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We Are Not the Future, We Are the Present: CANTERA, Young People, and Community Development

Emily Rapport
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**We Are Not the Future, We Are the Present:
CANTERA, Young People, and Community Development**

Emily Rapport
Davidson College, English Major
Academic Director: Aynn Setright
Project Director: Azucena Murillo
Ciudad Sandino, Nicaragua
SIT Nicaragua: Youth Culture, Literacy, and Media - Fall 2014

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Introduction

In an auditorium at a camp in the mountains of Jinotega, I saw an audience of young people steal a presentation off of the stage. The presenter, a sociologist, was showing a Powerpoint presentation about the challenges facing Nicaragua's youth. The thirteen- to thirty-year-olds in the crowd listened attentively at first, but soon their hands were flying into the air to share opinions of their own. One noted that the National Assembly doesn't include any young people. Another pointed out the negative impact of the mass migration of youth who choose to leave the country in search of work. My friend Emmanuel announced that young people need to start their own small businesses and create their own jobs. "People are always telling me that I'm the future of Nicaragua," said a girl in the front row. "But I'm thirteen and I'm a leader now."¹

This was far from the only time I heard this thought expressed by the young people involved at CANTERA, the popular education center in Ciudad Sandino where I spent a month learning about the role of youth in community development. The young people that I talked to told me again and again that they saw themselves as change agents not for the future of their communities, but for the present. They displayed a critical lens towards the injustices in their communities and envisioned themselves as part of the solution. And they engaged in everything from workshops to performance groups to advocacy to engage with their communities and develop as individuals. For many, participation in CANTERA is one of the most important parts of their lives. I wanted to learn about the impact of this participation on multiple levels. What impact does CANTERA participation have on the development of its youth participants, how does the organization achieve this impact, and what impact do these organized youth have on the wider community?

¹ Participant Observation. Youth Camp Day 1. Young Life Camp, Jinotega. November 21, 2014.

This is a critical moment for examining the role of youth in Nicaragua. According to the CIA World Factbook, 60.73 percent of Nicaragua's population is under thirty years old, making today's Nicaraguan youth a resource of unprecedented scale for the nation's development.² Understanding how the nation's young people envision themselves within their municipalities and their nation is crucial to understanding both personal development and community development in the Nicaraguan context.

Cultural Lens

I am a white, upper-middle-class, Jewish twenty-year-old woman from Bexley, a small town just minutes away from downtown Columbus, Ohio. I have a passion for education that I was more or less born into. The vast majority of my close adult relatives are public school educators, so conversations about teaching and learning were frequent in my home. Though I always enjoyed school and found success there, these family conversations helped me develop a critical lens towards school settings from a young age, and beginning as a high school student, I actively sought out alternative educational experiences that emphasized real-world learning and community engagement. I am currently in my third year at Davidson College, where I am studying English. My life has been deeply influenced by the parallel communities of Bexley and Davidson, both charming, tight-knit, and affluent, and both of which I became deeply involved with through a variety of organizations. In high school, I was involved with Student Council, Vocal Ensemble, and my synagogue's youth group. In college, I am involved with Student Government, a social and philanthropic women's organization called Warner Hall Eating House, and Eliminate the Digital Divide, a social justice project that aims to provide computer hardware, software, and training to local families in need. My friends and I often joke that we feel like we

² Central Intelligence Agency, "World Factbook: Nicaragua."

are majoring in our extracurricular activities. I perhaps have taken for granted the fact that I was always encouraged to participate in activities, that I always had a wealth of activities and organization to choose from, and that I usually felt like the adults I interacted with through my participation in youth organizations recognized my peers' and my potential. I consider my participation in these organizations to be a critical aspect of my education, providing important lessons in teamwork, organization, and leadership, while also causing me to think critically about the parameters of community and the responsibility of citizens to the communities to which they belong.

It is with this lens that I began to approach my ISP, with an interest in education, broadly defined, and a sense that the best way to explore that topic might occur outside the school setting. I considered a variety of different programs to work with, including an alternative bilingual school on Ometepe whose mission statement emphasized the need for bilingual education to enhance the economic development of the community. The community development angle resonated with me, and I started thinking about how development is defined, what effectively drives development forward, and the links between education, personal development, and community development. At Anita's suggestion, I read Amartya Sen's *Development as Freedom*, which challenged me to think of development not through any type of economic measure, but rather by examining "the expansion of the *capabilities* of persons to lead the kind of lives they value - and have reason to value."³ This book convinced me that I wanted to work with an organization that helps to expand individual agency while promoting wider community change, and after several last minute meetings with Anita, I ended up in Ciudad Sandino, working with CANTERA to learn about the role of youth in community development.

³ Sen, Amartya. 1999. *Development as Freedom*. New York: Knopf. p. 18.

About CANTERA

CANTERA, the Center for Communication and Popular Education, was founded in Ciudad Sandino in 1988. Its mission is

"to contribute to the building up of a society that is more just, fair, and sustainable, while at the same time strengthening the identity and capabilities of the persons with whom we work, not only in their individual setting, but also collectively, from the concept and practice of Popular Education, the perspective of gender, intergenerational relationships, agro-ecology, ethics and spirituality."⁴

According to volunteer Rose Costello, many of the organizations' early youth projects targeted Ciudad Sandino's youth gangs by creating alternative educational and cultural spaces in which they could participate.⁵ CANTERA has grown in scale and scope, and today it has a Managua central office with additional community centers in the Managua neighborhoods of Mateare, San Judas, and Jorge Demitrov. It also has a program that works with local rural communities. Today's Ciudad Sandino center includes a preschool, a community library, and a variety of mixed-use spaces for rehearsals and meetings. The organization regularly collaborates with other community institutions, particularly with the City of Ciudad Sandino, as well as with other NGOs that are members of CODENI, a federation of Nicaraguan NGOs that work with children and adolescents.

CANTERA's youth programming is organized through the Movimiento de Juventudes, or MOJUV, which was organized by youth in Ciudad Sandino in 2005. MOJUV is a loosely organized network based on a variety of different groups, or expressions, some of which are

⁴ CANTERA. "Who Are We?" Web.

⁵ Costello, Rose. Jesuit Volunteer. Informal Interview re: history of CANTERA. November 19, 2014. Bus from Managua to Ciudad Sandino.

peer-led and some of which have adult facilitators or instructors. According to Lucy Medina, territory coordinator of youth programs, the CANTERA youth coordinators are not part of MOJUV, but they help support their programs and act as advisors to the youth who are involved. MOJUV is organized into different groups, usually referred to as expressions, which include dance, karate, theatre, library, game library, English class, communication, facilitation, and gestures.⁶ In practice, these programs are referred to as MOJUV or CANTERA interchangeably. For consistency, I will refer to them as CANTERA programs.

During my time at CANTERA, the organization was engaged in a campaign called "Juntos/as Comprometidos/as por la Equidad," or "Together Committed to Equity."⁷ According to Sean, this campaign was the result of a grant for which CANTERA's central staff applied⁸. A group of youth from CANTERA's different territories worked full time traveling to high schools, universities, and public spaces around Nicaragua to engage people in the campaign. The youth asked people to write a gender equity commitment on a white board, then took a picture of the participant and his/her commitment and gave him/her a ring with the campaign's symbol on it. The campaign closed with a final event on November 25th at the Parque Japones in Managua, where youth from CANTERA's different territories sent paper lanterns into the sky to represent their wishes for gender equality. The campaign influenced the themes of existing CANTERA programming: for example, the youth theatre group in Ciudad Sandino was commissioned to write

⁶ Medina, Lucy. Territory Coordinator of Youth Programming. Interview re: youth participation in CANTERA. November 6, 2014. CANTERA, Ciudad Sandino.

⁷ In keeping with the gender equity theme of the campaign, the words "juntos" and "comprometidos" were typically written with symbols like an 'x' or a gender equality sign in place of the 'o' in order to avoid using the masculine plural. When discussed aloud in formal settings, the campaign was typically referred to as "juntos y juntas comprometidos y comprometidas por la equidad."

⁸ Rawson, Sean. Youth Coordinator. Informal Interview re: gender equity campaign and basurero project. November 24, 2014. CANTERA, Ciudad Sandino.

a play for the campaign, and the annual Youth Camp's activities were themed around the campaign.

Development, Popular Education, and Youth Organizing: A Literature Review

In a CANTERA publication called *Testimonies of the Soul: Experiences from an integral approach to childhood in Ciudad Sandino*, CANTERA's founders are described as follows:

"they gave themselves the task of thinking of themselves as key players in personal and community transformation. They began to dream and to act for the purpose of constructing a different reality for themselves, for the children, for the youth and for the municipality."⁹

From its inception, then, CANTERA was defined as having both personal and community development at the center of its mission. While personal and community development are typically considered through separate theoretical frameworks, both Amartya Sen's *Development as Freedom* and popular education theory suggest important links between individual agency and community development. Sen criticizes definitions of development that focus only on economic measures, and instead emphasizes the expansion of individual capabilities and freedoms as a marker of development, noting, "expanding the freedoms we have reason to value not only makes our lives richer and more unfettered, but also allows us to be fuller social persons, exercising our own volitions and interacting with - and influencing - the world in which we live."¹⁰ This development paradigm echoes the principles of popular education pedagogy, upon which CANTERA's methodology is explicitly based. Popular education, or "education for

⁹ "se dieron a la tarea de pensarse como piezas claves para la transformación personal y comunitaria. Comenzaron a soñar y a actuar en función de ir construyendo una realidad diferente para sí mismos, para la niñez, para la juventud y para su municipio." Translation by author. *Testimonios del Alma*, page 10

¹⁰ Sen, p.14-15.

critical consciousness," is a concept whose Latin American expression was popularized by Brazilian Paulo Freire, and it has played a major role in Latin American revolutions and social movements.¹¹ In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire writes, "In problem-posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation."¹² Popular education aims to both heighten the individual's consciousness of the inequalities and injustices that shape his or her life, and to give him or her the tools to influence those realities by participating in public life. The enhancement of individual agency, then, can be understood both as a process of personal development and as a mechanism for promoting community development and social change.

The body of scholarship on youth organizing provides a framework for understanding how youth participate in both of these processes. This research explains how collaborative, advocacy-focused youth activities impact both the personal development of young people and the revitalization of communities. In "Building Power, Learning Democracy: Youth Organization as a Site of Civic Development," John Rogers et. al define youth organizing as "the systematic development of youth power to confront inequities that negatively affect young people and their communities."¹³ They define the groups themselves as "voluntary associations focused on youth development and social change."¹⁴ While the literature on youth organizing - and the term itself - focuses predominantly on urban youth of color in the United States, and

¹¹ Popular Education News, The. 2009. "Definitions of Popular Education." Web.

