Youth empowerment in oppressive systems

Melissa Pearrow
Youth Empowerment in Oppressive Systems: Opportunities for School Consultants

MELISSA M. PEARROW
University of Massachusetts, Boston

STANLEY POLLACK
Center for Teen Empowerment, Boston, Massachusetts

Empowerment of youth, particularly in urban settings, is critical to addressing issues of social injustice. Programs that support the development of empowerment, or action taken by an individual to facilitate his or her own ability to act in the face of oppression, have demonstrated great promise in dimensions such as creating stronger group bonding and improved mental health and school performance (Bemak, 2005; Bemak, Chi-Ying, & Siroskey-Sabdo, 2005; Wallerstein, 2006). Yet, there are challenges inherent to implementing, supporting, and sustaining empowerment programs in many school settings given the hierarchical structure and contextual norms of these environments (Yowell & Gordon, 1996). This article reviews the Teen Empowerment program and offers strategies for consultants as they support programs and encourage socially just practices in the school setting. The use of Participatory Action Research methods, and its application to creating positive social change and the empowerment of community members, is also reviewed.

School is perhaps the most pervasive institution in the lives of young people in the United States and in many other developed and developing countries. In the United States, ubiquitous and free public education has been a mandate since 1918 (Butts, 1978). Schools provide a consistent and structured environment for youth and thus possess unique potential as a platform for preparing them for critical thinking, problem solving, and taking action to

Correspondence should be sent to Melissa M. Pearrow, Department of Counseling and School Psychology, Wheatley 2-169, 100 Morrissey Boulevard, University of Massachusetts, Boston, MA 02125. E-mail: melissa.pearrow@umb.edu.
improve their community. However, despite years of critical theory, many, if not most, academic settings still employ the “banking” concept of education (Cho & Lewis, 2006). The banking concept of education, posited by Paulo Freire (1970), suggests that a cycle of oppression ensues from the narrative of teacher to student, wherein the teacher, who assumes the role of paternalistic figure, “deposits” information into the passive student receptacles. The opportunity for dialogue is short-circuited, and with that, the chance for a true development of understanding and a socially just environment is eliminated.

Creating schools that operate in a socially just manner can be conceptualized as a multisystemic undertaking. School consultants can play critical roles in social change and social justice, and although they can take direct action to confront situations of injustice and act on the behalf of others, this is considered “social action” (Toporek & Lui, 2001) and takes the form of a paternalistic pattern embodied in most forms of oppression. In contrast, empowerment is action taken by an individual to facilitate his or her own ability to act in the face of oppression (Brown, 2006) and is more consistent with models of social justice. Empowerment is characterized by dialogue rather than by the narrative, or one-way, flow of information (Freire, 1970). It is also marked by the emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in reality (Freire, 1970). School consultants can apply their experience, skills, and insight to the inner workings and politics of school systems to raise empowerment awareness among faculty, staff, students, and parents.

This article explores the construct of empowerment in school settings and describes a youth empowerment program with urban youth and in schools. Ecological strategies for empowering young people with their involvement through Participatory Action Research are explored, as are challenges and future directions.

**EMPOWERMENT: DEFINED AND REVIEWED**

*Power* is the ability to access and influence control over resources to improve deleterious environmental conditions (Chadiha, Adams, Biegel, Auslander, & Gutierrez, 2004). Understanding power is the foundation for generating strategies to address powerlessness on individual, family, and social systems levels. Pinderhughes (1983) asserts “knowing how power and powerlessness operate in human systems is a key to effective intervention” (p. 331). *Empowerment*, however, has been defined as “a process of increasing personal, interpersonal, or political power so that individuals, families, and communities can take action to improve their life situations” (Gutierrez, 1994, p. 202). Rappaport (1985, 1987) also states that “empowerment suggests a belief in the power of people to be both masters of their own fate and involved in the life of their several communities” (1987, p. 142). Many
Empowerment institutions, such as schools, are characterized by systemic suppression of empowerment and perpetuate cycles of domination (Freire, 1970). Freire asserts that most academic institutions gravitate toward the banking concept of education, wherein students are seen as passive, compliant vessels rather than partners in the dialogical process of reality. At-risk youth and those who come from marginalized populations are at significantly greater risk for decreased capacity for self-improvement and empowerment (Lott & Rogers, 2005).

