations touch on many levels of the educational process. As a

whole, they provide a framework of considerations for creating and supporting conditions that may promote environmental activism and leadership among urban youth. Based on the nature, intent and findings of this research, the recommendations are infused with the intention of promoting education that is multicultural and environmental.

### Rethinking Curriculum in Public Schools

This study was inspired and informed by young people who, for a variety of reasons, developed interest in and concern for environmental problems in their communities and engaged in actions that furthered their understandings and had an impact on their lives and communities. The recommendations advanced in this subsection are directly derived from the analysis and findings of this study. In addition, they are infused with three assumptions that I identified in the first chapter of this thesis, and feel even more passionate about based on the outcomes of this study:

- 1) Multicultural environmental education, as a field of inquiry and practice has not been significantly researched, defined, theorized or applied.
- 2) It is socially and educationally desirable to promote learning environments where students can build ecological and multicultural understandings, develop creativity and critical thinking skills, learn tools for citizenship and participation in a democracy, and be treated and treat others with respect and compassion.
- 3) The stories and experiences of all young people are valid and valuable and constitute important contributions to educational research and practice.

Multicultural and environmental education have been influential forces in education over the last several decades, yet both are often considered occasional additives rather than

integral to the curriculum. Although there are teachers who have always and will always approach education from a multicultural environmental perspective without naming it as such, the process of asserting these as basic education is infrequently tread upon terrain. In this section, I suggest recommendations for curricular reform that may promote the kinds of experiences, connection making, support systems, values of caring, and knowledge of social and environmental issues that the youth in this study identified and exhibited.

Because the particulars of a situation dictate specific considerations, these are offered as a general framework for helping to define and formulate curricula that reflects the lessons learned from this study. "Curricula" refers to units of study, approaches to pedagogy and the learning environment. These recommendations are directed towards but not necessarily limited to high schools in urban areas.

Curricula are relevant to the lives of the learners, incorporate family and cultural knowledge and build on current social and environmental issues in the community.

The development of skills in critical thinking, cooperation, communication and creativity is actively supported.

Socioecological themes of study are integrated across the curriculum.

Students have opportunities to hold leadership positions, participate in peer and community education, and plan and implement school and public forums and events around themes that address social and environmental issues.

Community service and alliances with community member, professionals and organizations are promoted and integral to the curriculum.

Critical analyses of issues of domination and economic and political power that result in the exploitation of humans and ecosystems in their communities and beyond are addressed in courses, forums and study groups.

Curricula engages students in nonviolent social and environmental action, exercising cultural sensitivity and including investigations of political, environmental and social movements as preparation for activism.

Curricula exposes students to higher education and career opportunities in fields such as environmentalism, community development and social justice and supports them in gaining skills they will need for such pursuits.

The following recommendations refer to the dialogue and sharing of ideas necessary in order to rethink public school curriculum from a socioecological perspective,

who is best suited to contribute to these dialogues, and what they can learn from each other.

*High school age youth with experience in environmental activism can work in conjunction with educators and administrators to evaluate and develop curricula that reflects a multicultural environmental perspective.*

Youth such as those in this study are in an ideal position to participate in dialogues regarding what young people need to and would like to learn. As learners and leaders, their insights are crucial in helping to define multicultural environmental education appropriate to the urban youth experience. In addition to providing valuable information and experience to curricular re-envisioning, their participation may help them to further their own thinking, and prepare them to inherit and reshape social justice and environmental educational movements as adults.

*Environmental education professionals can offer more to public schooling than one hour or half day field trips. Those in the field can learn from multicultural educators as they rethink and transform perceptions and practices in order to promote socially and culturally relevant environmental education in public schools.*

Environmental education as a field has become too comfortable with its non-threatening, extra-curricular status, and needs to take a more active role in public school reform. Practitioners can learn from the programmatic and ideological impacts that multicultural education as a movement has had on public education, and the conflicts and successes that have surrounded it. In recent years, the multicultural education movement has had more impact on educational thinking and educational change than environmental education. Not only have public schools raised eyebrows, planned in-service days and implemented curriculum, multicultural educators are in demand as consultants for many types of businesses and organizations. As a field it has acquired avid supporters and

staunch critics, produced a wealth of research and writings, raised confusion, and generally drawn attention and inspired dialogue in teachers lounges, non-educators dinner tables and at national and international education conferences.

