An Appeal for Designing Safe, Progressive, and Transformative Schools

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Within this issue of *Children, Youth and Environments*, Markowska-Manista's review of Jessica Taft's book, *The Kids Are in Charge: Activism and Power in Peru's Movement of Working Children* underscores the existing inequalities between adults and children, and praises the book's focus on children's agency in social, economic and political life. Conversely, Breckin points out the lack of research on the frightening plight of youth and often young children in his position paper entitled "*Los Halcones*: The Forgotten Children in Mexico's Organized Crime Conflict." Research articles included in this issue examine children's connections to informal learning spaces such as museums (Kalessopoulou) and nature (Hinds and O'Malley). Additionally, Volpe, Derr, and Kim describe the benefits of nature schools and the assessment methods that led to their study's findings. Sweeney and Gray investigated the impacts on youths' leisure time in online schools versus a brick-and-mortar school. Bicycling serves as a worldwide activity for leisure or transportation, but Whelan, HubkaRao, Winters, Teschke, Stang, Freedman,Macpherson, Howard, Fuselli, and Hagel present research on how the environment faced by child bicyclists elicits their fears and may lead to injury. This, in turn, influences their bicycling experiences. Finally, Ataol, Krishnamurthy, and van Wesemael point out that children's rights to participate, survive and to be protected may hinge on the built environments in which they live—specifically those created with children's input. In summary, these CYE articles highlight how environments can be transformational when care and attention is given to supporting children's agency and capabilities. Yet, we are also made aware of how children and youth face dangers far beyond acceptable risks within the built environments in which they live, learn, and play. Thus, we would like to again call for research on school safety, particularly into how a school's built environment might be designed to mitigate the need for many of the drastic and fearful measures that are currently being employed to keep children and youth safe.

More specifically, as this issue goes to publication, the USA is grief-stricken over its 22nd school shooting this year—two more of our nation's youth have died at the hands of a teenage gunman. Although not a common occurrence, these acts of gun violence are tragic reminders of how vulnerable our children and youth are in learning spaces that should be safe and worry-free. The complexity of these extreme events goes beyond bullying, mental health issues, and weaponry—all very significant social issues that demand resolutions and action. The most common response across the nation thus far, however, is to enact active shooter and lockdown drills in schools that may exacerbate unwanted fears and further impact students' learning. The *Los Angeles Times* highlighted comments from students at Saugus High School—the site of the most recent school shooting—that clearly communicated the effective manner in which their teachers responded to the crisis as it happened as well as their fears, trauma, and concerns about the world in which they live (Fry et al., 2019). It makes us wonder if it is possible to create school campuses that are safe, progressive, and transformative. Thus, we are reaching out to our readers to ask the question: how might these issues be addressed through intentional design of the built environment?

We looked at some of the innovative projects that have recently been in the USA news and call for international recommendations for safe learning spaces for our children and youth, particularly those that respect their developmental understandings, capabilities, and agency. Building a school that evokes feelings of "openness and access while providing constant connection and subtle levels of security" served as a primary design principle for Sandy Hook Elementary School. This school re-opened in 2016 after the unfathomable and heartbreaking December 14, 2012 school shooting tragedy that took the lives of 20 six- and seven-year-old children plus six adults in Newton, Connecticut (Sisson, 2018). The school design was the first to comply with Connecticut's School Safety Infrastructure Guidelines (Connecticut Department of Administrative Services, 2015). More recently, the renovation of Michigan's Fruitport High School, scheduled to open in 2021, has employed controversial design strategies such as curved walls and shadow zones to make the environment secure, but not prison-like, by using the *Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design Guidelines* (Franklin, 2019; Ruiz, 2018). As Ruiz (2019) points out, safe school design is a new architectural dilemma.

Moreover, children, teachers, school staff, and families experience emotional stress and trauma as a result of perceived threats of violence, active shooter drills, and school lock-downs (Rich & Cox, 2018). These stressors are impacting children's learning and well-being. At the same time, well-meaning adults are grappling with their own fears and limited strategies for allaying students' anxieties and addressing mental health issues and challenging behaviors related to school safety threats. School psychologists have been called upon by school districts to provide multi-tiered mental health supports and mitigate physical and psychological safety concerns (NASP, 2015). Given that safety cannot be guaranteed, Chan (2019) documents how parents are purchasing bullet-proof backpacks and other paraphernalia marketed to increase children's protection should they encounter a horrible scenario involving a school shooter. These strategies, however, may only

exacerbate fears, provide a false sense of security, and/or detract from the hotly debated issue of gun controls. Specifically, as we highlighted in a previous CYE issue, anguished youth voices called out politicians over the horrific 2018 school shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Florida. Their voices led to protests, specifically the *National School Walkout* and *March for Our Lives*, and a reform bill that established some purchasing regulations for guns signed by Florida's governor (Brown, Carr, Mehta, & Kochanowski, 2018). We commended the youth on their activism and agree that we have not done enough to protect them. We begged the question, what's next?

We would like to hear from our CYE readership about these issues in several ways: 1) submission of research articles or field reports on built environments related to safe schools; 2) submission of research articles or field reports on how school environments have addressed issues related to stress and trauma resulting from drills and school threats; 3) posts to our CYE Network Discussion Forum; and 4) submission of position papers related to potential solutions for creating safe, progressive, and transformative schools.

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