Empowerment is a multilevel construct that can be understood along a continuum (Lee, 2001; Rocha, 1997). One end of the continuum focuses on individual capacity building. In this end, people empower themselves on a personal level to deal with social status and racial and ethnic oppression. This is done through developing coping abilities; taking a proactive approach to life; building collective relationships with families, groups, and communities; and critically understanding the sociopolitical environment (Chadiha et al., 2004; Lee, 2001; Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988). The other end of the continuum happens within families, organizations, and communities. This end focuses on changing the community and creating a sense of collective well-being, providing mutual support to effect change, and strengthening networks to improve the quality of community life (Jennings, Parra-Medina, Messias, & McLoughlin, 2006). Schools occupy a unique space in the lives of students, and school consultants can have a positive impact on students at both ends of the continuum. Power at the community level involves building coalitions and advocacy groups to impact the political process (Lee, 2001). The sociopolitical dimensions of empowerment, as discussed in Rissel (1994), indicate that “community empowerment includes a raised level of psychological empowerment among its members, a political action component in which members have actively participated, and the achievement of some redistribution of resources or decision making favorable to the community or group in question” (p. 41). Consultants will likely have to struggle with the hierarchical nature of schools but will also have the opportunity to enable faculty and administration to recognize the disempowering structures manifested within them (Juras, Mackin, Curtis, & Foster-Fishman, 1997). Because consultants are frequently brought into a system to address missing services or features, they must work alongside people at all levels in the organization, and an empowerment-oriented approach is often the most effective (Rappaport, 1987). Consultants bring substantial skills, experience, and insight to the community they serve but are much more likely to accomplish goals when they treat community citizens as participants and masters of their own fate rather than “patients” or even “clients” (Zimmerman, 1995). Within this view, the consultant is a facilitator, not a savior, and this is consistent with the nonpaternalistic foundations of empowerment theory. Youth empowerment is simply one facet of the overall ecology of empowerment, though a very important facet indeed. It
is important to note that empowerment is a holistic force that is weakened if members of the community (e.g., teachers) who are supporting marginalized individuals are themselves disempowered (Nastasi, 2005). Consultants can act as the facilitator of systemic change to enable empowerment ideals to flourish.

But beyond the conceptualization of empowerment and its abstract qualities, a number of researchers have examined whether this approach works along a number of dimensions. For example, a growing body of research demonstrates how empowerment can generate opportunities for individuals from marginalized communities (e.g., Bemak, 2005; Bemak, Chi-Ying, & Siroskey-Sabdo, 2005; Wallerstein, 2006). Empowerment is associated with a number of positive outcomes, such as enhanced self-awareness and social achievement (Altman et al., 1998), improved mental health and academic performance (Bemak et al., 2005; Lerner & Thompson, 2002), reduced rates of dropping out of school, delinquency and substance abuse (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 1998), and reduced violence (Hazler & Carney, 2002). Furthermore, the World Health Organization (Wallerstein, 2006) suggests that empowerment, a prominent paradigm within public health, can address health disparities and allow access to social resources that promote health. Empowerment is recognized as both an outcome, in and of itself, as well as an intermediate step to long-term outcomes (Wallerstein, 2006).

CRITICAL SOCIAL THEORY AND CONTEXTUAL FACTORS THAT IMPACT EMPOWERMENT

The construct of empowerment assumes that a society consists of separate groups possessing different levels of power and control over resources, and that social problems stem not from individual deficits, but rather from the failure of the society to meet the needs of all its members (Gutierrez, 1990). Brown (2006) proclaims “social justice activists espouse a theory of social critique” (p. 711). Critical social theory promotes critical thinking and focuses on emancipatory processes that give rise to community actions and the promotion of social justice and quality education with a call to activism (Brown, 2006; Campbell, 1991; Leonardo, 2004). Critical youth empowerment programs engage youth “in actions that create change in organizational, institutional, and societal policies, structures, values, and norms” (Jennings et al., 2006, p. 40).

An empowerment approach to school consultation requires that the consultant provide members of the school community with knowledge and skills to think critically about the issues in their system and to develop strategies to act on and change the problems (Gutierrez, 1990). However, an empowerment approach can be an unnatural fit within the culture of schools, which tend to be hierarchically structured and maintain a contextual norm
that is not conducive to empowerment for either student or teacher (Yowell & Gordon, 1996). Freire (1970) also suggests that the agents of change are themselves surrounded by the tools and artifacts of oppression, and may not fully understand their significance or dehumanizing power.