Although there is plenty of feather watching among environmental educators, there isn't enough feather ruffling. Environmental education in urban schools and all schools must be seen as a priority. Professionals in the field of environmental education must take an urgent stance in lobbying for curricular mandates that make environmental education core to the curriculum and result in lasting and systemic reform.

*Multicultural education advocates could benefit from environmental education philosophies that approach life and learning with a focus on ecological thinking, personal responsibility, and behavioral change.*

I have often been frustrated at multicultural education conferences where an entire morning will be spent focusing on becoming conscientious anti-racist educators only to be followed by anti-ecological coffee break where a pesticide infused beverage is served in cups that contribute to widening a hole in the ozone layer. Consciousness in regards to social justice does not always translate to ecological consciousness. Environmentalists often understand the inextricable connection between humanity and the natural world, and infuse this way of thinking in educational practices. Many environmental educators are knowledgeable about the ways in which personal, corporate and governmental actions violate natural ecosystems and through education, support individuals in assessing their own values and engaging in informed actions that challenge environmental destruction.

Just as many multicultural educators explore their own social and cultural identities and related issues of privilege and oppression, many environmental educators participate in reflective inquiry to understand themselves in relation to the place they live locally, regionally and globally. Themes such as sense of place, respect and appreciation, diversity

and interconnectedness inform the practice of environmental education and can complement explorations of social and cultural identity.

Environmental education theories and methods may help all educators, including multicultural educators develop and promote public school curricula that is engaging, incorporates multiple learning styles, and makes vital connections among nature, culture, personal values and actions, and society. The experiences of connection to and reverence for the natural world that emerge for many young people who learn about nature in cities, suburbs and rural areas through environmental education are often profound, lasting and transferable. These encounters may help promote respect and compassion not only for nature, but other human beings.

All those involved in curriculum evaluation, revisioning, development and implementation, be they multicultural or environmental educators or not might regularly ask themselves and each other the question: "What are schools for?" Although some core goals may remain consistent and unswayed by time, demographics or political climate, if we recognize the dynamic nature of society and life itself, then educational goals would likely follow suit. Two major educational goals emerged from this research, and encapsulate many of the other recommendations previously posed.

*An educational goal for schools should be socioecological literacy for all students.*

Socioecological literacy grows from educational opportunities that encourage investigation, reflection, dialogue, and connection-making among social and environmental issues. As with most processes of language acquisition, becoming literate about social and environmental issues involves learning basic words, principles and "grammatical rules," personalizing and integrating this new information, and practice with others in authentic contexts. These three processes can occur through in-school courses, internships and

involvement in organizations whose agendas focus on social and/or environmental concerns.

Access to learning opportunities that promote socioecological literacy should not be exclusively for those interested in environmentalism or environmental careers. All learners deserve to have opportunities to examine how social and environmental concerns in their communities impact the health of humanity and nature so they can knowledgeably participate in dialogue and actions that challenge potential and existing violations.

Content and pedagogical approach are equally important in encouraging socioecological literacy. In the urban high school curriculum, socioecological literacy can be fostered in individual courses, or strands within disciplines such as history, literature, geography, science and the arts. Themes such as such social and environmental identity, history of environmental and social justice movements, urban environmental issues, international environmental concerns, community organizing, environmental writing and journalism, media techniques, and leadership can be integrated across the curriculum. Over the course of several years, students would participate in a gradual and reflective process of acquiring the knowledge and vocabulary to engage in discourse, decision making and citizenship.

*A major goal of education should be to promote caring encounters among people of similar and diverse backgrounds, and between people and nature.*

In this research, a theme emerged that I did not necessarily anticipate and still have difficulty pin pointing and assigning words to. In the midst of media images, and personal experiences of racism, environmental pollution, war and violence these youth had managed to maintain a moral orientation of caring and hopefulness. Rather than over-emphasizing academic and material success in the formal and informal curricula of our schools, we need to better support students in appreciating and respecting each others similarities and

differences, affirming their connection to the earth, and finding alternatives to despair, alienation and violence.