¹² Freire, Paulo. 2000. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed: 30th Anniversary Edition*. New York: Bloomsbury. p. 83

¹³ Rogers, John, Kavitha Mediratta, and Seemah Shah. 2012. "Building Power, Learning Democracy: Youth Organizing as a Site of Civic Development. John Rogers." *Review of Research in Education* 36. p. 47

¹⁴ Rogers et. al, p. 44.

predominantly on political advocacy as opposed to other methods of social change, its findings on both personal and community developmental outcomes compliment those of CANTERA's popular education methodology. Rogers et. al note that youth organizing both "focuses attention on civic learning - how young people develop skills and identities that support civic development" and also "highlights the role of youth as legitimate civic agents whose political activity can achieve significant claims for their communities."¹⁵ In "Building Transformative Leadership: Data on the Impacts of Youth Organizing," Dr. Seema Shah notes that involvement in organizing helps young people feel a sense of agency, develop critical social analysis, and increases their educational motivation and aspirations.¹⁶ Rogers et. al develop a typology of civic development outcomes that youth organizing activities promote, which highlights the acquisition of civic knowledge and skills and the construction of civic identities.¹⁷ They also examine the elements of youth organizations that make them powerful learning sites.¹⁸ These scholars provide a useful lens for evaluating the forms of personal development that take place at CANTERA and the organizational elements that make it possible, while simultaneously acknowledging the wider community benefits of such participation.

Methodology

I began my ISP by observing full time at CANTERA's center in Ciudad Sandino. For my first week and a half, I spent all day at CANTERA every weekday, arriving between 7:30 and 8:30 in the morning and leaving between 4:00 and 6:00 in the evening, depending on the days' events. This immersion into the organization helped expose me to the wide range of activities in

¹⁵ Rogers et. al, p. 44.

¹⁶ Shah, Seemah. 2011. "Building Transformative Leadership: Data on the Impacts of Youth Organizing." *Occasional Papers Series on Youth Organizing* 11. Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing. p. ii.

¹⁷ Rogers et. al. p. 55.

¹⁸ Rogers et. al. p. 52.

which youth participate at CANTERA, as well as the day-to-day realities of running such an organization, including the interactions between different groups that occurred outside of formal programming. It also helped me decide which youth activities would make effective case studies for my paper, and my constant presence at CANTERA helped me build relationships with the youth before conducting formal interviews.

After deciding to focus on two particular youth projects, I asked CANTERA staff members which youth were the most deeply involved in these projects to decide who to interview. I also asked these youth if they had suggestions for which of their peers I should interview. I selected a couple of other youth from different expressions who were first-time Youth Camp attendees who I thought provided the distinct perspectives of young people who are involved, but less deeply so than the majority of the youth I interviewed. I conducted these interviews at CANTERA in whatever space was relatively quiet and available. CANTERA proved, at moments, a challenging place to conduct interviews, and during several interviews we had to pause and change locations due to ambient noise, music from another activity, or bugs. Scheduling interviews also proved challenging, as I had several interviewees not show up, or have a limited time in which they were able to talk to me. Regardless of these issues, I was satisfied with the quality of the interviews and I feel that I collected enough information to effectively answer my questions.

I began each interview by asking the interviewee to describe Ciudad Sandino. I asked follow up questions about the community's strengths and weaknesses and sometimes asked follow up questions to learn how they analyzed the root causes of their community's problems. I then asked them about how they became involved in CANTERA and which activities they're involved in and why. For those interviewees who were in the groups that I focused on in my case

studies, I asked them to describe the processes that their group followed, what they learned from the process, and how they evaluate their project's impact on themselves and the community. For those young people who I interviewed after CANTERA's Youth Camp, I asked about their camp experience and the impact it had on them. I also asked general questions about the impact CANTERA has had on their lives and on the wider community. I finished each interview by asking if the interviewees had any questions for me. They often asked me what I thought of the work they were doing, or if similar programs existed where I live. I enjoyed the opportunity to share my experiences as a peer and draw connections between youth involvement in Ciudad Sandino and in my own homes.

Two of my interviewees were fifteen years old, which puts them below the age of legal consent according to the human subjects review board. In both cases, the interviewees were recommended to me by CANTERA staff members who knew that I was looking specifically for sixteen-year-olds and older; young people of diverse age ranges are involved within the same CANTERA youth programs, which suggests that this age distinction probably does not regularly cross people's minds. In both cases, I learned that the interviewee was fifteen at the beginning of the interview, and opted to continue with the interview rather than stop and potentially create an uncomfortable situation for both the interviewee and myself. In both cases, I was able to secure parental permission for use of the interview in person with the interviewees' mothers after the interviews. While it would have been better protocol to secure parental permission beforehand, the interviewees' involvement in CANTERA programs implies that they had permission to be participating in whatever programming and evaluations occur there, and since I complied with all of CANTERA's procedures, I feel comfortable using these interviews in my project.

In addition to these youth interviews, I conducted formal interviews with Lucy Medina, the Territory Coordinator of Youth Programs, and Gemma Gonzalez Espinoza, Supervisor of Sociocultural Programs. These interviews provided an important staff perspective. While I never conducted formal interviews with administrator Acuzena Murillo, Youth Coordinator Sean Rawson, and Jesuit volunteer Rose Costello, I asked them many questions in informal settings. These informal conversations added a depth to my understanding of the institutional context in which CANTERA works. Informal conversations with youth also provided a more natural context to learn about their experiences.

I also had the incredible opportunity to attend CANTERA's fourth annual Youth Camp, which was held from November 21-23 at a Young Life camp in Jinotega. This camp invites the most involved youth from CANTERA's four communities to come together to share discussions, performances, and recreational activities. Camp gave me the opportunity to interact with youth from CANTERA's other communities and learn about what the different groups had accomplished over the course of the year. It was a special opportunity to get to know many of the young people from Ciudad Sandino better as we shared an event that many of them look forward to all year long.

It is difficult for me to explain how much Ciudad Sandino, CANTERA, and the people I met there came to mean to me during my three and a half weeks of field research. I continued to spend my entire day at CANTERA even when I was not conducting interviews or observations relevant to my project, simply because I enjoyed forming relationships there and because I admired the unwavering commitment of the program staff and wanted to display an equal commitment to the community. Some of the greatest learning that came out of this project I cannot possibly include in this project, because it took the form of personal growth as I thought

about the meaning of community, formed relationships across cultural boundaries, and considered about the footprints that the community and I would leave on each other after such a relatively short encounter. It was very difficult for me to leave Ciudad Sandino, and I suspect that the memories of the relationships I formed there will stay with me long after I have forgotten what I wrote in this paper.

Some Words on Words

In order to write this project in English, I had to translate interviews and observations from Spanish. Translations are inherently imperfect, and as I still am far from fluent in Spanish, I struggled with several translation decisions over the course of my writing project. Perhaps most difficult was the translation of the word *los/las jóvenes*, which typically translates to youth - obviously a critical word to my project. The term *joven* is used much more expansively in Nicaragua than the word youth is in the United States, both in terms of content and style. In the United States, "youth" typically refers to people under the age of eighteen, whereas in Nicaragua, the term *jóvenes* is commonly understood as including people up to age thirty. Additionally, the youth whom I talked to at CANTERA often self-described as *uno/a joven*, whereas a person of the same age in the United States would almost certainly never refer to him or herself as "a youth," nor would he or she necessarily use the word "youth" to describe his or her peers. The use of "young person" in English seems to more closely resemble the use of the word "joven" in Spanish. I opted to alternate between the two English translations to avoid redundancy.

Additionally, there were certain words in Spanish whose resonances were hard to capture in a simple English translation (for instance, *gestoría*). When appropriate, I included an English explanation of the Spanish word in parenthesis or a footnote and continued using the Spanish word throughout.

The Interviewees

Each youth interviewee was selected for one of two reasons: 1) he or she participated in one or both of the two case study project groups (Teatro Güegüeja and *gestoría*¹⁹), or 2) he or she attended CANTERA camp for the first time this year. While all of the interviewees attended this year's Youth Camp, half of the interviews (the first five listed) were conducted before camp occurred, and we were thus unable to discuss the impact of camp. To protect the privacy of the young people, youth interviewees will be referred to by first name. For context, they are listed below, along with their ages, a list of CANTERA expressions in which they are currently involved, and any other relevant details.

- Kevin, 15. Karate, facilitation, *gestación*, Teatro Güegüeja.
- Gerardo, 18. Teatro Güegüeja (director), dance, facilitation. Graduate of CANTERA preschool.
- Jorge, 16. Teatro Güegüeja, dance, facilitation.
- Yeymi, 17. Teatro Güegüeja, karate.
- Emmanuel, 18. Director of children's theatre group, Caritas Pintadas. *Gestación*, dance.
- Manuel, 24. Communication, *gestación*.
- Joseling, 19. Biblioteca, dance, communication, *gestación*. Graduate of CANTERA preschool.
- Lady, 15. Dance, facilitation, *gestación*.
- Gioh, 19. Leader of breakdance group.
- Priscilla, 28. English class.

¹⁹ For an explanation of the term *gestoría*, see page 31.

Structure of Findings

In the following sections, I will present my findings on the learning outcomes achieved by CANTERA-involved youth through participation in specific projects, the elements of the organization itself that make it a potent cite for personal development, and the youth's perceptions on how their participation is impacting the wider community. These answers are presented in distinct sections. In the "Case Studies of Personal Civic Development" section, I will profile two specific CANTERA youth projects to show how the youth participants achieved specific civic development outcomes and gained life skills through their participation. In the section, "A Light in the Darkness: The Power of CANTERA as Integrated Space," I will explore the ways in which CANTERA itself functions as a space that promotes this type of development by bringing different types of expression together, particularly through the Youth Camp setting. In "Transforming Ourselves and Our World: Personal Development, Community Impact," I will draw connections between the personal development that occurs at CANTERA and wider community impact, while also addressing youth perceptions on the impact their work is having on the community.

But first - what community are we talking about?