These challenges suggest that collaborative strategies unique to the school setting may be necessary for socially just consultation. Lott and Rogers (2005) assert that consultants have a major responsibility to challenge and reform unresponsive and neglectful educational environments, and that this can in part be effected through participatory processes that give teachers and staff a voice. North (2006) asserts that social justice can be accomplished through collaborative partnership with students, families, school personnel, community members and the larger social institutions that perpetuate bias. This ecological type of collaboration, particularly between schools and community-based organizations, has been identified as an effective approach to bringing resources to schools, particularly in urban areas where unique circumstances require the credibility of established organizations (Vera, Daly, Gonzales, Morgan, & Thakral, 2006). The school consultant will be well-served to keep this ecological frame in mind, and remember that each member of the ecology plays a critical role in the greater picture of social justice (Juras, Mackin, Curtis, & Foster-Fishman, 1997). It is unlikely that any plan that fails to consider and involve the community can ultimately succeed.

These cultural and contextual factors take on great importance when working with young people in urban schools. Urban schools face a host of challenges given the stark differences in the social background of the students families (Lee & Burkam, 2002) and the disproportionate rates of individuals who are vulnerable to oppression, marginalization, and disenfranchisement (Chadiha et al., 2004). Furthermore, youth-oriented programs have historically consisted of risk-based preventive approaches that include rehabilitation or containment (e.g., keeping kids off the streets). More recently, approaches have emerged that focus on positive development and asset building, and have emphasized youth empowerment (Jennings et al., 2006). An empowerment approach, if systemically applied, can impact students and families as well as the teachers and administrators. As Nastasi (2005) notes, “one task of school consultants is to promote both the empowerment of families as they advocate for their children’s education and responsiveness of school personnel to family advocacy and participation” (p. 114).

We will now present a specific youth empowerment program, called *Teen Empowerment*, which initiates dialogue with urban youth to guide them to critically examine the social issues in the school and community, and to eventually take action to improve their lives related to these issues. After presenting the philosophy and training components of the program, we will present examples of its application to school settings with youth and school personnel. We will hereafter refer to this youth empowerment program as “TE” to distinguish it from the general concept of teen empowerment.
THE TEEN EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM

The Teen Empowerment (TE) program, designed by Pollack in 1982, aims to make institutions more effective and to develop mechanisms for people to work productively together to achieve important goals. Unlike traditional programming that provides services to youth, the TE program has the underlying belief that youth have the capacity to make meaningful change in their community and is designed to organize youth by training them to be catalysts of institutional and social change. Youth are hired to analyze problems in the school and community and are provided with decision-making power, support, feedback, and resources as they actively address the identified problems. Procedures for selecting and training youth are reviewed and the beliefs and conceptual framework of the TE program are listed in Figure 1.

Selecting Youth Participants

TE’s interactive modes of work and communication offer a unique approach to group facilitation based on the belief that groups function best when everyone’s voice is heard and group members have the tools they need to develop relationships. The TE program uses interactive techniques to continuously reinforce the vital link between the group’s mission and its current work, thereby increasing the group’s investment in its work and, ultimately, success of its organizing efforts. The interactive methodologies are used in every aspect of TE’s work with both youth and adults (see Pollack & Fusoni, 2002).

Conceptual Framework of Teen Empowerment Program

- There is a connection between feeling powerless and increased risk of engaging in dysfunctional behaviors.
- Analysis + Decision making + Action + Success = Power
- Youth have the ability to make real and meaningful changes in their schools and communities.
- To make real change, youth need access to adequate resources to implement their ideas.
- The most effective forms of youth leadership are facilitative rather than command in nature.
- There is a connection between the skillful use of interactive group work methods and the ability of the group to reach consensus and to maximize the amount of productive work they are able to accomplish.

**FIGURE 1** Conceptual framework of Teen Empowerment program. Copyrighted by the Center for Teen Empowerment, 2002.
Empowerment

2005, or Fusoni, 2005, for more information related to TE implementation activities). At each site, a group is assembled that is (a) gender balanced, (b) reflects as closely as possible the diversity of the school or community where the group will work, and (c) includes those who might be considered too high risk for other youth programs (e.g., on probation, living in foster care). Other selection criteria include demonstration of motivation to work for broad-based positive change, a connection to other youth in the setting, and a willingness to exert a positive influence. In school settings, staff and administrators are consulted during the hiring process to ensure that students selected based on interview criteria are not poor role models in the school setting (e.g., blatantly disrespectful to staff, failing classes).