Nodding suggests that in "centers of care" such as care for the self, intimate and distant others, animals, plants, the physical environment and ideas, we can find many "themes on which to build courses, topical seminars, projects, reading lists, and dialogue" (1995, p. 366). She argues that a curriculum organized around themes of care does not work against intellectual or academic achievement, but offers a solid foundation for these while simultaneously emphasizing moral development. The Buddhist monk and social activist Thich Nhat Hanh writes, "If we knew how to deal with ourselves and our fellow human beings, we would know how to deal with nature. Human beings and nature are inseparable. By not caring properly for either, we harm both" (1993, p. 119).

In rethinking curriculum, it is urgent that we foster and value opportunities that foster caring encounters among people and between people and nature. Promoting conditions that support young people in becoming compassionate and loving people through curricula that values these qualities is perhaps the greatest educational goal we can aspire to.

#### Teacher Education: A Socioecological Perspective

This subsection poses several recommendations for supporting prospective and in-service teachers in developing perspectives and practices that are informed by multicultural and environmental education. The recommendations are primarily directed at teacher education programs in colleges and universities.

*Colleges and universities can require courses in multicultural and environmental education for pre-service teachers, as well as make them accessible and appealing to those teachers already in service.*

The general objectives of these would be to prepare teachers to address issues relevant to their students lives, our society, and social and ecological concerns locally and

globally. Foundation courses should engage students/ teachers in exploring their own cultural heritage and identity, societal forms of privilege and oppression, the histories of the environmental and multicultural movements, and current theories and research. Methods courses should promote development of personal and professional philosophies of multicultural and environmental education, teach curriculum development, examine promising practices and suggest teaching resources.

*In addition to specific courses that address historical, theoretical, and methodological issues in multicultural and environmental education, a goal of teacher education programs could be to integrate these perspectives into other courses as well.*

Multicultural and environmental education perspectives can inform the content and pedagogical approaches to many courses in order to promote these ideologies across the curriculum. For example, a human development course could include materials and discussion that introduce a socio-cultural perspective to human development, ethnic and gender awareness at different life periods, and children's' relationships to nature. A social studies teaching methods course might present multiple perspectives on a particular historical event or period, or teach prospective teachers how to critically analyze current social, international and environmental issues and engage their students in action-oriented projects. In this way, teacher education programs themselves serve as a model of methods of integrating multicultural and environmental perspectives across the curriculum. In addition to infusing these perspectives individually, prospective teachers should be supported in developing curricular frameworks and applications that integrate and illuminate similarities and contradictions between the two.

Consistent access to theoretical and practical models that reflect culturally sensitive, socially just and environmentally conscious approaches to education may support prospective teachers in developing a philosophy of education and pedagogical approach rooted in these principles.

*Prospective teachers should be supported, through courses and identity groups, in exploring their own social, cultural, and environmental identities so that they are more prepared to do the same with their students.*

Personal reflection is a valuable part of any learning process. Writing exercises and creative activities that support introspection and dialogue among prospective teachers and encourage them to examine how their cultural and environmental identities have influenced their thinking about education are invaluable. Weekly or bimonthly caucus groups defined by religion, gender, race and class, as well as mixed discussion groups, speakers at brown bag lunches, workshops and conferences can continue to facilitate dialogue and introduce research relevant to social and environmental issues.

*Teacher education programs can promote access to resources for environmental and multicultural teaching and support educators in critiquing and selecting appropriate materials.*

Ideally, educators would be provided with sufficient time to develop curriculum appropriate to their students interests, and share ideas with colleagues. Since this time is rarely provided, existing multicultural and environmental curriculum materials and media resources should be introduced, critiqued, and made available to pre and in-service teachers. One way for teachers to gain access to materials is by attending workshops and conferences. Teacher education programs can promote exposure to resources as well as current research by providing support for pre-service teachers to attend professional conferences, or sponsor workshops and conferences at their own institution. In addition, teacher education programs can organize strands at environmental or multicultural conferences that connect teachers and resource specialists and promote networking and sharing of ideas.

*Urban teacher preparation programs can tap into current movements and organizations that deal specifically with urban environmental issues.*

Alliances between schools and community based or national organizations may help all parties involved develop educational agendas that focus on urban environmental issues. Teacher education programs can serve as a crucial link in making these connections by bringing together policy makers, educators, politicians and community members to collectively define environmental issues from an urban perspective and set educational agendas.