Ciudad Sandino In Their Own Words

Ciudad Sandino was established in 1969, when a major flood of Lake Managua forced residents of lakeside neighborhoods out of their homes.²⁰ The government created the Permanent Organization of National Emergency (OPEN) to help relocate families to a more secure location, which at the time was referred to as OPEN-3. The 1972 Earthquake pushed more Managuans into the new neighborhood, which was still struggling with such basic issues as potable water, energy, and public transportation.²¹ In 1979, the name OPEN-3 was changed to Ciudad Sandino, and in 1995 the community became its own municipality distinct from that of Managua. The community continues to grow both in population, as more recent natural disasters like Hurricane Mitch have pushed more Managuans to Ciudad Sandino, and in infrastructure, as new organizations and institutions are established to serve the municipality's diverse population.²²

According to Lucy, youth in Ciudad Sandino "are fighting against a municipality that is very stigmatized, that is discriminated against."²³ In order to discuss the tactics that CANTERA youth use to catalyze change in their community, it seems important to provide context of how youth describe Ciudad Sandino and how they perceive their own role within the community. Their perceptions of their community are critical to understanding their civic development as agents of community change, which will be discussed in the next section.

When asked about the strengths of the community, youth were quick to point out the network of government institutions and nongovernmental organizations in the municipality that

²⁰ Instituto Nicaragüense de Fomento Municipal. 2014. "Ficha Municipal: Ciudad Sandino." Web.

²¹ Instituto Nicaragüense de Fomento Municipal.

²² Instituto Nicaragüense de Fomento Municipal.

²³ "Están luchando contra un municipio muy estigmatizado, discriminado." Translation by author. Medina, Lucy. Territory Coordinator of Youth Programming. Interview re: youth participation in CANTERA. November 6, 2014. CANTERA, Ciudad Sandino.

support the rights of children and youth. "There are many institutions that protect our rights," says Kevin, identifying several youth and government institutions in particular.²⁴ Jorge explains, "the city government [is] one of the most important resources because it makes many programs that change and improve the municipality."²⁵ Gerardo rattles off a list of institutions and the issues they address: "organizations that work in the municipality against violence, early pregnancy, and machismo...there are many that are working here in Ciudad Sandino."²⁶ Joseling points out the value of the elected leader of each block. "He or she maintains control, and if someone dies, he or she is the leader of the community, he or she takes up a collection to help the people who are grieving," she explains.²⁷ Jorge also points out the importance of market: "many people work there and have their own businesses."²⁸ Manuel asserts that "the community in general, the people, is something very important, because its a productive force."²⁹

While the youth were aware of their city's resources, they were also quick to identify their city's problems. Most identified gangs and intrafamilial violence as the most pressing

²⁴ "Hay muchas instituciones que proteger nuestros derechos." Translation by author. Kevin. CANTERA-involved youth. Interview re: youth participation in CANTERA. November 17, 2014. CANTERA, Ciudad Sandino.

²⁵ "la alcaldia, uno de los recursos más importante porque se hace varias gestiones para el municipio para cambiar y mejorar el municipio." Translation by author. Interview. Jorge. CANTERA-involved youth. Interview re: youth participation in CANTERA. November 18, 2014. CANTERA, Ciudad Sandino.

²⁶ "Las organizaciones que trabajan en el municipio, contra violencia and el embarazo tempranidad, machismo...muchos que están trabajando aquí en Ciudad Sandino." Translation by author. Gerardo. CANTERA-involved youth. Interview re: youth participation in CANTERA. November 17, 2014. CANTERA, Ciudad Sandino.

²⁷ "Maneja el control, si muere una persona, el la lider de la comunidad, hace una recolecta para ayudar a la gente que están con dolor." Translation by author. Joseling. CANTERA-involved youth. Interview re: youth participation in CANTERA. November 25, 2014. CANTERA, Ciudad Sandino.

²⁸ "El mercadito, mucha gente trabaja, tiene su propio negocio." Translation by author. Jorge.

²⁹ "La comunidad en general, como personas, es algo muy importante porque la fuerza productiva." Translation by author. Manuel. CANTERA-involved youth. Interview re: youth participation in CANTERA. November 26, 2014. CANTERA, Ciudad Sandino.

concerns in the community. Interestingly, when questioned about the source of these problems, the young people interviewed were quick to articulate connections between problems within the household and problems in the community at large. Jamie explains that the youth who are involved in gangs "don't have support in their family, in their home, there's no one that advises them."³⁰ Jorge enumerates the different types of intrafamilial violence that exist within the community - "physical, psychological, verbal, sexual" - and notes that what happens within the family influences what type of spaces youth are involved in. "There are responsible parents that put their children on the right path, but there are others that neglect them, and don't advise them, and leave them in the streets," he notes.³¹ Lady draws a link between economic pressures and gang involvement. "The ones who are involved in gangs, or robberies...are from low-income households. They're looking for the easiest way to pick up money."³² These analyses of the root causes of community problems speak to the highly developed critical lenses with which CANTERA-involved youth evaluate their community.

Yet when I asked the interviewees what Ciudad Sandino's adults think of its young people, they were quick to tell me that the adults in their community don't recognize this potential in them at all. "Most of the time people think poorly of young people," says Jorge, citing comments he has heard adults make about his peers: "badly dressed, dirty, they say, he is a

³⁰ "no tienen apoyo en su familia, en su casa, no hay nadie que los aconseje." Translation by author. Yeymi. CANTERA-involved youth. Interview re: youth participation in CANTERA. November 17, 2014. CANTERA, Ciudad Sandino.

³¹ "Violencia entre la familia - física, psicológica, verbal, sexual." "Hay padres responsables de que inculcar sus hijos en buen camino, pero hay padres que se descuidan...y no les dan consejo, y les dejan en las calles." Translation by author. Jorge.

³² "Los jóvenes que están involucrados en las pandillas, o para robar, porque están de pocas casas recursos. Y buscan agarrar dinero por la manera más fácil." Translation by author. Lady. CANTERA-involved youth. Interview re: youth participation in CANTERA. November 28, 2014. CANTERA, Ciudad Sandino.

slacker, out in the streets."³³ Gerardo explicitly refers to these attitudes as adultism, and notes that many adults say things like, "young people shouldn't question adults' decisions," he explains. When young people lead workshops about social issues, he says, many adults say, "what can the youth know about machismo? Young people don't know anything. They're kids. You need a whole life to know what machismo is."³⁴ According to Lady, adults fail to recognize the value of youth participation at CANTERA. "The majority of adults think we're huge slackers, we don't do anything here, coming to CANTERA doesn't serve anything."³⁵ Manuel notes that while some adults support the youth movement, "there are adults that think that at best its a waste of time, what we're doing, that maybe we're just trying to kill time or have fun."³⁶ These comments show that even the youth who are deeply involved in organized activities are hyperaware of the critical gaze with which adults look upon their participation.

These young people's answers to questions about their community revealed that they share a critical lens towards their surroundings, an understanding of the root causes of social issues, and a strong awareness of the resources that work towards community change. How does their participation in CANTERA programming help them develop these insights?

³³ "La mayoría de veces la gente piensan mal de nosotros, los jóvenes." "Mal vestido, todo sucio, ellos dicen, el es un vago, solo camina en la calle." Translation by author. Jorge.

³⁴ "Los jóvenes no podemos cuestionar las decisiones de los adultos." "Qué van a saber los jóvenes de machismo? Los jóvenes no saben nada, son niños. Le hace falta una vida por seguir para saber de machismo." Translation by author. Gerardo.

³⁵ "La mayoría de adultos piensan que somos grandes vagos, que no hacemos nada aquí, que para venir a CANTERA no te sirve de nada," Translation by author. Lady.

³⁶ "Hay adultos que piensan que a lo mejor es una perdida de tiempo, que estamos haciendo, que lo mejor que buscamos es pasar el tiempo, o divertirnos." Translation by author. Manuel.

Case Studies of Civic Development in CANTERA Youth

These case studies examine how two different CANTERA projects promoted civic development outcomes in the youth who participated in them. These two projects were selected for examination because a) they were being presented or completed during my time at CANTERA, b) they were explicitly aimed at making a change in the community, as opposed to some of the other expressions that are aimed solely at personal or group development, and c) they shared similarities in their investigation and planning processes, although they addressed different themes and took very different forms.

Participants in each project were asked questions about their involvement in the project, the process that they followed, what they learned from the project, and what impact the project had on themselves and on the community. Their answers revealed growth across the Rogers et al. Typology of Civic Development Outcomes, which identifies categories of civic development that youth participation can promote.

FIGURE 1
Typology of Civic Development Outcomes

	PARTICIPATORY	TRANSFORMATIVE
Civic Knowledge and Skills	I Gather, analyze, report data; Engage in systems analysis; Understand formal politics.	II Recognize power within social relations; Analyze root cause of problems; Understand schema for social change.
Civic Identity	III Address public problems; Interact with state officials and civic leaders; Work with and galvanize action in others.	IV Challenge race and class inequality; Embrace sense of solidarity with others who are oppressed; Envision self as part of movement for social change.

Rogers et. al distinguish between the development of civic knowledge and skills (quadrants 1 and 2) and the formation of civic identity (quadrants 3 and 4). The first category recognizes skills that allow young people to participate in community life, while the second category recognizes the development of the young peoples' self-images as legitimate agents of change in their communities. Within both of these categories, the authors make the distinction between participatory outcomes (quadrants 1 and 3), which enhance young peoples' abilities to engage with existing social mechanisms, and transformative outcomes (quadrants 2 and 4), which develop their critical outlook on social realities and allow them to work towards more equitable systems in which to participate.³⁷

These outcomes echo the desired outcomes of popular education pedagogy. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire writes, "in order for the oppressed to be able to wage the struggle for their liberation, they must perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a liberating situation which they can transform."³⁸ Rogers et. al's typology identifies learning outcomes that recognize this belief in one's own ability to transform reality and the development of skills that one can use to do so.³⁹

³⁷ Rogers et. al.

³⁸ Freire, p. 49.

³⁹ It should be reiterated, however, that this framework was developed in the United States and its emphases in certain ways unintentionally reflect this cultural context. For instance, Rogers et. al's chart refers exclusively to the inequalities of race and class, whereas in CANTERA's programming, gender and age inequalities were the primary issues addressed. Still, the typology is a useful framework for articulating the development outcome of the following projects.

