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Street-Kids: A Pedagogical Journey  
into Alternative Art Education

Johanne Lacelle-Lavallée

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Art Education

Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for  
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**Canada**

**Abstract**  
**Street-Kids: A Pedagogical Journey**  
**into Alternative Art Education**

**Johanne Lacelle-Lavallée**

This study investigates the teaching of art to street-kids, its effect on their sense of self-esteem or self-worth, their belief in their own creative potential and the process by which all this takes place. A method of action research has been used, relying chiefly on observation and behavioral data as well as sociological inquiry in the form of both conversational and standardized interviews. It was found that the alternative art-educator needs to rescue the idealism of street-kids, enticing them to return to main-stream society, to become independent. This is made possible by the application of a carefully structured art program, based on literacy, such as the one being run by Projeto Axé of Brazil.

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## PREFACE

A student very carefully gathers her drawings from her locker door and puts them into her school bag alongside her precious agenda. As she walks down the corridor she stops at the wastepaper basket and disposes of unwanted math papers, grammar tests, and history notes. She's 16, 15 or even 14 years of age and she's not coming back.

When I was a teenager, many of my cousins and friends quit school very young to help their parents at home. Others just dropped out and were considered "delinquents". When I became a teacher, I tried very hard to keep my students interested in their studies. As much as possible, I encouraged creative ideas. When I became a young mother, I also became a foster parent for abandoned young boys.

It was when I became the mother of two very wise, young teenaged daughters that I became informed of the latest trends in fashion, the latest major complaints and the most important current issues of teenagers. My youngest daughter made sure that I had active contact with runaways, dropouts and homeless kids; she brought them home and introduced them to me and my husband. High doc boots, shaved heads, spiked hair, green hair, blue hair and leather jackets became common sights in our home. One visitor needed paints for his/her leather jacket, another needed a hot meal and yet another needed a hot bath.

For two years or more, I was in a position to actually come face to face with these "kids" and I gained enough confidence to be able to converse with them on a personal level. I respected them and they respected me. I trusted them and they trusted me. The "street kid" became a reality for me. I must admit that this experience did not

correspond to my own values which had been instilled in me throughout my life either by my family, the media or even my contacts in society in general.

At one time these biases led me to believe that all street-kids were the same, that they all came from poor families, and that they were untrustworthy, lazy, and dangerous.

In our society, we tend to look for stereotypes which fit media-generated descriptions. And many people of varied ideological positions from across the political spectrum have adopted a set of values, often influenced by the media, that centres on a fear of youth, of gangs, and of difference.

When I met these street kids, fear definitely did not fit the array of emotions I experienced. Instead I came to a personal realization that some kids just cannot adapt to the school system that we as a society have created for them and that they see as being imposed on them. Out of this understanding arose a new conviction. For me, not only is it important to keep our youth interested enough to want to stay in school, it is equally important to create an alternative education outside the formal school system to reach the ones that drop out.

Most of the street-kids that I met have expressed the conviction that art is a major part of their lives. I noticed that, for them, important decision-making was intrinsic to the artistic process. This process created, for them, a sense of self-esteem and often contributed to their reintegration into mainstream schooling and/or society. This led me to formulate the following research question: Can art education outside the formal institution be used to create a sense of self-esteem or self-

worth in street-kids as a means of enabling them to become image fluent and/or socially productive? In other words, can the teaching of art to street-kids have a positive effect on their sense of self-worth and their belief in their own creative potential? If so, how does this process take place?

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Can the teaching of art to street-kids have a positive effect on their sense of self-worth and their belief in their own creative potential? If so, how does this process take place?

In the Webster's New World Dictionary of American English, Third College Edition (1994), street people are described as people who gather or live primarily on streets, malls, etc., as homeless transients, vagrants, alienated youth, or residents of crowded neighbourhoods. In this context, my definition of the term street-kid refers to the child or teenager who is homeless and/or the child or teenager who has run away from home and/or the child or teenager who spends all of his/her free time on the streets and/or the child or teenager who has a home but who has been pushed into the streets by various forms of abuse in the home and/or the child or teenager who has chosen to live on the streets for no specific reason other than to experience adventure, freedom and independence.