*Teacher education programs should include a community service component.*

If community service learning is to be stressed in the school curricula, teachers themselves should be encouraged to partake in order to guide such projects. Pre and in-service teachers should engage in service practices with community or regional organizations with environmental or social justice agendas. For pre-service teachers, such practicums would be required as part of the course of study. In-service teachers would be able to receive credits towards advanced degrees or pay increases. In both cases, these service practicums should be accompanied by seminars that help them make sense of their experiences and discuss educational implications of community service learning.

*Teacher education programs can provide prospective teachers with practical knowledge and ideological tools for challenging inequitable and un-ecological aspects of the educational system.*

Too often, teachers are "trained" to fit into existing educational structures and practices that are not necessarily working. Although curricular change must happen on every level and not be placed solely on teachers, educators should not be groomed to be powerless promulgators of schooling that perpetuates institutional inequity and separation from nature. We live in a culturally, ethnically and linguistically diverse society and world

where humans of every land mass have always had a profound reliance upon and to varying extents, impact on natural ecosystems. Educational practices based on social and ecological consciousness and responsibility are not likely to become irrelevant, only more pressing. If teachers enter the system with a philosophy that is informed by culturally inclusive and ecological principles combined with a political agenda for change, they can help shape the educational processes that they are an instrumental part of.

There are numerous existing educational organizations and movements involved in curricular reform efforts. Exposure to these, as well as courses that explore social and political movements and the history of educational reform may support pre-service teachers in recognizing education as a political process that they can participate in. Prospective teachers should not only be versed in multicultural environmental education, but prepared to take part in related reform initiatives and hold leadership roles in their own schools and regional and national organizations.

### Beyond Schools: Alliances

The youth in this study were connected to environmental activism through school classes and teachers, extra-curricular school-based clubs, and community and national organizations. This section focuses on this third area of connection; education that happens beyond the structure of the school curriculum and environment, with recommendations for alliances between schools and community organizations suggested.

*Models of successful community service learning projects can be accessed to design educational programs that develop multicultural and environmental understandings in the context of service.*

The participants in this study clearly benefited from opportunities that linked them with community resources and connected their learning to "real-life" issues. Community service learning engages youth in projects that promote learning through participation in

service, activism and education in the community. Youth / adult alliances proved to be important to the youth in this study. Community service learning can help structure such alliances and support mutually beneficial relationships between adults and youth of similar or diverse cultural backgrounds. School classes can help young people reflect on their experience through discussion, writing, and presentations within the school community. Community service projects should include incentives such as job training, leadership opportunities, college application support and scholarships, and stipends. Projects that seek to improve upon the aesthetic environment such as vacant lot clean-ups or community gardens, or provide support to community members through literacy campaigns or meals-on wheels, can bring together youth from diverse neighborhoods, and promote cross cultural understanding and cooperation in the context of empowering and positive experiences.

Community service learning programs designed to meet goals of multicultural and environmental education need to weave social, cultural and ecological issues and provide young people with adequate preparation, continuity of experience, and reflection. In addition to participating in revitalizing actions, youth and advisors should engage in critical discussions of racism, over-consumption and other exploitative practices that result in the breakdown of social and ecological health and necessitate service-oriented attention.

*Alliances between schools and regional, national, and international organizations should be actively explored as an effective means of promoting environmental education and activism among youth.*

Reputable non-profit organizations should be increasingly accessed as valuable resources to teachers and students as clearinghouses for information and centers of current debates and actions. Environmental organizations with agendas that include urban environmental issues should actively reach-out to schools, developing programs that enable youth and faculty to participate in the work of the organization. Involvement in regional,

national, and international organizations can help young people gain skills in research, leadership, and advocacy. Participation in real life investigations, actions and lobbying efforts may be more exciting to young people (and teachers) than in-class, synthesized learning activities. Such affiliations would inevitably be mutually beneficial in that youth may be intimately knowledgeable about the issues and social dynamics in their own communities, making them valuable participants in research and educational efforts that large organizations may want to carry out. The contributions of urban youth diverse in cultural knowledge and experience can inform the agendas of environmental organizations while simultaneously preparing the youth to inherit and re-envision these organizations and the environmental movement as a whole.