Teatro Güegüeja - Los Caminos de La Vida

Teatro Güegüeja is the adolescent theatre group at CANTERA. The group began three and a half years ago to fill a gap in CANTERA's multigenerational theatre program, which includes the young adult group Panico De Risa and the children's group Caritas Pintadas.⁴⁰ According to Gemma, Supervisor of Sociocultural Programs, the older children within Caritas Pintadas were outgrowing the group, and they decided to form a new group with a new name and identity. The group chose the name Güegüeja, a combination of Güegüense, the titular character of a famous post-Columbian Nicaraguan drama, and *ja*, to suggest laughter, like "ha."⁴¹ The group is currently composed of both founding members and newer members, all between the ages of thirteen and nineteen. Gemma previously served as the group's director, but this past year, founding member Gerardo took over as director.

Teatro Güegüeja investigates, writes, and performs short, sketch-based plays based on different social issues. They choose themes based on the members' interests or solicitations they receive from CANTERA or other organizations. They have written works about the environment, gender violence, human trafficking, and more. They have had the opportunity to perform at theatre festivals in Managua and in other departments, as well as at CANTERA's annual youth camp. They have collaborated with the National Police and the Mobile Commission to bring their work to the streets, going door to door to invite citizens and performing in barrios across Ciudad Sandino. They recently had the opportunity to perform live on Channel 10 News.

⁴⁰ Gerardo, interview.

⁴¹ Espinoza, Gemma. Supervisor of Sociocultural Programming. Interview re: youth participation in CANTERA. November 25, 2014. CANTERA, Ciudad Sandino.

Their piece *Los Caminos de La Vida*, or The Paths of Life, was commissioned by CANTERA's central office, who invited the group to create a piece focusing on gender equity as part of the Juntos/as Comprometidos/as por La Equidad campaign. The group investigated the topic and developed a play that combines interconnected sketches about gender violence and favoritism within the family, catcalls on the street, and discriminatory hiring practices. The play begins when Yeymi enters excitedly, daydreaming about becoming a doctor or an astronaut, before sadly explaining that her father says she would be better off learning to cook and clean. The piece follows her and her family as their interactions within the home and with others in the community reveal a deeply entrenched culture of machismo. The piece includes funny moments, like the market scene in which the mother is bombarded by vendors in an uncanny impression of the Nicaraguan market experience, and sad moments, like the mother's monologue after leaving her husband, when she asks members of the audience what she should do. The play ends with each actor walking out onto the stage to share a brief statement about gender equity before they all join hands to announce "No soy más, no soy menos, juntos y juntas comprometidos y comprometidas por la equidad de género" (I am not more, I am not less, together committed to gender equity).⁴²

Civic Development Outcomes

In choosing to address gender equality in one of their plays, Teatro Güegüéja displayed a recognition of the role gender-based discrimination plays in their lives. While the creation of this piece was solicited by the CANTERA central staff, the group had the choice whether or not to accept the project. Director Gerardo describes the decision making project as "democratic...I said

⁴² Participant Observation. Performance of *Los Caminos de La Vida*. Barrio Nueva Vida, Ciudad Sandino. November 5, 2014.

we should support the campaign and the others agreed."⁴³ The group members recognized the need to challenge gender inequality that they saw in their daily lives. According to Kevin, "it's a useful theme for young people, because we fall into this ignorance...we say that we can't cry because we're men, and we believe in all of these myths."⁴⁴ Jorge notes that they already knew gender equity was a problem because, "we had seen it where we lived."⁴⁵ This piece gave the group members the opportunity to challenge inequality, which Rogers et. al describes as a transformative civic identity outcome which "helps youth develop a sense of common cause and identify themselves as part of a larger struggle for social justice."⁴⁶ Group director Gerardo recognizes how his upbringing in the CANTERA preschool program helped him become aware of this problem. "We grew up in a very machista society, where women didn't have opportunities," he says. "Since I was little in CANTERA, they gave us workshops about gender equity and machismo...so CANTERA has been making me aware of this problem since I was four years old."⁴⁷ The creation of *Los Caminos de la Vida* gave the young people the opportunity to put this sensibility into action.

Though the group displayed awareness of gender inequality issues in selecting the piece's theme, the process of researching and staging this production increased their awareness of the complexity of gender issues. "This is the only time I've played the role of a mujer," says Jorge,

⁴³ "...democrático." "Yo dije: muchachos, debemos apoyar a la campaña, y los otros estaban de acuerdo." Translation by author. Gerardo. Interview.

⁴⁴ "Es un tema útil para los jóvenes...cayemos en la parte de ignorancia, decimos que nosotros no podemos llorar porque somos hombres, creemos en todo de estos mitos." Translation by author. Kevin. Interview.

⁴⁵ "Siempre vimos esto en donde vivimos." Translation by author. Jorge. Interview.

⁴⁶ Rogers et. al, p. 57.

⁴⁷ "Estuvimos creciendo en una sociedad muy machista, donde la mujer no tenía oportunidades." "Estuve desde pequeño aquí en CANTERA, y nos daban talleres sobre equidad de género, sobre machismo, entonces...CANTERA me estuvo sensibilizando desde tenía cuatro años." Translation by author. Gerardo. Interview.

explaining his role as the grandmother. "It's something that not all kids do for fear that people will say, 'he's gay.'"⁴⁸ For Emmanuel, who played the role of a woman in a previous Teatro Güegüija performance, his gender-bending performance caused tension in his family. He notes that this was part of what raised his consciousness about machismo in his own household.⁴⁹ This increased awareness among group members has affected the gender dynamics within the theatre group, which currently includes five men and two women. "A lot of the times the boys didn't want to play the role of women," Yeymi explains, citing fear that the public would call them gay. This play has helped change that, though. "It has helped as develop a group," she asserts.⁵⁰ Supervisor Gemma has seen a change in the group dynamics. In the past, she says, "At times, it would happen that the boys [said], I want to do this thing, and the girls would say, I want to do that, and the boys would say no," says Gemma. "Little by little, they're practicing."⁵¹ In this way, their production has served as both a way to challenge inequality (quadrant 4) and a space in which to learn about its effects (quadrant 2).

Through the process of researching and writing the piece, the participants learned to gather evidence on the theme and use it to construct a message for their audience. The research process for this project sent participants out to critically examine their own neighborhoods and find instances of gender inequality. "We live in different places and so we observed. For example, on my block...there was a brother fighting with his little sister, a dad giving money to

⁴⁸ "Solo una vez he actuado el papel de una mujer...es algo que no todos los chavallos lo hacen por miedo que lo demas personas le dicen, este chavallo es gay." Translation by author. Jorge. Interview.

⁴⁹ Emmanuel. Interview.

⁵⁰ "...a veces los chicos no querían hacer el papel de mujer." "Nos ayuda formar como grupo." Translation by author. Yeymi. Interview.

⁵¹ "A veces, suceden que los chavallos, yo quiero hacer esta cosa, y las chavellas quieren hacerlo, y ellos le dicen no." "Poco a poco, practicaban." Translation by author. Gemma. Interview.

one child and not the other because of gender preference," explains Jorge. "We went out looking, then shared the information: this is my community, this is my neighborhood."⁵² Gemma explains that this process also forced participants to think critically about their own households and share personal experiences. "They began to share personal things, problematic things that they live in their families, as kids, whether they see equality or not," she says.⁵³ With this information, the group members engaged in a process of improvisation and writing to determine how to convey their message to their audience. Yeymi explains, "We wrote sketches about the theme, small scenes," and the play emerged from this process.⁵⁴ This research and writing process allowed youth to practice the participatory skill of gathering, analyzing, and reporting qualitative data through a creative, arts-based presentation (quadrant 1).

The feedback that the group has received from the audience suggests that they have successfully captured many peoples' lived experience. "When we present it, they say, this part of the play, it happened to me," says Gerardo. He explains that it gives the audience the chance to express themselves, and in the past audience members have cried and talked about how they've suffered violence.⁵⁵ Yeymi confirms, "The message has a strong impact...at times the people stay there, like, 'yes, it's true, that happened in my house'...In the part where the husband hits the

⁵² "Vivimos en diferentes lugares, y observamos. Por ejemplo, por mi cuadra...había un hijo peleando con su hermanita, un papá que le da más dinero a uno y al otro no porque de preferencia." "Nosotros vamos viendo, compartimos la información, esto es mi comunidad, esto es mi zona." Translation by author. Jorge. Interview.

⁵³ "Comenzaron compartir cosas personales, problemáticas, que viven en su familia, como chavallos y chavallas, como se ven ellos si hay igualdad o no." Translation by author. Gemma. Interview.

⁵⁴ "Fuimos haciendo sketch, pequeña escena, sobre el tema." Translation by author. Yeymi. Interview.

⁵⁵ "Cuando lo presentamos, dicen: esto que estuve en la obra, me pasó a mi." Translation by author. Gerardo. Interview.

wife...[someone said] 'I think that I'm living this situation in my home.'⁵⁶ These reflections suggest the realization of one of Rogers et. al's transformative civic identity goals, in which participants learn to "embrace sense of solidarity with others who are oppressed" (quadrant 4). The participants not only represent the peoples' experiences, but also learn to empathize with them by quite literally placing themselves into the roles that they've seen in the community. Gerardo is cognizant of the impact this process has had on him. "Reading the experiences of other people, of the community...has made me a better person," he says. "It has changed my way of thinking."⁵⁷

Though the students are creating art, they are explicit about the fact that their ultimate goal is social change. Gerardo explains that "they call it popular theatre because we present in the neighborhoods...the community is where we need to raise the consciousness of the people about themes like the environment and violence."⁵⁸ For this piece in particular, the goal is "to raise the people's consciousness about equity, that we're all equal," says Kevin.⁵⁹ The group imagines that this raised consciousness will empower the audience to take it a step further: Jorge explains that he hopes the audience "identifies with the play and tries to make a change in their life."⁶⁰ This focus on the work's social mission allows the group members to envision themselves as agents of social change (quadrant 4). Yeymi notes that when she hears comments

⁵⁶ "El impacto le llevó el mensaje fuertemente. A veces la gente se queda como, si, es cierto, eso pasó en mi casa...en una parte de la obra donde la esposa se pega a la mujer...pienso que estoy pasando esta situación en mi hogar." Translation by author. Yeymi. Interview.

⁵⁷ "Leyendo experiencias de otras personas, de la comunidad..me ha hecho una mejor persona." "Me ha cambiado bastante mi forma de pensar." Translation by author. Gerardo. Interview.

⁵⁸ "Le dicen teatro popular porque presentamos en los barrios...la comunidad es donde necesitamos socializar a la gente a problemas de medio ambiente, de la violencia." Translation by author. Gerardo. Interview.