Youth participants are recruited by the adult staff, called Program Coordinators, through active outreach such as posted fliers, referrals from school staff, and personal contact with potential youth candidates. All interested youth participate in a competitive hiring process using interactive methods (Pollack & Fusoni, 2005) in which they are invited for first-round group and individual interviews. In the group interviews, the youth have the opportunity to demonstrate their leadership skills and articulate their thoughts about issues facing their school and community. Each candidate then participates in an individual interview with an adult staff member in which they are asked their thoughts about the group process and/or the project and other activities they have organized. The pool is then narrowed to approximately half of the initial pool, based on the criteria described later, for the second round of interviews where the same process of group and individual interviews is followed.

Training of Youth Organizers

After completing the hiring process, the TE program selects between 8 and 12 youth, henceforth referred to as Youth Organizers. Two adult Program Coordinators who have previously worked as Youth Organizers facilitate the intensive training process. This training, which uses the same interactive methods, ambitiously targets several goals, such as building group and individual relationships, identifying key issues in the community or school, placing identified issues within a larger social context, developing two to three strategic action steps to begin addressing the identified issues, and orienting group members to the Behavior Change System (described in detail later). The training culminates with the Youth Organizers planning and executing a community project. The project in and of itself is generally useful as an outcome. In the past, these projects have ranged from community events like a “Youth Speak-Out,” where youth use spoken word, rap, and poetry to address issues in their community, to awareness-raising events designed to reduce racial tensions between conflicted groups. The project also acts as a constant focus point for the trainees and a framework for
cooperation. See Figure 2 for a case example. What follows is a schedule of the initial training.

**Day 1: Relationship building and project purpose.** This training begins with relationship building (e.g., youth getting to know each other, sharing their thoughts about their school, and developing an understanding about the purpose of the program).

**Day 2: Prioritizing issues.** Still accounting for relationship building, the group progresses to prioritizing the issues that youth are facing, with a focus on organizing the youth to create change in their community (as opposed to providing services to individuals).

**Day 3: Considering action steps.** With the prioritized issues identified, the group decides on actions to create positive change.

**Day 4: Choosing the initial action step and creating a tentative timeline.** To achieve the goals of the prioritized issues, a timeline is created to allow the group to make informed decisions about the project they have chosen.

**Day 5: Begin the TE 10-step planning process.** The youth learn about a 10-step problem-solving model (similar to many other business and group problem-solving strategies) that facilitates the brainstorming of goals and

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**Case Example**

In the 2005–2006 school year, the Teen Empowerment program was facilitated in one of the three academies in a 1,200-student urban high school in the Northeast. In this school community, made up of 310 students, the demographics of the student body included 99% non-White, 65% low-income, and 22% English Language Learners. Several issues were identified by the Youth Organizers through the training process and included violence within the school, inconsistent disciplinary procedures, and relationships between various groups within the school community.

One of the solutions generated by the Youth Organizers was to organize a schoolwide assembly where their peers and teachers addressed issues of race through spoken word, poetry, role plays, dance, and rap. One staff member commented that it was the best assembly conducted in many years in the building, and it was reported that there was a subsequent reduction in the number of fights in the school. Obviously, this type of event required the support of the school administrator in order to use the auditorium and access their peers during a free period, highlighting the need for “responsiveness of school personnel” in the empowerment process (Nastasi, 2005).

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**FIGURE 2** Teen Empowerment case example.
Empowerment

the creation of a structure for the tasks, responsibilities, and deadlines to complete the work of their project, such as those mentioned previously.

Day 6: Orientation to feedback skills. This training focuses on the feedback and contracting system of TE. It offers guidelines for giving and receiving feedback and allows opportunities for youth to practice these skills.

Day 7: Feedback/Contracting session. During this session, the Behavior Contract System is explained. The Behavior Contract System is used to manage behavior and to develop appropriate work, learning, and communication skills within the context both of TE Youth Organizing groups and of the larger community. The system used by TE’s Youth Organizing projects consists of two main components: weekly feedback and the Youth Organizer work contract.

With regard to weekly feedback, Youth Organizers learn how to give and receive both criticism and praise and to view feedback as a set of skills that can be improved through practice and reflection. Feedback aims to connect positive emotions with both positive and negative information about each group member. In the weekly session, Program Coordinators lead the group through exercises and provide training in feedback skills and then open the feedback session. In the feedback session, they give feedback to Youth Organizers, and Youth Organizers give feedback to one another and to the Program Coordinators.