*Peer education can serve as an effective venue for youth to become leaders and educators in their communities and beyond.*

There are many existing programs that prepare youth to become HIV/ AIDS educators, drug awareness educators and conflict resolution mediators. Successful models of peer education and activism can inform the start-up of programs that focus on environmental issues. Such projects could be based in schools, community centers or organizations, or serve as catalysts to link these.

The young people that make up *Youth Force* say that peer counseling takes advantage of "peer-suasion." They suggest that trained youth outreach workers and counselors are more effective than adults in reaching other youth, due to the declining influence of adults and the rising influence of peers that occurs when young people enter their preteens. Their *Five Steps to Starting a Peer Counseling Project* (School Voices, 1994) is a framework for establishing counseling programs that support youth in dealing with problems from school failure to relationships. Their guidelines offer important considerations that can be applied to other kinds of youth-run projects. They are summarized below:

- 1) Examine your personal goals. Why do you want to start a peer counseling project? To involve youth, you must give youth decision making and planning roles, not just service roles.
- 2) Determine what your needs are. What youth problems are in need of attention? What are the other available services?
- 3) Recruitment and Training. Peer counselors must be representative of the youth they will be working with. Training should include decision making, listening, communication, outreach, confidentiality, socialization skills, and conflict mediation skills. In addition, training should include skills on how to reach out to, be sensitive to, and work with youth from diverse ethnic backgrounds, children of alcoholics and substance abusers, abused youth, lesbian and gay youth and disabled youth.
- 4) Establish professional support for help with difficult issues, and providing resources.
- 5) Be Creative. Some ideas include hotlines, tutoring projects and conflict mediation projects. Good projects identify youth who aren't being served and go to where they are.

*A youth environmental education action network could be established to support, link and fund youth initiated community-based environmental education efforts.*

In conducting this research, many of the youth I interacted with expressed curiosity about others in their age bracket who were also active in environmental issues. Some of the youth in this study were involved in small, local organizations. A few had delved into national networks that offered them some opportunity to occasionally meet with or hear about other youth, but did not serve to reinforce or build a network of young people who could learn from and support each other in their efforts. This research has illuminated the need for an umbrella organization that would bring together already active youth and serve as a venue for others, provide funds for community projects and stipends, and serve as a clearinghouse for information and resources to support youth in pursuing and carrying out environmental education and activism in their communities.

The lessons learned from this research have motivated me to consider putting this recommendation into action, and provided insights as to what components might make for a successful project. Below, I briefly outline what some of the major goals and functions of a youth environmental education network might be. In keeping with the philosophy of

this research, youth environmental activists would be asked to advise the creation and development of a more comprehensive proposal.

*What would the umbrella organization (youth environmental education action network) do?*

- The organization would locate interested youth and conduct an application process by targeting schools, churches/temples, neighborhood centers, and community and national organizations.
- The yearly kick-off for the project might consist of a two week intensive summer institute. The summer seminar would serve three purposes. First, to provide a forum for these youth to discuss environmental issues of importance to them. Second, to offer the youth workshops and classes in field ecology, community organizing, writing/ photography/ film making, leadership and public speaking, and environmental movement history and current issues. The purpose of these would be to help them advance their understandings, develop skills, and become informed about resources. Third, to support the youth in designing an action plan for an environmental activism project with an education component that they will implement in their communities. Part of each day would be allotted to planning and networking time for the youth to share ideas, identify interests, and design and receive feedback on action plans.
- The umbrella organization would identify and assign mentors from within the youth's community, assist them in developing a contractual agreement and maintain on-going contact with the youth and the mentors, including occasional site visits.
- The umbrella organization would provide resources, troubleshooting, media support, stipends for youth and mentors, and start-up money/small grants for projects.
- In addition to the intensive summer institute, there may be a scheduled weekend mid-way through the year where the youth can check in with each other, share struggles and successes, and rethink strategies.
- The umbrella organization would also establish ties with colleges interested in offering environmental studies scholarships and help the youth with the application process.

- In order to maintain on-going communication and facilitate networking among the youth adults and organizations involved, the umbrella organization would compile and distribute a newsletter to circulate information about and rally support for each others projects, successes and challenges.