Dr. James Battle, an Alberta psychologist, has suggested that, while there is no consensus on a universal definition of self-esteem, most researchers and clinicians agree that self-esteem refers to the individual's perception of self-worth (Peggy Edwards, 1992, 3). Formulating my own working definition of the term self-esteem on which to base my observations was a little more difficult than simply opening a book and finding what I needed. It was only by working with street-kids that I came to understand Dr. Battle's reference to the individual's perception of self-worth. As I worked with street-kids, I noticed that



the approval of the other was very important. The other could be the other kid, the adult or the family (when they spoke of their family). This approval also included academic worthiness which, for the street-kids, was offered by the adult who worked with them on the street. Children and adolescents on the street needed to be accepted as being part of society. They also needed to be accepted by their peers. They needed to create and make decisions leading to positive outcomes. All of these factors helped created a favourable evaluation of oneself or, in other words, all of the above created a sense of self-esteem.

While in Brazil in 1995, two terms were brought to my attention: re-culture and re-educate. Evalda Vilanova, a Pedagogical Coordinator working as Supervisor of Street Educators for Projeto Axé (a project for Street-Kids in Salvador), informed me that boys and girls who link with groups and gangs in the street create certain dynamics and in the process, resulting in the creation of another culture. Evalda also mentioned that as Projeto Axé's street workers reinstated self-esteem, they also introduced children to their cultural roots. They believed the child needed to reassess his/her culture. This process of reconciliation to one's own cultural roots, I believe, explains the term re-culture. As for the term re-educate, in Salvador, Brazil, I listened to volunteer instructors teach moral and mental discipline to the street-kids. These kids were also taught varied skills. Literacy, respecting other people's rights without forgetting your own rights and the importance of school were all priorities in re-educating these kids who had lost most, if not all of their self-esteem. They were kids who had left school or who had never been to school. They had lost most moral and mental discipline.

And all of these issues were first addressed through the arts: visual arts, music, dance, circus, etc.

Many professionals have influenced the way in which I approached my research. Their writings have guided and at times have helped me interpret my observations. The literature cited in Chapter 2 includes references to a number of these authors. Jean Morman Unsworth (1990) discussed the potential drop-out and the thread that holds him/her in school while Arthur J. Cropley (1992) encouraged flexible and inventive thinking on the part of the students. Paulo Freire (1973a) informed us that children have ideas and capabilities, all different and all extremely creative. Ray Marshall and Mark Tucker (1992) referred to Dewey as having spoken about applying ideas to real problems, which I believe refers to the application of creative thinking to solve real problems. They also spoke of Dewey as a person who focused on a curriculum that responded to the desire of children to work with their hands. Evalda Vilanova (Interview, 1995) mentioned that, as the Projeto Axé staff reinstated a sense of self-esteem in children, they also introduced them to their cultural roots. Self-esteem, James Battle (1982, 1987, 1990 & 1993; Battle & Savage, 1994) has repeatedly suggested, affects one's accomplishments, interactions with others, achievement patterns, level of mental health and state of well being. Battle has also written about self-esteem and teenagers but I have yet to find an author who has made a link between self-esteem and street-kids in particular. Celia Salvador (1994) wrote about the situation of children and adolescents in Brazil. James David Smith (1993), a former High School teacher in Los Angeles, spoke of the benefits of an art education program for street-kids. One of

these benefits was the promotion of self-esteem or self-worth. Graffiti was looked at as an immediate realization of self by Angela McRobbie (1989) in Zoot Suits and Second Hand Dresses: An Anthology of Fashion and Music. Graffiti can provide an opportunity for the art educator to reach street-kids.