⁵⁹ "Concientizar a las personas sobre le equidad, somos muy igual." Translation by author. Kevin. Interview.

⁶⁰ "Se sienten identificado con la obra y tratan de hacer conciencia a tener un cambio en su vida." Translation by author. Jorge. Interview.

from audience members that suggest that they identified with the piece, "I feel content because we do good work and the message arrives."⁶¹ Gerardo says that he will carry this motivation with him beyond the performance of this particular work. "It motivated me to continue making social change in the community," he says.⁶²

In addition to these specific civic development goals, the participants identify key life skills that they have gained through their participation in the group. Yeymi has experienced personal growth through her participation in the group; she notes that now, she is more responsible, more punctual, and has learned to control her stage fright.⁶³ The group has also developed skills in self-evaluation and planning for the future. "We have a meeting, after every performance, and we do an evaluation, what we didn't like, what didn't seem right, what can be improved for next time," explains Kevin.⁶⁴ In his leadership role, Gerardo says he's learned to take other opinions and suggestions into account when making decisions.⁶⁵ For many of the participants, Teatro Güegüjea has also become an important space to develop interpersonal relationships and socialize. "We've formed a second family," says Jorge. "We support each other."⁶⁶ These learnings transcend Rogers et. al's civic development outcomes, addressing many skills that Teatro Güegüjea members will use in different contexts throughout their lives.

⁶¹ "Me siento contenta porque el trabajo que hacemos es muy buena y llegan el mensaje." Translation by author. Yeymi. Interview.

⁶² "Me motivo para continuar hacer un cambio social en la comunidad." Translation by author. Gerardo. Interview.

⁶³ Yeymi. Interview.

⁶⁴ "Tenemos una reunión, después de cada presentación, hacemos una evaluación, que no nos gustó, que no nos pareció, se puede mejorar por el próximo." Translation by author. Kevin. Interview.

⁶⁵ Gerardo. Interview.

⁶⁶ "He logrado formar una segunda familia." "Nos apoyamos entre nosotros mismos." Translation by author. Jorge. Interview.

Gestoría - Eliminate the Basurero Project

The CANTERA *gestoría* group is a new expression that was formed towards the beginning of the 2014 calendar year. The group was born out of an initiative of CANTERA central, who asked each territory's coordinators to select a small group of highly involved youth from across expressions to attend a series of workshops with sociologist Roberto Stuart on themes related to political involvement and civic development. Eventually, the group subdivided into territory groups to begin brainstorming local problems that they could try to address in their communities. In Ciudad Sandino, the students chose to focus on eliminating the illegal trash dump, or basurero, located by CANTERA's east wall, near the preschool⁶⁷. Stuart remained involved in the beginning of the process, but the advising role had fallen to Sean by the project's end. Only some members of the original workshop group remained involved in the project, while other young people from different expressions became involved later in the process.⁶⁸

It seems important to take a moment to clarify what it means to be a *gestor* or *gestora*, since the term does not invite an easy English translation. When I asked the students involved in the basurero project how they would define *gestores*, I received a variety of explanations. According to Manuel, the *gestores* are "in charge of making alliances with institutions or individuals to coordinate more effectively and plan activities collaboratively to eradicate problems that affect the community." To be a *gestor*, he explains, implies certain qualities: "knows how to express him or herself, how to communicate a problem...someone that likes to connect with others."⁶⁹ For Lady, *gestoría* describes a specific process for addressing community

⁶⁷ Because the word "basurero" came to refer not only to the trash dump itself, but also to the entire project, I will continue to use the Spanish word throughout this section.

⁶⁸ Rawson, Sean. Informal interview.

⁶⁹ "encargado de hacer alianzas con instituciones o personas individuales para poder coordinarse de manera mas efica, y realizar actividades en una manera conjunta para poder eradicar ciertas

needs: "For a project that we're going to *gestionar*...we come together and brainstorm ideas...we choose a project, and we see the complications, the advantages and disadvantages, we make a map of actors, the people that are or aren't interested, look for alliances with institutions that have the problem in common."⁷⁰ Based on these descriptions, we will define CANTERA's group of *gestores* as youth leaders who aim to work with other community stakeholders to address community problems.

To address the illegal basurero, the group of *gestores* created an action plan that began with conducting interviews with different community members and institutions who were affected by the problem. They went to the city to search for information on who owned the land. After gathering the information they sought, they created an audiovisual presentation and presented it to the community members they had interviewed in order to contextualize the problem and gain support. Eventually, the city agreed to put up a sign to remind the people that throwing trash in that spot is a crime punishable by the law. The *gestores* also planned an event aimed at raising public consciousness about the illegal basurero and other environmental issues. The event, held on the morning of November 7th at CANTERA, featured the band from a local high school, a Gigantona, and an environmental play presented by CANTERA's children's theatre group, Caritas Pintadas. As part of the event, attendees helped finish an environmentally-themed mural on CANTERA's north wall by putting their painted handprints inside an outline of Ciudad Sandino as a commitment to help keep their municipality clean.

problemas que afectan a la comunidad." "Saber como expresarse, como comunicar un problema...alguien que le gusta relacionarse con lo demas personas." Translation by author. Manuel. Interview.

⁷⁰ "Tener un proyecto, un cual nosotros vamos a gestionar...venimos nosotros y hacemos un sinumero de ideas...cual es el tema de este proyecto, y lo elegimos, y vemos las complicaciones que hay, las ventajas y desventajas de esto, hacemos como un mapeo de actores, la gente que si o no están interesados, buscar alianza con instituciones, los que tienen el problema en común." Translation by author. Lady. Interview.

Civic Development Outcomes

The process of choosing which community issue to address gave the gestores the opportunity to think critically about how different problems affect the community. The group considered the illegal basurero, the poorly-lit park, and human trafficking as potential problems to address. Lady explains that the basurero project was chosen "because it affects the people who live on the side of CANTERA, and those in CANTERA, and especially the kids in Los Cumiches [CANTERA's preschool]. Because they're right next to it, and they had to smell this strong odor, dead dogs, it was horrible."⁷¹ The gestores identified the basurero not only as an inconvenience, but also as a potential health risk. "[The basurero] affects the kids, and us...we could get sick," explains Emmanuel.⁷² Joseling thought about the causes and effects of the different options to decide which was the most important. "We had to choose between CANTERA and the preschoolers, and the park," she explains. Ultimately, she explained, the health risks of the basurero were more pressing than the safety risks of the park. "If we begin with the park, we could be having fun, but be sick. But if we begin here we'll be healthy."⁷³ These comments display the students' abilities to analyze the root cause of problems, a transformative civic skill according to Rogers et. al's typology (quadrant 2).

The gestores also gained the participatory skills needed to gather, analyze, and report data (quadrant 1) - specifically, to gather qualitative information on how the basurero affects different community members and to present it in a compelling way to make their case to the city.

⁷¹ "Uno, porque nos afectaba tanto la gente que vive al lado de CANTERA, y ellos en CANTERA, y principalmente los niños en Los Cumiches. Porque están al lado y sentían un odor bien fuerte, perros muertos...eso era horrible." Translation by author. Lady. Interview.

⁷² "...afecta a los niños, y afecta a nosotros...nos enferma." Translation by author. Emmanuel. Interview.

⁷³ "Tenemos que escoger entre CANTERA y los preescolares o escoger el parque" "Si empezamos por el parque, hubieramos estado diviertendonos, pero enfermo. mientras, empezamos aquí podemos estar sano." Translation by author. Joseling. Interview.

According to Manuel, the group conducted interviews with such diverse stakeholders as CANTERA administrators, the preschool staff, the security guards, citizens who live nearby, the nearby high school, and the Mormon church. "[We asked] what they think of the problem, how it affects them, who is causing the problem, and what they recommend to us for solving it," he explains.⁷⁴ Joseling and Lady went to the city government to find a different set of information. "We asked first what are the laws about the environment that protect us. We went to investigate who are the owners of the land," Joseling explains. "[We asked] if they could tell us which articles would help us about the environment the right to live in a healthy environment."⁷⁵ The group also took photographs to document the growth of the basurero and used them to create an audiovisual project that they shared with other community members at a forum. Engaging in these processes gave the youth important experience in participatory research (quadrant 1) and in interacting with civic leaders to present their findings (quadrant 3). "I grew personally, in knowing how to interact with institutions of the state," explains Manuel.⁷⁶

Learning about the experiences of the neighbors and preschoolers affected by the problem helped the gestores stand in solidarity with others affected by the problem (quadrant 4). Kevin notes that they were able to gain support for the project because "it wasn't something that only affected us - it had an effect on everyone."⁷⁷ The call to serve others was part of what drew Joseling to the project. "I don't like to just think about myself, I also like to think about others

⁷⁴ "Que piensan en el problema, como lo afectaba, quienes estan provocando el problema, y que nos recomendaria para solucionarlo." Translation by author. Manuel. Interview.

⁷⁵ "Preguntamos primeramente cuales son las leyes que nos protegen sobre el medio ambiente. fuimos a investigar quienes son los dueños de este terreno." "Si nos dijeron ciertos articulos que nos podían ayudar sobre el medio ambiente y el derecho vivir en un medio sano." Translation by author. Joseling. Interview.

⁷⁶ "Me fortalecí personalmente, en conocimiento de como relacionarme con institutos del estado." Translation by author. Manuel. Interview.

⁷⁷ "No es algo que solo afecta a nosotros - tiene un efecto en todos." Translation by author. Kevin. Interview.

more," she explains. "I knew how this was going to affect the preschool."⁷⁸ When asked what he learned from the project, Manuel pointed to his deepened understanding of the perspectives of others affected by the problem. Everyone had different recommendations, he explains, but he learned that "we all were affected in the same way...when we have an illegal basurero, it affects everyone in the same way."⁷⁹ This ability to empathize with others who are oppressed is a key transformational outcome in the development of young people's civic identities.

Several of the gestores identified challenges in the process of working with the city, and their comments reveal a strong awareness of the imbalances of power that limit youth's ability to participate in civic life (quadrant 2). "We didn't get answers from the city government," explains Emmanuel. "The only answer they gave was, 'yes, we're going to support you.' And because they saw that young people were working on the project...it wasn't of high importance."⁸⁰ Lady learned that in her community, "there is a lot of adultism."⁸¹ By developing this critical awareness of the way in which they were discriminated against as they tried to make their voices heard, the gestores learned to recognize the specific ways in which the government withheld information from them. "There is a lot of bureaucracy," explains Lady. "At the city, [they said], 'oh, go to Catastrophes,' 'no, to Environment.' They sent us flying."⁸² Joseling confirms that "at

⁷⁸ "Yo no pienso en mi misma, también me gusta pensar en otros más...Sé como lo va a afectar el preescolar." Translation by author. Joseling. Interview.

