



POINTS OF VIEW

SUMMARY:

This discussion focussed on programming needs of displaced youth. It was held at Taller de Vida, a national NGO in Colombia.

Participants in this round-table discussion included three adult programmers and three youth.



2. SUPPORTING YOUTH

A DISCUSSION AMONGST ADULTS AND YOUTH

ESTELLA (ADULT PROGRAMMER):

Our work focuses on emotional recovery and to help young people adjust from a country to an urban world.

The first step is to welcome them. We receive and enrol them into the program. This takes about six weeks. They need to become acquainted with the city; to learn about different places and also to become comfortable with Taller. During this time both sides get to know each other. They need to understand what we have to offer them and how we can help them. We need to know more about their situations and their needs. As part of that we hold a workshop where the group talks about their experiences and integrates them into the overall context. This has been a very important thing to do.

The second part focuses on the meaning of life and the meaning of their situation: why are they in Bogotá? What did they lose by coming here? We talk about their life in an urban context and what is different for them. Children need to mourn what they have lost as part of the transition to learning how to function in a totally new environment. They need to come to terms with what it means to be displaced, what it means to be young in a city.

The third part of the process focuses on their life stories. This is also about their identity, thinking about it and rediscovering it. We ask them to look at their story, their story before and during displacement. We also ask them to look at the story of their life and make connections to the past but also to the future, the life they want to have. So this has been the process.

The last thing is to discuss with young people about how they want to be involved with Taller de Vida. We present the options – theatre, music, crafts, video, and work with younger children.

ALEXANDRA (ADULT PROGRAMMER):

An important part of our work is to create space for dialogue between different cultures and ethnic groups. Young people need to recognize their own stories in relation to those of others. They need to understand that theirs is not the only possible universe. For example, displaced people from Quibdó, Puerto Tejada, Putumayo only know the culture of the Afro Colombians and the indigenous Colombians. So it's easy for them to have an intolerant attitude with others.

That's why it's so important to create this space for dialogue. We want them to deal with these issues, to ask themselves: How valid is my way of life in front of others? And there is another important point. Most displaced young people live inside a life where their ways are criticized by everyone – at school, in the neighbourhood, at work. This process



Entrance to Taller de Vida's office in Usme, Colombia

Taller de Vida offers a range of programs for displaced children and youth. It operates a centre in Usme, an area just outside Bogota, the capital city. Usme is essentially a community of displaced people.

Taller has many ongoing programs. For younger children there is a daycare and informal school. This operates out of the centre in Usme just outside Bogota.

helps them to see that their own stories are legitimate. But at the same time, we want them to see themselves as a part of a common story. We need to build this common story with young people.

Another important thing is that we always work in the frame of rights. So they must be conscious that some rights have been injured and there is work to do, organizational or political to get these rights back. But we don't want to victimize. Not at all! We need to look at their strength to see how we get those rights repaired.

Speakers will talk about how displaced young people have lost their rights because of the displacement. It's not true. They lost their rights long before that. Long before that they lost their rights to education, to health or to be social actors in their society. It is not new to displacement; it is a continuing story with different chapters.

What we try to do is to create spaces where young people become aware of the idea of rights. This is the foundation for them to make proposals for something different. For us, this pedagogical process is very important. It permits young people to build knowledge and arguments based on their experiences and understanding of the reality that is affecting them. Through these arguments they gain a lot in terms of content and also in confidence. So when they begin to give presentations – through cultural means or on political stages, they can communicate and be heard in equal terms with others.

This is important to recognize – the need for preparation. Sometimes youth can be given the space but they are not ready, they don't speak well. They can't argue well. So, quickly people say, "See, youth ask for space, we give it to them but they can't do anything with it. There is no point to this youth involvement."

So all of this is important. It is important to have a good speech. But even more it is important for them to have a good knowledge of their own lives. We want this to make sense for them and once it does they can use this perspective to talk about social issues. This is our methodology – working with the head and the heart.

JOHANA (YOUNG PERSON):

A lot of young people arrive in Bogotá and they don't know what they want, they don't know themselves. They think everything is lost. So in the workshops we learn about self-confidence and self-respect. This helps us to recover so that we can look at different things. We also had workshops about rights – a lot of us didn't know about rights. When I first came here I didn't know anything about that.

JESÚS (YOUNG PERSON):

I want to say something about the ethnic part of the project. It's right that the Afro-Colombian and ethnic dynamics have been strong in the project because it allows us to discuss with other youth and adults in different places. Most of us don't see a future. But if we look at our ideas, how we think, how we are, we can see it reflected and the part of



Carlos

For youth its main programs are a video group and drama group. The drama group created its own play with the help of a professional director. This play, which focussed on the experiences of displaced families, toured Germany.

Taller also offers many workshops for indigenous and Afro-Colombian youth in various communities in Colombia. It has been working to establish an exchange between the indigenous and Afro communities. Much of this work focuses on cultural expression and the comparison of different realities and views.

Many of Taller's youth act as assistants in the program, facilitating in workshops and generally participating in all parts of the centre's work. Youth have their own space in Taller's office

being free gets stronger. Because being free is to have the possibility of proposing and acting.

We are Afros but we are also heterogeneous. We need to see the connections but we also have to respect our culture. I have to start with myself. I have to think about my culture. We, young Afro-Col, have we really been concerned about strengthening our spaces as young Afros? You can't always criticize; you also have to think about what you are doing. No one will rescue you.

CARLOS (YOUNG PERSON):

I want to emphasize issues around young people who are displaced. When you get displaced you change from a life of no-problems to an unbalanced life with no border. So you get fragile in your thoughts and your feelings, you can lose your head maybe do something that wouldn't be right and that's not good for you. You get to a stage when you see everybody like an enemy.

In Taller the community work is important. I am part of it in Usme. How the young behave is important, what we do matters. I understand that it is important for Afros and natives to work on their culture. But also it shouldn't be something that separates us, pulls us apart.

HAI DY (ADULT PROGRAMMER):

It's something we have learned that is very important. The young population is heterogeneous. We can't say "the young" and expect everything works for everyone. For us, it means change and adopting methods. Jesus told us about heterogeneity of the groups and how our strength must start from there.

ALEXANDRA:

Another thing. Once young people have this analysis they are eager to give their arguments, their proposals. They like to work with photography, video, theatre – all kinds of media. They are betting on their country, betting on change.

As they produce their arguments, they start to realize that these problems are not easy to solve. For example the problem of teen pregnancies. They see that it's not enough to go to school and offer condoms. So they understand that there are many aspects, that they need to look for allies. This can be difficult for them. But we say: you have to think about it; it's up to you. And sometimes they find that other young people don't want to speak for a future.

HAI DY:

We saw these complications in workshops both in Usme and Soache where we did the colour self-portraits. You could see in their pictures that so many of them don't see any possibility for a future. And this is not just in Usme, it is a feeling all over Colombia.

Young people will say, “Why should I get involved in a community process, there is only death near, not life?” Many young people are living with this no-future outlook. It’s not only the ones who are fighting with weapons. It is a way of thinking. War gives us a very narrow thinking and makes the work difficult. It’s a big challenge for people who want to build peace.

CARLOS:

I like to think that this will change. I know that now in the countryside young people only think about how to fly from the guerrilla or the para-military groups. They don’t want to go to war. As young people we have to be concerned about that so they will not kill us. So you can think only about the present, not the future. But I also think that more and more young people will become concerned about what to do to end the war, to develop young people’s voices against this no future. We need to think about the future that we want and not just the one we are being given.