Other professionals who have influenced my views are Yves Lamontagne and his associates (1987), Joseph Palenski (1984), Joan Scheff Lepsitx (1979), Arthur Paul Efland (1990), and Peggy Edwards (1992), to name a few. Through their writings, I was able to confirm my own observations in the field concerning the situation of street-kids, what motivates them, the varied possibilities of art education being taught outside the institutional setting and the importance of self-esteem or self-worth in relation to street-kids.

As described in Chapter 3, I adopted the method of action research which relies chiefly on observation and behavioral data. I have also used sociological inquiry in the form of conversational and standardized interviews.

I started the project by preliminary work in the form of a pilot project undertaken in Montreal. I made contact with two teenaged street-kids, Paul and Don, and conducted informal interviews with both of them using audio and video equipment. One of the teenagers, Paul, was one of my daughter's friends. This allowed me to spend many hours with him and he informed me of various centres oriented to meeting the needs of street-kids. These included centres in which he had spent time, ranging from one month to four years. He also introduced me to many of the professionals working at the centres. This is how I discovered an alternative centre

working with teenagers suffering from drug and alcohol abuse problems. I decided to start a pilot project at this centre. The centre offered one creative class once a week. I offered to start an art education class. My idea was accepted and this class remained active for a period of three years. Later that year, while researching my ancestral roots, I met a person who became interested in my studies. He had lived in Brazil for more than 30 years and knew much about street-kids in the Sao Paulo area. Two weeks later I was introduced to a lawyer from Guarulhos who worked with the common people. He soon became my coordinator and my contact in Brazil when I decided to further my research in that country. Before leaving for Brazil, I informed myself about the political and social situations of the country. I also learned to speak Portuguese. But I discovered that nothing can really prepare anyone for the reality I encountered there. After arriving in Brazil, I spent about two weeks acquainting myself with the people and their culture.

My research in Brazil took two forms and took place during two years. In 1994 I met Brazilian street-kids, and in 1995 I researched Projeto Axé, a project which approached street-kids using various art forms.

In June, July, and part of August 1994, the first part of my research in Brazil was spent in Guarulhos, the suburbs of the city of Sao Paulo. I had the privilege of meeting many influential people for whom the well being of street-kids was very important. I travelled from Sao Paulo to Recife, studied with Brazilian educators, met with a singing star, shook hands with artists and lawyers, and travelled in Nordeste with a person from the human rights division of Aracaju. I also visited

numerous centres, from Sao Paulo to Recife, which dealt with street-kids. I have to admit that, for me, the most effective educational experience was hands-on involvement when I was able to teach on the streets of Guarulhos at night and in the favelas (shanty towns) during the day.

I found myself back in Brazil in the summer of 1995. The purpose of this trip was to research a project in Salvador, Bahia, called Projeto Axé. This project had been successful in assisting street-kids in becoming good citizens. A questionnaire was prepared and interviews were scheduled with the approval of the pedagogical coordinator at Projeto Axé. She prepared an agenda which correlated with my research proposal. Informal interviews were carried out with four street-kids and formal interviews with five street-kids, one psychologist, two educators, two instructors and one artist-educator. Chapters 6, 7, and 8 contain summaries and discussion of these interviews, followed by the conclusion to the thesis.

I have tried to report as clearly as possible my observations of the use of art education to re-culture and re-educate street-kids in Brazil, focusing on the dynamics of how the teaching of art to street-kids can have a positive effect on their sense of self-worth and their belief in their own creative potential.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

To situate my research, I will present recent works and references that I find most relevant to my focus on art and the street-kid.

Too often, by the time a negative self-concept has been recognized, the young person has gone to the streets--in search of what? He/she may not really know.

Celia Salvador reported that, in Brazil in 1994, 50% of the children and adolescents remained away from school (1994, 168). Salvador made a strong point that "rethinking education and school is an essential requirement for democratic societies that believe in the importance of education in building citizenship and self-esteem" (168). In this context, it could also be profitable to rethink our judgement of the adolescent and provoke intelligent discussions aimed at a better understanding of a situation in which our society is clearly losing touch with our kids. Perhaps we should reflect on society's misguided treatment of adolescents.