⁷⁹ "Pero todos están afectado en la misma manera...cuando tenemos un basurero ilegal, afecta a todos y todas en la misma manera." Translation by author. Manuel. Interview.

⁸⁰ "Pero nunca nos dieron una respuesta, la respuesta que solo nos dieron era, 'si lo vamos a apoyar. Y a veces porque miran jóvenes que están trabando en el proyecto..no era de alta importancia." Translation by author. Emmanuel. Interview.

⁸¹ "Hay bastante adultismo." Translation by author. Lady. Interview.

⁸² "Y mucha burocracia. Demasiado burocracia. Porque a la alcaldía, oh, vayan al catastro, no a medio ambiente, nos mandan voliendo." Translation by author. Lady. Interview.

the city, they couldn't give us much information...supposedly it was a way of protecting us."⁸³

Her 'supposedly' hints at the critical lens that she and her peers are developing towards powerful institutions in their community, a lens which will both teach them how to interact with their city government and motivate them to continue doing so.

After achieving the twin victories of installing a sign on the basurero and holding a successful awareness event, the gestores were able to envision themselves as change agents in the community (quadrant 4). Lady describes, "the satisfaction of knowing what we reached, knowing what we did, that this was our project as youth...a joy to know that we eradicated it."⁸⁴ Emmanuel indicated that he and his peers have developed a sense of citizen responsibility that motivates them to work on this type of project. "We have this great anxiety [about the basurero]," he explains, "and we wanted to do something for our community, and so we threw ourselves into this serious plan to help, a lot of work."⁸⁵ The group's success had an emotional impact on the young people involved. "I feel happy that I could help the community," explains Manuel. "What a feeling...being organized with other young people to protect an important resource."⁸⁶ This event had a transformative impact on the gestores civic identities by allowing them to see themselves as community leaders and celebrate the fruits of their labors.

The gestores will carry this sense of personal change agency forward as they use what they learned from this project to enact greater change in the future. When asked about the future

⁸³ "En el alcaldia no pueden nos dar mucha información. Supuestamente son una manera de asegurarnos." Translation by author. Joseling. Interview.

⁸⁴ "satisfaccion, de saber que logramos, saber que hicimos, que este fue un proyecto de nosotros como jovenes...Una alegria de saber que lo eradicamos." Translation by author. Lady. Interview.

⁸⁵ "Tenemos esta gran ansiedad, de querer hacer algo por nuestra comunidad. Nos pusimos un plan serio a ayudar, trabajar bastante." Translation by author. Emmanuel. Interview.

⁸⁶ "Me siento contento que podía ayudar la comunidad y el medio ambiente como recurso." "Que siento, organizarme con mas jovenes para proteger un recurso importante." Translation by author. Manuel. Interview.

of the gestores, Manuel says, "I imagine that the group will follow the same process, that's to say, we'll meet...first, to evaluate the activities that we've done, what we can do to strengthen what we have achieved, and after a brainstorm for a new subject to tackle."⁸⁷ In this way, the gestores are developing a tool kit for social change which they will continue to employ and modify as they work towards other changes in the community. "We're always continuing with bigger projects," explains Lady. "This was big for us, but we'll do something bigger." She also believes that the group has a responsibility to teach what they've learned to younger people to ensure that the process continues. "We're going to see new generations, teach them what we've experienced ...we're going to make an example for the kids that come."⁸⁸ In this way, the gestores imagine that the social change processes they've learned will outlast even their own participation in CANTERA and build a foundation of youth participation in Ciudad Sandino's civic life.

⁸⁷ "Me imagino que el grupo seguirá el mismo proceso, es decir, nos reuniremos... principalmente, para evaluar que actividades hemos hecho, y que podemos hacer para fortalecer que hemos logrado, y despues un lluvia de ideas por en tema para realizar." Translation by author. Manuel. Interview.

⁸⁸ "Siempre sigamos proyectos más grandes que eso. Esto era un proyecto grande para nosotros, pero esperamos algo más." "Vamos a ver generaciones, y vamos a enseñar que recibimos...vamos a hacer un ejemplo de los niños que vengan." Translation by author. Lady. Interview.

"A Light in the Darkness": The Power of CANTERA as an Integrated Space

While these individual projects provide important case studies into how CANTERA's programming promotes civic development, it would be a mistake to think that the power of CANTERA lies solely in its programs. CANTERA is more than a collection of distinct sociocultural and educational programs, but rather, an integrated space whose youth focus and multipurpose nature promote civic development in its participants. Gemma notes that as CANTERA's physical space has improved, so have the opportunities it provides. When I asked her what has changed at CANTERA since she was a youth participant, she answered, "the infrastructure...they added the preschool, storage, the terrace...more opportunities emerged for youth and children because we had our own space."⁸⁹ The current generation of CANTERA-involved young people recognize the power that this space gives them. Jorge describes CANTERA as "a space where one can grow as a young person, learn new things, have new experiences."⁹⁰ The space itself holds an appeal for young people in the community who are not otherwise involved in CANTERA's programs. When Gioh and the other break dancers began meeting regularly as a group, he says, they were practicing in parks and houses. When they performed at a town event that also featured a CANTERA dance group, they started enquiring about where the group practiced. Sean gave them permission to use CANTERA as a rehearsal space, and they have now been holding practices there twice weekly for a year. Having their own space, he says, has helped strengthen the group. "We've developed more, advanced well. We have a permanent space now, and before we didn't." Their use of CANTERA's space has also

⁸⁹ "Su infraestructura..el preescolar, hicieron la bodega, la cafetin...surgieron más oportunidades para jóvenes y niños porque teníamos nuestro propio espacio." Translation by author. Gemma. Interview.

⁹⁰ "..un espacio donde uno se forma como joven, aprende muchas cosas, tiene nuevas experiencias." Translation by author. Jorge. Interview.

given them the opportunity to interact with the young people involved in other CANTERA groups. "We've met more people...developed friendships with the other groups," he explains.⁹¹ CANTERA pulls previously uninvolved youth from the community in through the appeal of a space they can make their own. "[CANTERA is] a light in the darkness," says Priscilla. "It's a refuge."⁹²

Many CANTERA-involved youth do seem to take refuge in its space, as they admit that they would rather spend time at CANTERA than in their homes. "It's a relief here, a relief to be out of my house," admits Joseling. She explained how her parents' separation caused tension between her and her siblings. "For me it's a relief, and at the same time a place to get advice."⁹³ Emmanuel, too, relies on CANTERA as a space away from home, even outside of scheduled programming. "As a university student, I think I study here more than at my house," he explains. "In my house I always have to do things, or my siblings are listening to loud music...so I come here at five or six to do my work, when it's a little calmer at the center, and it helps me concentrate."⁹⁴ Manuel notes that this space is an important alternative to gangs, which often appeal to young people who are looking for spaces outside their homes. Many of the youth involved in Ciudad Sandino's gangs, he notes, "have problems in their homes...they have

⁹¹ "Nos hemos estado formado más, avanzando más bueno. Tenemos un lugar fijo y grande, y antes no lo tenía." "Nos conocimos más gente...haciendo más amistades con los otros grupos." Translation by author. Gioh. CANTERA-involved youth. Interview re: youth participation in CANTERA. November 25, 2014. CANTERA, Ciudad Sandino.

⁹² "Una luz en la oscuridad...un refugio." Translation by author. Priscilla. CANTERA-involved youth. Interview re: youth participation in CANTERA. November 27, 2014. CANTERA, Ciudad Sandino.

⁹³ "Para mi, es un consuelo aquí, un tranquilidad estar alrededor de mi casa." "Para mi es un consuelo y el mismo es un lugar para me aconseje." Translation by author. Joseling. Interview.

⁹⁴ "Yo, como universitario, siento que estudio más acá que en mi hogar. Porque en la casa, uno tiene que estar haciendo las cosas, y mis hermanos les gusta escuchar a músico alto...vengo a las cinco o seis, hacer mi trabajo, la hora más tranquilo en el centro, me ayuda concentrar aquí." Translation by author. Emmanuel. Interview.

problems, and they need to be heard, and they get into this space. While organized youth, those involved in youth movements like here at CANTERA, are equally here to be listened to, but also to address problems in society."⁹⁵ The space's appeal, though, is much simpler. "We feel good here," says Emmanuel.⁹⁶ "I like being here," Manuel admits. "Even when I have other priorities, I'm always supporting CANTERA in my free time."⁹⁷

Yet the young people who find themselves drawn to CANTERA for one reason often find themselves involved in ways they never anticipated. "[CANTERA] is attractive because of its cultural expressions," says Emmanuel, referring to the dance, theatre, and karate groups that boast a strong appeal for young people.⁹⁸ Yet these activities are often a pathway to deeper involvement in CANTERA's more leadership-focused groups. When Lady first started coming to CANTERA as an eight-year-old, she explains, "I was never interested in facilitation or *gestoría*, because it never even crossed my mind. I just liked dance. But her involvement in dance soon led to involvement in other expressions. "Then the coordinators invited us to a workshop...the kids that were facilitating, I liked the vibe, and now I've been in the facilitation group for two years." She believes that her experience is typical in this sense. "One never starts out interested in an educational space, one always starts in a cultural space, or with sports, then gets involved in something more."⁹⁹ Manuel echoes this experience. After joining the group of communicators,

⁹⁵ "...tienen algun tipo de problema en su casa."Tiene problemas y necesitan estar escuchados, y se meta en este espacio. Mientras jovenes organizados, meta a movimientos juveniles como aqui en cantera, para igual ser escuchado, pero afectar a los problemas en la sociedad." Translation by author. Manuel. Interview.

⁹⁶ "Nos sentimos bien estando acá." Translation by author. Emmanuel. Interview.

⁹⁷ "Me gusta estar aqui, aunque tengo otras prioridades más adelante, siempre hacer esta tarea de apoyar el movimiento en el tiempo disponible." Translation by author. Manuel. Interview.

⁹⁸ "...es atractiva porque de las expresiones culturales." Translation by author. Emmanuel. Interview.