The Youth Organizer Work Contract specifies exactly what is expected of each group member and the precise consequences for failing to meet the expectations. Expectations are clearly outlined and cover 25 behavioral categories, including motivation and attitude within the group and behavior within the classroom or the community. For example, the first time a participant is late for group, he/she is warned; the second time, the participant loses 2 hours of pay; the third and fourth time, he/she loses 3 hours of pay; and the fifth time, the participant is fired. Participants can earn back an assessed fine if they work for a specified amount of time without incurring an infraction. If a participant is fired, he or she may, at the discretion of the staff, reapply in writing and, after volunteering in the program for a week with no contract infraction, be rehired.

After the initial training period, Youth Organizers continue to meet for interactive work sessions 4 or 5 days per week. The first session each week is used to address group issues and implement the Behavior Contract System. Each of the other sessions uses the TE meeting format, as follows:

Introduction. The introduction covers the purpose of the day, the timeline of upcoming initiatives and projects, and a review of the day’s agenda.

Warm-up question. This is answered by each member of the group. Program Coordinators select the question to highlight some aspect of the group’s work, to educate the group regarding a societal or community change dynamic, or to work with a particular group dynamic.
**Springboard exercise.** Designed to generate and focus group energy, the springboard exercise is a physical or intellectual group challenge meant to highlight a societal, community, and/or group dynamic and to connect group members to the purpose of their work together.

**Work section.** These decision-making and educational activities take place in the whole group and in small group work (such as planning logistics; producing graphic materials; and writing and practicing speeches, skits, or raps) and are needed to carry out the chosen organizing strategies. When Youth Organizers work in small groups, the groups report back on what they accomplished and, in some cases, demonstrate what they have produced and get feedback from the group.

**Summation.** The Program Coordinator(s) speak(s) briefly about what has been accomplished and what is coming up for the group, makes announcements, and addresses any logistical issues such as assignments or handouts to be distributed.

**Evaluation.** Each group member rates and comments on the day's work. The TE program, as described earlier, has been implemented in a variety of community and school settings. More information regarding this program is available at www.teenempowerment.org

**PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH**

The TE program offers the challenging opportunity for young people to work for positive social change and holds unique relevance for urban communities with disproportionate numbers of marginalized and disenfranchised youth. Its foundation in critical social theory and its application of critical analysis focus on emancipatory processes that promote social justice with a call to activism. Strategies to support social change at the sociopolitical and institutional levels are further reviewed in Pearrow (2008).

Empowered people still need to consolidate information to effectively share it with participants and individuals in power. School consultants must frequently find ways to overcome systemic obstacles to the various mechanisms of empowerment. For example, making sure programs are implemented as planned and not subverted by personal interests of powerful individuals, sharing information, and managing feedback are all potential pitfalls if the consultant does not maintain stakeholder investment throughout the process. In addition to within-system obstacles, consultants must also be mindful of the potentially disempowering effects of the involved institutions on the youth. Cosgrove and McHugh (2000) state, “Despite the conception of empowerment as a multi-level construct, most of the research has not achieved social justice goals because of a microlevel or individualistic focus” (p. 829). Because many of the institutions involved in TE are susceptible to the fallacy of paternalistic or colonial behavior, some means of egalitarian
collaboration between parties is needed. One such method for generating collaborative research is Participatory Action Research (PAR; Rennie & Singh, 1996). This approach emphasizes direct stakeholder involvement in those being “helped” and seeks to minimize the degradation of the effort into a pressing of communities into some external agenda (Rennie & Singh, 1996).

As stated in Kidd and Kral (2005), “Psychologists are being called to examine the larger sociocultural contexts that underlie individual problems and use interventions that facilitate social action and empowerment with participatory strategies” (p. 192). Conde-Frazier (2006) supports the ideal of scholars pursing knowledge while being “educated by struggling peoples” (p. 322) and as such, using PAR methods to examine issues of social justice and to work in support of positive social change (Brydon-Miller, 1997). The dialogical approach to knowledge and discovery espoused by Freire (1970) is evident in this approach.

Furthermore, the overarching question in developing action-oriented research, according to Cosgrove and McHugh (2000) is “How can our research be designed and carried out so that social systems and not just individuals are problematized and asked to change?” (p. 832). Non-PAR approaches can tend to pathologize the state of those attempting to make changes in their community. This construct is part of the foundation of oppression (Freire, 1970).