When I was in Salvador, Brazil, Evalda Vilanova, a pedagogue with a specialization in educational orientation and psychodrama, told me that "the existence of abandoned children is a reflection or the result of abandoned families and a disorganized family is the result of a disorganized society which provokes a lack of structure in the system, within both economic and social structures. It goes without saying that this interferes with human relationships and the child ends up on the street" (Interview, June 5, 1995).

In Quebec, like anywhere else, we have to deal with the social

dilemma of the homeless. A book presenting this dilemma, La Jeunesse Québécoise et le phénomène des sans abri (Lamontagne, Garceau-Durand, Blais, Elie, & Lavergnas, 1987), describes situations related to the family crisis, the school crisis, and that of society in general. The book's aim is not to find a solution, but to try to understand the causes and the phenomenology of young people on the street. A survey is presented concerning the young homeless in Montreal. It shows that action such as further research involving video and written documentaries are required to give the homeless a voice, an identity. It also shows that street-kids form an ever-increasing proportion of homeless individuals, bringing with them their own unique requirements.

In Kids Who Run Away, Joseph Palenski (1984) presented a qualitative study of young adults who run away from home. Palenski suggested that one must be aware of one's own biases in order to reach relatively objective conclusions. This is a very important issue which must be dealt with before undertaking research involving street-kids. Joan Scheff Lepsitx (1979), in Adolescent Development, Myths and Realities, Children Today, Focus on Youth, warned of myths which can be destructive to young people at such a vulnerable time in their development.

Angela McRobbie (1989) made the point that, while graffiti is considered an open crime, in street-life crime is, in fact, the central reality.

James Battle (1990) has defined self-esteem as a dimension of one's self-concept, which is an evaluative phenomenon determined by one's subjective perception. He defined the self as the culmination of one's inherent make-up and life experiences. "In other words," he continued,

"the self is a composite of an individual's feelings, hopes, fears, thoughts and views of who she is, what she is, what she has been and what she might become" (1990, 22). This sense of self-worth may be encouraged or discouraged, depending on an individual's acceptance by his/her significant others. Battle also reminded us of H. S. Sullivan's comments in The Theory of Anxiety and the Nature of Psychotherapy, written in 1949. Sullivan indicated that if significant others communicate to the child the feeling that he is approved of, respected, and liked, he will develop a sense of self-acceptance and respect for himself and others as well (Battle, 1990, 23). Thus, self-esteem, in the words of Battle, "affects one's accomplishments, interactions with others, achievement patterns, level of mental health" (Battle, 1990, 22). Battle also repeatedly pointed out that a negative self-concept is a significant factor contributing to low academic achievement (1982, 61) and that our subjective perception of self-worth or self-esteem determines our characteristic reactions (Battle, 1987, 11).

Arthur J. Copley (1992) has discussed the emotional and motivational bases of learning and thinking, encouraging flexible and inventive thinking on the part of the students. He studied the creative thinker and the need for creativity and presented us with a number of procedures for training creativity. He wrote that "bold, innovative, and free-ranging thinking depends, not only upon the strictly intellectual, but also upon motivational and emotional factors, as has been emphasized in many of the best known psychological studies in the area...the discussion of ways of increasing creative thinking in school children stresses not only enhancement of the ability to get ideas, but also



fostering the desire and developing the courage to do so" (7). The processes which Cropley mentioned, if used to teach art to street-kids, could contribute to enhancing their self-esteem.

Paulo Freire (1973a) has reminded the teacher that the mark of a successful educator is not skill in persuasion but the ability to dialogue with students in a reciprocal manner. The right approach is crucial in achieving results that lead toward a successful future for the child. Friere (1973b) also suggested that a liberating education consists of acts of cognition, not transferrals of information. He suggested that teaching is a dialogue and that the teacher is no longer merely the one who teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students. The idea is not to force the teacher or/and the student to conform to a curriculum. Rather, the teacher learns with the student and in doing so, learns how to formulate a curriculum to suit the student's needs.