*Who would this project be geared towards?*

Initially, the project might include 12 to 15 youth, diverse in terms of ethnicity, class and gender, and from several different cities in the Eastern United States. There would be clusters of two to three youth who live in the same community so they can learn and work within the context of a small group and meet regularly to maintain continuity and energy. The youth will need to commit to a certain number of hours of involvement, and be willing to stay in contact with the umbrella organization through regular updates.

Each cluster would have an adult mentor who lives/works in their community and is versed in environmental issues and/or community organizing or education. The mentor would not own the youths' process, but provide support, guidance and inspiration. After the project is established, the network could begin to expand to include youth from both rural and urban areas, and other regions of the United States.

*What do the youth do?*

This is essentially up to them. The umbrella organization would guide the project participants in deciding upon a manageable environmental activism/education project and provide support for them in designing an action plan. One focus of the summer institute would be to brainstorm and decide on projects to pursue over the year. Examples might include designing a curriculum on a particular topic and implementing it in several elementary school classes, door to door canvassing distributing information and talking with neighborhood residents about lead paint poisoning or energy conservation, organizing a series of public forums and speakers on topics such as rooftop gardening or occupational

hazards, planning anti-violence events, or leading a series of urban ecology nature walks or "toxic informational tours" to power plants, incinerators and landfills.

### Recommendations for Further Research

This section consists of recommendations for further research. They emanate from two primary sources: themes and tangents uncovered in the process of this research that warrant a study of their own, and ideas for using this study as a springboard for continued investigations and comparative explorations.

The primary method of data collection in this study was the long interview, supplemented with observations, mini interviews, group dialogue and written and media material. In these recommendations, I pose thematic extensions of this research as well as consider additional methodological tools that may provide additional or diverging insights. The incredible insights that the study participants offered, and the openness with which they told their stories suggests that youth are valuable contributors to the process of educational research. The following recommendations outline ideas for further research with, as well as conducted by youth, and possibilities for comparative studies.

*A follow-up study involving the same twelve youth five years later .*

A study such as this could provide insight as to how profoundly the youths' environmental activism experiences as adolescents affected them. One of the interview questions asked the youth what they saw themselves doing in five years. A follow-up study would enable the researcher and the youth themselves to assess their predictions and goals, and identify the factors that had either brought these into fruition or altered their course. Together, the youth and the researcher could compare how they envisioned themselves with what they are actually doing and reflect on significant experiences that continued to shaped their environmental identities.

*A study which involves extensive observation of youth in environmental action and in leadership roles.*

This could be valuable to illuminate factors that they did not think to articulate and I did not think to ask. Extension observation of the youth in their home environments, in social situations with peers, in school settings and engaged in environmental pursuits could supplement interviews and possibly provide more information about cultural influences, relationship dynamics and sense of place.

*A study that interviews the adult mentors as well as the youth.*

An study that includes the perceptions and experiences of both youth and adults involved together in projects and partnerships may provide additional insights as to how to best support successful youth/adult alliances. In particular, it would be interesting to compare the experiences of partnerships where the youth and adult are of the same cultural background with "bicultural partnerships" (youth and adult of different ethnic/ socioeconomic background) in order to see how cultural familiarity may impact the process and outcomes of environmental education/activism efforts and the success of the alliances.

*A study that compares and contrasts the experiences of youth environmental activists from urban, rural, and suburban environments.*

The purpose of this would be to identify similarities and differences among environmental concerns and approaches to activism identified by a group similar in age but geographically and culturally diverse. A study such as this might support the development of environmental activism curricula and programs that are unique to particular social contexts and natural ecosystems. The research process and its outcomes could serve to join youth from each of these geographic cultures and facilitate their making connections between each others lives and environments.

*A study in which youth self select based on a number of criteria related to the nature and length of their participation in environmental activism.*

In this study, in all but one case adults recommended youth based on their perceptions of what constituted a youth environmental activist or leader. The adults clearly demonstrated respect for and confidence in those they were suggesting. However, it would be interesting and perhaps more in keeping with a philosophy of youth empowerment to let young people develop a list of criteria of what constitutes a youth environmental activist, then have them recommend peers that fit this criteria, and/or and distribute a call for research participants based on the list.

*A study on environmental activism designed by youth for youth.*

The findings of this research indication that youth who have demonstrated leadership and activism in environmental issues are well suited to participate in related dialogues and initiate projects and actions. They may be equally suited to conceive of, design and carry out research about themselves and their peers. A study designed by youth, for youth could be a wonderful peer education project as sharing of knowledge would likely happen in the process. Educators and environmental professionals could provide resources, support and guidance to youth-conducted research, but not assume too much power or ownership.