PAR methods have been used in a variety of settings, including schools. These methods of inquiry empower members in the school community. For example, as the interests of the youth and school community are defined, these interests become the priority, not the interests of the researcher. PAR recognizes the significance of including youth, families, teachers, and community members as essential to the discovery of knowledge of educational, social, political, economic, and organizational problems (Conde-Frazier, 2006). As it has been put by Conde-Frazier, “Scholarship is not only about the knowledge generated but it is about who controls that knowledge and to whom it is made accessible” (p. 325). Teachers need to be involved in the process of any empowerment program, not just during the implementation phase but also early in the adoption and planning (Cherniss, 1997). If teachers are given a voice in developing strategy for empowerment programs in their environment, they are more likely to provide long-term support (Juras et al., 1997). A consultant has a variety of possible approaches, each of which puts teachers in the “driver’s seat,” for planning and implementing a local empowerment program. For example, a consultant could plan a retreat or similar function in which teachers, consultants, and administration meet to discuss several possible options (Cherniss, 1997).

Positive outcomes have been demonstrated when applying PAR strategies to empower individuals and families experiencing mental illness. Dittrano and Silverstein (2006) demonstrated how engaging families of children with emotional disabilities in a PAR project led to the parents’ active engage-
ment with their schools at local and community levels. For example, the participating parents generated ideas for their local school improvement plans, created brochures and videos for other parents, organized family fun events, and ultimately provided input and comments to their State Department of Education’s Improvement Plan for Special Education. Additionally, the children of involved parents demonstrated educational improvements. Knightbridge, King, and Rolfe (2006) demonstrated the impact of using PAR methods while examining the mental health needs of area members and, as a result, facilitated more integrated, community-based services for individuals with complex needs.

PAR methods are not without potential drawbacks. According to Rennie and Singh (1996), “Participatory Action Research is fine if you understand the local power structure and the issues. It is best reserved for situations where the external agent is aware of the potential for damage, both to themselves and, more importantly, to the disempowered in the community. It also works best when the external agency has a clear status and relationship with the community and can secure resources for a long-term commitment” (pp. 13–14).

**SUMMARY AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

School consultants can play critical roles in constructing multisystemic change to create schools that operate in a socially just manner. Yet the empowerment of young people, particularly those within urban settings, necessitates supports and resources as they create their message and share it with stakeholders. Unfortunately the hierarchical structure of the school environment is not conducive to dialogue with youth, thus making it critical to assist school personnel as they become receptive to the youth (Nastasi, 2005). In altering the banking concept of education, wherein students are passive, compliant vessels, this effort in social justice breaks the patterns of oppression to create full participation in the education process (Freire, 1970; Yowell & Gordon, 1996).

Yet, how does one support these ideals when teachers and administrators share complaints of being made into “bankers” due to mandates by governing bodies and their directives (e.g., No Child Left Behind)? An empowerment model requires systematic application to amend contextual norms supporting the emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in reality (Freire, 1970).

Critical social theory focuses on emancipatory processes that promote social justice (Brown, 2006; Campbell, 1991; Leonardo, 2004) and the TE program reviewed here provides a framework for training individuals to examine sociopolitical structures and to generate strategies for creating equitable environments and communities. Additionally, PAR provides critical information to understand the perspective of the community, thus leading to social change.
Empowerment

Much work remains to be done in the analysis of empowerment programs. Longitudinal outcome studies that examine the lasting impact of empowerment are needed, both to answer the academic question of efficacy and to help guide future funding for such projects. And finally, once fully incorporated into a school context, a study of differences in pedagogical practices could enhance our understanding of socially just educational strategies.

REFERENCES


Empowerment


Melissa Pearrow is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Counseling and School Psychology and Senior Research Associate at the Center for Social Development and Education at the University of Massachusetts, Boston. After working as a school psychologist for ten years, she completed doctoral training at Northeastern University, where she trained in hospital, community, and school-based settings. In addition to her focus on youth empowerment programs, her scholarship focuses on issues of urban education, prevention program implementation, and school-based mental health services.

Stanley Pollack grew up in New Jersey and received his B.A. from Rider University in Trenton. His youth work career began in the early 1970s at a residential facility for delinquent boys in that city. He then worked for the Somerville, MA Youth Services Department for eight years, becoming the director of the department while also developing innovative methods
for engaging youth in a process of changing their communities for the better—the basis for
the current Teen Empowerment Model. From 1982 to 1991, Stanley provided consultation in
the model to over 35 youth-serving organizations throughout Massachusetts and in Louisville,
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Pearrow has conducted independent evaluations of the Teen Empowerment program which
were financially funded by anonymous donors and in 1992, Stanley Pollack established The
Center for Teen Empowerment, Inc. as a nonprofit organization in Boston’s South End/Lower
Roxbury. He is currently the Executive Director of The Center.