In Thinking for a Living, Marshall and Tucker (1992) wrote that John Dewey believed a curriculum could be both democratic and intellectually demanding. They noted that Dewey focused on shaping the curriculum to meet the child's needs and to include activities that respond to the desire of children to work with their hands. Dewey also thought that the curriculum could combine both the head and the hand, and that intellectual activity could be meshed with the application of ideas to real problems, making conceptual development inherently more interesting for the student and at the same time more useful (Marshall & Tucker, 1992, 26).

A great deal has been written about art and its relationship with self-image and learning. Jean Morman Unsworth (1990), an art consultant for the Chicago Archdiocesan Schools and author of numerous books on art

education, observed that "for many of our students, the world of fantasy and imagination is their only escape from a personal life filled with violence, abuse and neglect. A learning climate that channels this fantasy, dream, hope may be the thin rope that holds a potential drop-out" (1990, 15). She advised teachers to plan with their students to productively channel the ideas that may come from activities such as doodling, day-dreaming, acting out, tapping rhythms and telling tall tales. She suggested that the potential for new ideas is there just waiting to be let out and the teacher's interest in them can be the release.

Howard Gardner, Associate Professor of Neurology at Boston University School of Medicine, research psychologist at the Boston Veteran's Administration Hospital, and co-director of Harvard Project Zero, has written widely on psychology, art and child development. In Artful Scribbles, The Significance of Children's Drawings (1980), he points out that "it is in the activity of the young child--his preconscious sense of form, his willingness to explore and to solve problems that arise, his capacity to take risks, his affective needs which must be worked out in a symbolic realm--that we find the crucial seeds of the greatest artistic achievements" (269).

While researching various artistic activities on the streets, I came upon a study of the phenomena of graffiti, tagging and vandalism in Los Angeles which was presented by James David Smith at the 28th World Congress of the International Society for Education Through Art (INSEA) in Montreal in 1993. When I met with Smith, formerly a teacher in a Los Angeles (L.A.) high school, he gave me a copy of his study which included

an overview of one of the most difficult problems gripping the cities of America. The then fairly recent riots in L.A. provided the starting point for the author's discussion of the malaise apparent in American society. He discussed gangs of street youth running seemingly wild, vandalizing public property with graffiti, causing grave financial and sometimes physical harm. Worse still, he said, is tagging which involves a game of one-up-man-ship in which opposing gangs of youths compete to cover each other's art works, on private and public structures of difficult access, with sometimes deadly consequences. (For example, painting from train trusses.) It was erroneously suggested that the recently reconstructed programs for L.A.'s devastated areas had gone astray. In fact the programs came at the very time they could have done the most good. A study of L.A.'s varied ethnic groups has suggested the most disadvantaged people to be those most likely to benefit from some kind of art education program. Several different pilot programs were outlined, in which talented 18- and 19-year-old youths were able to actually learn the difference between vandalism and art. Working with the owners and with assistance from various funding sources, they produced works on both interior and exterior walls.

Battle wrote that "anxiety disorders, depression and suicide are strongly associated with loss of self-esteem" (Edwards, 1992, 7). Further, Edwards (1992) has suggested that the development and maintenance of positive self-esteem is the responsibility of both the individual and society. Montreal is faced with an ever-growing number of violent acts in our schools as well as an overwhelming increase in the number of dropouts. Many of our teenagers, for one reason or another, cannot come to grips

with the school curriculum as they experience it. They apparently cannot see the advantage of a long-term investment leading to a future which seems so far away (Lamontagne et al, 1987).

My experience in various project settings has confirmed for me what Edwards (1992), and others have suggested, that self-esteem is a fundamental human need for all ages as well as a foundation of emotional well-being.

In Zoot Suits and Second-Hand Dresses: An Anthology of Fashion and Music (1989), Angela McRobbie suggested that graffiti could be seen as an immediate realization of self through no other mediation than one's name. McRobbie explained that this is the way a street person begins to achieve recognition.