*A series of studies might use a similar model as this one but focus on individual cultural factors such as gender, ethnicity, religion, class and sexual orientation, and how each of these may impact youth leadership, activism, and environmental awareness and concern.*

In this research, I consistently considered cultural and social factors, but did not focus, either in the interview framework or analysis on the isolated influence of specific cultural categories on environmental awareness or activism. Building on this body of research, a series of studies that examine the impact of specific cultural categories such as

those mentioned could be compared and contrasted to provide more insights regarding intersections of culture, identity, environment and activism.

*A study that focuses on the relationship between cultural identity and sense of place/environmental identity in the process of adolescent development.*

This study did not seek to address how one's cultural background and relationship to place intersect and influence the development of identity, morality, and social and ecological consciousness during adolescence, although this arose as a question as a result of some of the findings. A study along these lines might explore in detail how relationship to geographic and natural places is influenced by cultural knowledge, and vice versa. There have certainly been anthropological studies that look at these relationships in indigenous cultures and societies in many parts of the world, but none that I am aware of that intersect adolescent development, sense of place and cultural identity among youth in the United States. A study such as this may be particularly interesting if focused on young recent immigrants who are coming of age while negotiating their connection to two diverse cultures and environments.

### Concluding Reflections

This thesis culminates a long, arduous, humbling and illuminating process. It is a scholarly work and a personal work. I would be truly surprised if all those who write a dissertation are not in some way accessing or healing or celebrating a part of their own lives that calls out to be delved into (I'm not sure how this theory applies to fields such as organic chemistry, or nuclear whatever majors, but I'll bet somebody does). I recognize my choice of a research topic and the beliefs and questions evidenced in this dissertation as reflective of my own story, a dynamic tapestry of personal and cultural experiences, woven with struggle, success, and faith.

This research was initiated by personal and professional passion, and it concludes with personal and professional reflection. The personal question is self-indulgent: What made me, a kid from Jersey, awaken to and become involved in environmental issues, and how does my experience compare to the youths' in this study? And the professional reflection: Now that I have a stable enough sense of self and place in the world, and some knowledge, experience and enough university degrees, how can I continue to support these and other young people as an educator and activist committed to multicultural environmental education?

Reflections on the first question: I was twelve when I first visited a place called The New Alchemy Institute and saw people growing and sharing food, and educating others about alternative energy and sustainable living. Something stuck. I returned at age nineteen as I knew I would after that first visit, and began my serious path as an educator and environmentalist. I met my husband Ricky there. He was also about twelve when he left his New York metropolitan area school classroom for a field trip on the Hudson River aboard the Clearwater environmental education sloop. I guess something stuck. He returned to join the Clearwater crew when he was eighteen, eventually catching up with me at New Alchemy a few years later.

Are these isolated incidents of environmental connection, desire for community and participation in social change awakened and pursued? I don't know. Susan Bordo (1995, p. 3) suggests that "getting involved in a social movement to change things, even on a small scale such as at one's school or place of work can shift one's sense of life significantly." Without returning to these same youth five or ten or fifteen years down the line, I cannot know the extent to which their environmental activism as teenagers impacted, shaped or altered their lives. However, my personal recollections coupled with the opportunity to witness a fragment of their potential as leaders, activists and visionaries is enough to make me believe that there are others like us awaiting a spark.

Reflections on the second question: I conclude this thesis after a seven month hiatus during which I had time to reflect on the participants, process, and data collected while traveling through urban and rural areas in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, India and South East Asia. After a journey through many countries and regions that have known war and the human and environmental destruction that it brings, I am amazed and humbled by the resiliency and creativity of the human spirit. After hearing these youths' stories, I spent months listening to countless more, in steamy crowded city streets, lush rainforests, farmers fields, and war-torn neighborhoods.

The young people whose stories this research is inspired by and built upon have personally or in their family's history known the lives of immigrants and refugees, of those enslaved, and of colonizers. What is remarkable, yet I do not believe unusual about these young people is that not only have they survived everything from rush hour subways to raging hormones to the fear of drive-by shootings, to political and religious persecution; they deeply care--about the well-being of nature, their communities and the planet. I applaud their vitality, empathize with their fears, and gain inspiration from their thirst to rise as caring and informed leaders and changemakers.