⁹⁹ "Nunca me interese *facilitación* y *gestoría* porque no me pasa por la mente...porque me gusta danza. Los coordinadores nos dicen, mira, les invitamos a un taller...los chicos que estaban

he explains, "little by little I got more involved."¹⁰⁰ The continued involvement of Joseling and Gerardo, both of whom graduated from CANTERA's preschool, certainly speaks to the way that young people who enter the space through one particular program end up staying for many more.

I have observed the way in which youth from one expression get pulled into other CANTERA activities. In my first week of observation, I sat in on an English class, composed mostly of students who are not currently involved in other expressions. Towards the end of the class, Sean came over to ask if any of them were willing to come early the next morning to help set up the basurero community event that the gestores were in charge of. Several of the students willingly volunteered.¹⁰¹ Participation in one activity often leads to opportunities to participate in something new, allowing youth to become more deeply engaged with the organization and collaborate with their peers across expression groups. In a meeting with evaluators from an outside organization, Gerardo described how the different expressions are able to use their individual strengths to provide integrated programming - for instance, the theatre group presenting a production, then the facilitation group leading a discussion. "We're a single cord, a single thread," he explained.¹⁰²

CANTERA Camp as a Catalyst for Increased Participation

CANTERA's Youth Camp provides a particularly unique space to foster collaboration between CANTERA youth involved in different expressions and in different territories. All year

facilitando, me gustó la honda, y ya tengo dos años de facilitación." "Una nunca comienza interesado por un espacio educativo, siempre comienza por un espacio cultural, deportivo, recreativo, despues se integran en algo más." Translation by author. Lady. Interview.

¹⁰⁰ "Poco a poco me fui integrando." Translation by author. Manuel. Interview.

¹⁰¹ Participant Observation. English class. CANTERA, Ciudad Sandino. November 6, 2014.

¹⁰² Participant Observation. Meeting with AWO evaluators. CANTERA, Ciudad Sandino. November 28, 2014.

we're planting seeds, Lucy explained to me, and at camp they all bloom.¹⁰³ The camp has been an annual event since 2011, and the youth coordinators from each of CANTERA's four territories selected up to fifty of the most involved youth from their territory to attend. Youth promoters from within CANTERA's rural development program, which does not include an integral youth program, were also in attendance. This year's camp was held from November 21-23 at the Young Life campsite in Jinotega. The camp's programming, much of which was based largely on the Juntos/as Comprometidos/as por la Equidad campaign, provided attendees with the opportunity to discuss and reflect upon their work in their organizations, showcase their accomplishments, and socialize with peers from other territories. Ciudad Sandino brought the biggest group of any territory, about 45 youth from ages 13-28 from across the different cultural expressions.

All of the groups met in the camp's gymnasium for the opening activity, a series of ice breakers that provided opportunities to dance and move around, meet new people, and share expectations for the days to come. An enthusiastic master of ceremonies raised the energy level with frequent chants of "who is this camp for?" which the crowd answered, "us!"¹⁰⁴ The afternoon continued with a screening of a film, *Real Women Have Curves*, which follows a young female protagonist as she comes into conflict with her mother over the daughter's body image, personal life, and university aspirations. Afterwards, a sociologist gave a presentation on the state of youth in Nicaragua, with an emphasis on education, migration, employment, and organization. After dinner, each territory's theatre group presented a play with social themes.¹⁰⁵ Day two began with more ice breakers, including a "pass the line" activity in which facilitators

¹⁰³ Medina, Lucy. Territory Coordinator of Youth Programming. Informal Interview re: Youth Camp. November 12, 2014. CANTERA office.

¹⁰⁴ "de quién es este campamento?" "nosotros!" Translation by author. Participant observation, Youth Camp Day 1.

¹⁰⁵ Participant observation, Youth Camp Day 1.

read first-person statements and the participants were asked to move across the room if the statement applied to them. Statements focused on issues of inequality and discrimination, and asked participants to identify as both recipients of and perpetrators of discrimination. Afterwards, participants were divided into groups based on gender and age to discuss gender and generational inequalities. In the afternoon, participants had the opportunity to participate in outdoor activities like zip line, rock climbing, and a labyrinth. The day ended with a dance festival featuring groups from each territory, followed by a dance party in the gymnasium.¹⁰⁶ The final day of camp opened with more ice breakers and warm up activities, followed by the opportunity for representatives from the previous day's gender equity discussions to report to the group on their discussions. Next, participants met in territory groups to discuss ways of fostering more collaborating between youth from different territories, then presented their ideas to the group at large through creative skits. A final meeting in the auditorium included announcements and acknowledgements, plus closing remarks from Linda Nuñez, before the participants and staff boarded buses back to Managua.¹⁰⁷

In typical CANTERA fashion, camp provided both a distinct recreational appeal and an educational opportunity for campers. Manuel was excited to attend for the first time this year, he says, "to spend time and have fun, but mainly to share with other territories and strengthen yourself as a general movement between territories."¹⁰⁸ For Priscilla, camp provided both an opportunity to visit a new part of the country and to interact with new people: "I wanted to share

¹⁰⁶ Participant Observation. Youth Camp Day 2. Young Life Camp, Jinotega. November 22, 2014.

¹⁰⁷ Participant Observation. Youth Camp Day 3. Young Life Camp, Jinotega. November 23, 2014.

¹⁰⁸ "...para pasar el tiempo y recrearse, pero principalmente para compartir con los otros territorios, y fortalecernos como movimiento general entre los territorios." Translation by author. Manuel. Interview.

thoughts and ideas with others, and get to know the kids from other territories, how they think, how we can work together."¹⁰⁹ Camp provided an opportunity for the youth of CANTERA in Ciudad Sandino to put their work in a larger context and imagine themselves as part of a larger network of organized young people.

A couple of specific activities were particularly effective in allowing participants to share their personal experiences with inequality and envision ways to work towards a more equal society on the individual, organizational, and social levels. In the pass the line activity, participants were invited to consider their own roles in situations that represented imbalances of power, both as victims of discrimination and as perpetrators of inequality. Instructions that asked participants to pass the line if someone had told them their ideas were wrong because they were younger allowed campers to identify the social dynamics that affect their own community participation and build a sense of solidarity with their peers who face similar forms of discrimination. Instructions that asked participants to pass the line if they had yelled at someone who had less power than them obligated campers to think about their own participation in creating discriminatory situations. In a discussion after the activity, a camper reflected on the cyclical relationship between the two types of statements, calling on her peers to reflect on the fact that they admitted to perpetuating the same inequalities they themselves suffered.¹¹⁰ Lady identified this as one of the most important activities at camp. She recalled a statement that she felt guilty about admitting to: "I didn't want to say...but there were so many people going to the other side, that it wasn't important. I could share my thoughts, so I went to the other side. We

¹⁰⁹ "...porque queria compartir el pensamiento, las ideas con los/las demas, porque quería conocer a los/las jovenes de los otros territorios, como piensan, de que manera podiamos integrar."

Translation by author. Priscilla. Interview.

¹¹⁰ Participant observation, Youth Camp Day 2.

could open up and share freely."¹¹¹ This activity allowed campers to think about how they experience and perpetuate inequality on the individual level and how their individual actions affect others.

The group discussions on inequalities gave campers the opportunity to delve more deeply into their own personal experiences and envision themselves as change agents on different levels. In the twenty-and-over female discussion group that I participated in, a variety of stories were shared about discrimination within the home and the wider community: one woman's family did not show interest in her organizing work, while another did not get a job because of the way she dressed, and a third reported being assaulted while leaving work at night.¹¹² The group members' shared age and gender identification permitted a unique level of solidarity based on shared social identities. Participants began their comments with phrases like "we, as mothers" and "we, the working women," which suggests a strong awareness of how social identities frame their experiences and provide the opportunity to organize for greater social voice. Priscilla identified this as the most important activity of the weekend. "This space was great for me because I could identify with all the girls, with how they lived," she explains.¹¹³ At the end of the discussion, the group subdivided into smaller work groups to brainstorm ways that participants could work towards equality as individual change agents and as members of organizations. Priscilla identified this opportunity to envision "in what way we, who are organized with CANTERA,

¹¹¹ "Yo no queria decir. Pero haber tantos personas que van por el otro lado, no me important, para compartir mis sentimientos, so yo voy tambien. Podemos abrir y compartirnos libremente." Translation by author. Lady. Interview.

¹¹² Participant Observation, Youth Camp Day 2.

¹¹³ "Este espacio fue bonito para mi porque podia identificar con todas las muchachas, de como se vivia." Translation by author. Priscilla. Interview.

how we can support, how we are be different" as a key learning moment in her camp experience.¹¹⁴

Camp appears to have made a particularly strong impact on Gioh and Priscilla, both of whom are currently involved in only one expression and attended camp for the first time this year. For Gioh, camp provided an important opportunity to become more connected to other youth who are more deeply involved in CANTERA's programming. "Before, I didn't have much communication with the other youth here," he says. "This camp helped me to reflect and talk with more people."¹¹⁵ Priscilla hopes to use her camp experience as a jumping off point towards deeper involvement: "I feel more involved, more committed to equity and above all to put into practice all that CANTERA has taught me."¹¹⁶

Transforming Ourselves and Our World: Personal Development, Community Impact

The bulk of this paper has focused on personal development outcomes reached through participation in CANTERA's programming. Members of CANTERA's staff articulate the personal development aspect of CANTERA's programming as an important step in the broader community development that the organization aims to promote. According to Lucy, while CANTERA aims to do work in the community, it first recognizes that the citizens it serves first need to put effort into themselves.¹¹⁷ Linda Nuñez echoed this idea in her closing remarks at camp when she said, "We're not just going out and mobilizing people...we want a transformation

¹¹⁴ "...en que manera, nosotros organizadas como CANTERA, podemos ayudar, como nosotros eramos diferentes." Translation by author. Priscilla. Interview.

¹¹⁵ "No tenía mucha comunicación, con los demás, con jóvenes de aquí, y este campamento me ayudó a reflexionar, pues, hablar con más personas." Translation by author. Gioh. Interview.

¹¹⁶ "Porque me siento mas involucrada, mas comprometida, mas comprometida a la equidad y sobre toda poner en practica todo que me enseñe CANTERA, ponerla en practica." Translation by author. Priscilla. Interview.

¹¹⁷ Lucy. Interview.

from inside."¹¹⁸ Yet CANTERA's mission statement explicitly states that its goal is not only to capacitate individuals, but also to achieve a more just society. So what impact does youth participation in CANTERA have on the wider community?

While it is easy to glean the impacts of CANTERA programming on young people's personal development from interviews from the young people themselves, it is somewhat more difficult to determine how their involvement impacts the wider community. Indeed, in the field of youth development research, the impact of youth involvement on the wider community tends to be under-investigated compared to the impact of youth involvement on personal development. In "A Social Justice Perspective on Youth and Community Development: Theorizing the Process and Outcomes of Participation," the author writes that though many youth organizing programs include a rhetoric that emphasizes community-oriented outcomes, the research tends to focus only on benefits to youth's personal development.¹¹⁹ It is beyond the scope of this project to do a well-rounded analysis of CANTERA youths' impact on the community, which would necessitate interviews with other community stakeholders outside of CANTERA itself. However, many interviewees were able to articulate how they perceive their involvement and that of their peers is transforming Ciudad Sandino on multiple levels.

For Priscilla, who credits the workshops she attended as a child at CANTERA with influencing her decision to finish university before having a child, her participation as a student in English class is not the end goal of her involvement. "I would like to support CANTERA, receive workshops and give them to other people, impart what I know to others," she says. "Yes I

¹¹⁸ Participant Observation, Youth Camp Day 3.

¹¹⁹ Sutton, Sharon Egretta. 2007. "A Social Justice Perspective on Youth and Community Development: Theorizing the Processes and Outcomes of Participation." *Children, Youth and Environments* 17, p. 638.

want to learn, but I also want to help the community. I'm not here only to listen, but also to help others."¹²⁰ She is excited to put what she learned at camp into practice not only for herself, but also "for my daughter, for my family, for my friends."¹²¹ Priscilla envisions her participation as actively influencing her community on the micro-level within her intimate circles.

For Gemma, who has now seen her generation of CANTERA-involved youth grow into adults, the impacts of their CANTERA experiences are reaching the community on a more macro-level. "Many kids from my generation are now professionals at the heads of other institutions [like CANTERA]. They have a lot of experience working with kids and youth," she explains. "What we want is for them to form on a personal level, learn how to express themselves...learning that they're important and can support change...and I lived it, and I see it in many people who are leaders."¹²² By providing experience that prepares youth for careers in community organizations, CANTERA strengthens the formal mechanisms that work towards greater social impact. Gemma herself is as an example of this, as her upbringing in CANTERA led directly to her role as Supervisor of Sociocultural programs today, in which she is continuing the cycle of capacitating youth for community impact.

But as the youth at CANTERA were always quick to inform me, it would be a mistake to focus on their potential to be leaders in the future without recognizing their powers as leaders today. Joseling notes that CANTERA works to involve youth in aspects of community life beyond the organization itself. In my time at CANTERA, I often witnessed staff members invite

¹²⁰ "Yo tenía ganas también de aportar de CANTERA, recibir talleres y irlos a otras personas, impartir que yo sé a los demás." Translation by author. Priscilla. Interview.

¹²¹ "Para mi hija, para mi familia, para mis amigos." Translation by author. Priscilla. Interview.

¹²² "Muchos chavallos de mi generación ahora son personas profesionales que están el frente de otras instituciones. Tienen mucha experiencia con el trabajo de niñez y juventud." 43:20 "Esto es que queremos, que los chavallos se forman más en el nivel personal, de como poder expresarse...de que vos sos importante y puede aportar a un cambio...Yo lo viví, y conocido muchas personas que son líderes." Translation by author. Gemma. Interview.

youth to events hosted by outside institutions that would give them alternative opportunities for community participation. Through these collaborative opportunities, CANTERA provides a context that allows youth to recognize the importance of working together for collective impact within their community. Manuel recognizes this as a primary reason for his involvement. "I have become stronger individually and also collectively, because to be involved and relate with more young people, I feel that together we can make a bigger change," he says. "It's difficult to do it alone."¹²³ By enhancing youth's recognition of the importance of collective change making, and providing them with a space to practice it, CANTERA equips the community at large with a potent human resource.

These mobilizing opportunities are helping CANTERA youth change the misperceptions of young people that they face within Ciudad Sandino. Kevin notes that opportunities to perform as Teatro Güegüjea in the community have helped its members present young people in a positive light: "When they see us acting, they always reflect, 'they're organized youth, they're making the most of their space.'"¹²⁴ CANTERA has provided its youth with important recognition in the community that they don't receive otherwise. "People in Ciudad Sandino recognize [us], 'look, it's the kids from CANTERA,'" explains Emmanuel. "They like our work, they like to watch us dance and act...they ask for our plays, they ask when we're going to present in the community."¹²⁵ Jorge confirms that CANTERA youth are breaking prevailing stereotypes about youth behavior. "There are comments from many people, like, kids, they're out

¹²³ "He fortalecido personalmente como colectivamente, porque estar involucrado y relacionar con mas jovenes, siento que juntos y juntas podemos hacer un cambio más profundo. Es difícil hacerlo en una manera individual." Translation by author. Manuel. Interview.

¹²⁴ "Siempre cuando nos ven actuar, se quedan reflexionando, son jovenes organizados, aprovechan su espacio." Translation by author. Kevin. Interview.

¹²⁵ "Ellos siempre dicen, 'Mira, los muchachos de CANTERA,'...Le gusta nuestro trabajo. Le gusta mirarnos bailar y actuar...todo el mundo pregunta por nuestras obras, que cuando vamos a presentar algo comunitario." Translation by author. Emmanuel. Interview.

in the street loitering...but now we're out doing workshops, giving information, and it has changed peoples' ways of thinking," he says. "The change hasn't been so much, but you can see a change in the community."¹²⁶ Lady, too, recognizes this change as a larger impact of the basurero project. "It will make an impact on the population, because for them, [they think] 'wow, those young people, how great, they took initiative,'" she explains. "Now they know that we can do big things."¹²⁷ Seeing as nearly every person I interviewed said that young people face discrimination and lack of recognition within the community, this positive spotlight on youth participation seems to be going a long way towards changing the prevailing perceptions of youth in Ciudad Sandino and promoting a more equitable society overall.

Conclusion

My research found that CANTERA is distinctly effective in enhancing the personal civic development of the youth who participate in its programming. I found that CANTERA's individual youth programs, particularly the theatre and gestores groups, give youth the opportunity to develop community impact skills and see themselves as change agents in their community. I also found that the power of CANTERA in driving this individual development is greater than the sum of its individual programs, as the organization itself provides a space for young people to discover the intersections between their different involvements and to develop further motivation to make change in their community. I found that this personal development is viewed as part of the community development process, as it capacitates leaders to work towards social change on a micro-level within their homes and on a macro-level within their

¹²⁶ "Hay comentarios de muchas personas de que los chavallos caminan en la calle, son vagos...y ahora caminando talleres, capacitaciones, brindando información, la gente ya cambia su forma de pensar. El cambio ha sido no tanto, pero si se ve un cambio.

¹²⁷ "Será un impacto para la población, porque para ellos, "wow, estos jovenes, que bueno, tomaron la iniciativa," es un impacto para ellos saber que nosotros podemos hacer grandes cosas." Translation by author. Lady. Interview.

communities. I also found that CANTERA's youth participation is changing the perception of young people in Ciudad Sandino and is helping build a more equal society where citizens of all ages are recognized for their social value. I was able to learn all this because I was fortunate enough to have enough time to really understand and experience CANTERA's programming on a day-to-day basis. I saw what happened during its programming and, perhaps more importantly, what happened during its non-programmed moments. And I developed relationships with the young people, who shared openly and honestly with me about their participation, their lives, and their community.

Most evaluators of CANTERA's work do not have this luxury of time, nor the opportunity or inclination to develop a nuanced understanding of the community. In my time at CANTERA, I learned about the many organizational pressures that the institution faces in order to receive enough funding to remain in operation. At nearly every CANTERA meeting or event, lists are passed around that ask participants to provide their name, ages, and other identifying details. According to Rose, these registries have become a necessary measure as funding organizations have begun to ask for more data on CANTERA's impact.¹²⁸ This quantitative evaluative trend is problematic as a measure of CANTERA's community impact. One need not spend a month in the space to realize that the kind of transformations happening there cannot possibly be quantified, particularly not in numbers of attendees.

Even when evaluators do come looking for qualitative data, they are usually limited by the brevity of their visits and their distance from the organization's cultural context. On my final full day of observation, I sat in on a meeting in which evaluators from an organization that provides funds for CANTERA came to evaluate the impact of CANTERA's programming.

¹²⁸ Costello, Rose. Jesuit Volunteer. Informal Interview re: other NGOs. November 6, 2014. CANTERA, Ciudad Sandino.

CANTERA youth presented *Los Caminos de La Vida* before answering the evaluators' questions about their participation and the impact of CANTERA on their lives.¹²⁹ While the evaluators asked many questions similar to those I had asked in my interviews, I could not help but feel that their lack of familiarity with the young people and their experiences, as well as the age divide between the older adult evaluators and the youth they were evaluating, made it unlikely that they could truly understand the impact that CANTERA has on these young people's lives. The impossibility of the evaluative task is problematic in a nonprofit atmosphere in which, according to Rose, "organizations give CANTERA money, but they always pay close attention," sometimes by designing the programs that they want to see implemented.¹³⁰ For donors and foundations to stipulate that their money be used in certain ways creates the risk that new programs will be incompatible with CANTERA's cultural context. Much of CANTERA's power lies in its Popular Education rhetoric, with a vocabulary that emphasizes on "protagonismo" (being a protagonist), "concientización" (consciousness-raising), and other difficult-to-translate terms, and on the loose leadership structure of its youth programs, which Lucy says that outside organizations often struggle to understand.¹³¹ It would be difficult for outside observers to recognize how these cultural distinctions strengthen CANTERA's programming without spending a significant portion of time observing what happens at CANTERA on a daily basis and listening to the people who have built their lives there. I hope that this document can serve to highlight the impact of CANTERA on its youth participants and on the community at large from the lens of a compassionate observer who had the great fortune of spending an extended period of time gaining a deep understanding of how the organization and its programs operate.

¹²⁹ Participant Observation, Meeting with AWO evaluators.

¹³⁰ Costello, Informal Interview.

¹³¹ Medina, Interview.

Further research is needed to truly understand the impact that these youth programs are having on the wider community and the levels of social change that CANTERA youth are helping achieve. It would be a mistake, however, to focus only on their leadership potential. As they reminded me time after time, CANTERA's youth are not the future of Ciudad Sandino, but rather, its present, and they are providing their community with a gift that goes yet unmeasured.

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