What can be learned from their stories and experiences, their clarity, grace and commitment? I believe one of the things we can learn is that their courage to explore, to take responsibility, to initiate means that many other young people would likely thrive with these opportunities as well. And so, after many words shared and words on paper, reflection and inquiry, editing and feedback, it is time for me to put some of lessons learned into action. As a tea bag tab from one of the many thousands of cups of tea I drank through this dissertation process informed me, "Talk does not cook the rice."

I sincerely appreciate the young people who helped me validate and challenge my preconceptions as they shared their stories and with me. In return, I offer them my commitment to bring the insights and questions that emerged as I listened to and interpreted

their experiences to informal and educational dialogues, to draw from their knowledge in developing curricula and programs that bridge multicultural and environmental education, and to believe in them with all my heart.

## APPENDIX A

### INTERVIEW FRAMEWORK

The following interview questions provided a structure that I drew from in the interviews. While I did not read from this list, this framework of questions was designed and ordered to stimulate responses in the form of perceptions, knowledge, experience, opinions, and demographic information.

What are some words you would use to describe your neighborhood/community?

Have you always lived in this neighborhood? How has it changed over time?  
If not, how are the places you've lived different from each other?... the same?

Tell me about your immediate family, the people you live with.

How long has your family, including grandparents lived in this community/country?  
Where did they live before?

Do you have family members who talk or tell stories about their lives, and the place they lived before coming here? What is one of your favorite stories?

What is a problem in your community /city that concerns you?  
What concerns you about it? Who do you think is affected by (this problem) and how?  
What made you aware of it?

How does this problem relate to your life?

What comes to your mind when I say the word "environment"?

What is an environmental problem that concerns you?  
What concerns you about it? Who do you think is affected by (environmental problem),  
and how? What made you aware of (the environmental problem)?

How is this problem related to your life?

What are some words you would use to describe yourself?

Who has been an important person in your life? What makes them important to you?

Are you involved in any environmental organizations at your school or in the community?  
How did you get involved?  
Tell me about a project you are/were involved in.  
What were some of your responsibilities?  
What was your favorite part about the project?  
How did you feel to participate?  
What kinds of things did you learn?

How do you think environmental problems, such as...(one they named) affects young people?

What advice would you give other young people who wanted to get involved in (the particular environmental issue that interviewee has identified)?

Do you talk about or learn about the environment at your school? What things do you remember learning?

Describe your idea of a class in school that teaches about environmental problems in the city. What would you like to learn? What kinds of things would you like to do?

What is your advice to schools and teachers about what they could do to help people learn about the environment and environmental issues?

## APPENDIX B

### WRITTEN CONSENT FORM

Dear (participant),

I appreciate your interest in participating in this project on urban youth environmentalists. I know that you have important ideas and experiences to contribute. This information is being sent to you so that you understand the project that you are being asked to participate in and a little bit about me. My name is Deborah Leta Habib ( I go by Deb, Deborah, Debbie, or Habib). I am an educator, activist, and a student at the University of Massachusetts, working on my doctorate in education. This project is part of my doctoral work. I am especially interested in and committed to environmental and multicultural education. A purpose of this project is to learn from young people such as yourself who are concerned about and active in environmental issues. The way I would like to learn from you is by interviewing you, in a place comfortable to you. You will also have the option of participating in a group discussion with others who have similar interests in environmentalism.

The attached page describes in more detail what I am asking you to participate in and agree to, and serves as a consent form. Please read it carefully. The University of Massachusetts requires that you sign a consent form as a participant in this project. If you are under 18, a parent or guardian needs to give permission as well. If you have any questions, please call me at (413) 367-0218. You can call collect. There will be approximately 12 people interviewed. The knowledge and ideas that you and the others contribute will help me and other educators to understand the kind of education that is needed to support more young people in becoming active in environmental issues.

If you are comfortable with the attached agreement, please sign both copies, keep one for yourself, and send the other to me in the enclosed envelope. Thank you and I look forward to meeting you, talking with you and learning from you.

Sincerely,

Deborah Leta Habib



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