All the above can be effectively applied to the endeavour of educating and preparing children for life. But this cannot happen if children do not believe in their own creative potential. Thus, as educators, we must concern ourselves with positively influencing our students' sense of self-worth or self-esteem.

Evalda Vilanova, mentioned that affection, literacy, and artistic activities as well as culture are important means to permit the child to build a better future. She added that these experiences become pedagogical instruments rather than ends in themselves (Interview, June 5, 1995).

I found a quotation by Viktor Lowenfeld extremely important in my approach when applying art education to the streets: The goal of art education, he said, "is not the art itself, or the aesthetic product, or the aesthetic experience, but rather the child who grows up more

creatively and sensitively and applies his experience in the arts to whatever life situations may be applicable" (Efland 1990, 235). In effect, art education is a very efficient means of fostering self-esteem in street-kids, thereby allowing the educator to re-culture or re-integrate them into mainstream society and re-awaken in them the curiosity that is crucial to a healthy future and, hence, to re-educate them.

The next question, then, is "How does this process take place?".

## CHAPTER 3

### METHOD AND PROCEDURE

An awareness of the life situation of either street-kids in Canada or those in Brazil is essential to understanding their need to learn art. We are not always aware of political, cultural or social situations any more than we are aware of the psychological impact that living on the streets can have. I am not a psychologist or a specialist in anthropology, but I have been made aware of the importance in possessing some knowledge in each of these subject areas. I am positive that many anthropologists would agree that we may profit by adapting certain working solutions from other cultures, especially in regards to education. But to do so, one must be well informed. I sought as much knowledge as possible to prepare myself for working with the Brazilian street-kids. I talked with Brazilian lawyers as well as government agents and other professionals such as school teachers living and teaching in many areas of Brazil. I did not forget to seek the advice of the most important experts of all, the common person.

Since my research was conducted in what might be termed the area of alternative art education, I felt obliged to employ varied but balanced methods appropriate to the specific population and the physical terrain encountered in Canada and in Brazil. I needed an intimate knowledge of the social and personal characteristics of my research participants. And, at all times, I felt it important to try to be sensitive to my own biases as well as those of my subjects. I initiated myself to work being done in the area of alternative teaching in Montreal and in Brazil. I also developed rapport with the street-kids and workers in this field in

Montreal and Brazil.

I have adopted a style of research which I consider most à propos to my field of work, that of action research. This type of research entails "a small-scale intervention in the functioning of the real world and a close examination of the effects of such intervention" (Cohen & Manion, 1982, 174). "Action research lends itself to ethnographic methods such as keeping field-notes or journals, participant observation, interviewing, engaging in dialogue, audio taping and collecting and analyzing documents and students' work....The primary interest of action researchers is to gain a better understanding of their beliefs/practice and how these came to be and to enhance their practice if, when and how they see fit" (May, 1993, 118).

The focus of this work is on specific knowledge derived from diverse sources and used to resolve a very specific problem. Cohen & Manion (1982) wrote that action research relies chiefly on observation and behavioral data and that action research is appropriate whenever specific knowledge is required for a specific problem in a specific situation. Street-kids do pose a specific problem because of the social implications of a lack of self-esteem. My focus is on how alternative art education can foster a better sense of self-worth in street-kids, thereby having a positive impact on their life in general.

I have also looked for greater understanding of myself and of the street-kid phenomena in give-and-take situations which Norman K. Denzin has called the "sociological interview" (1989, 102). I applied this method especially in the form of conversational and non standardized interviews. Although I did not always have a set questionnaire, I did try

to assure that my questions were comprehensive and that they elicited meaningful responses. Often, whether in concrete social situations or in spontaneous social situations, as defined by Norman K. Denzin (1989, 73), I allowed myself to simply surmise and later record theoretically relevant interpretations.

Whether in Canada (Montreal) or in Brazil, I tried to understand the situation of street-kids, what their world view was, and how they functioned in their situation. In Montreal and in Brazil, it was very important to experience life in their environment: the favelas, the markets, the rural areas (farms), the streets, the politics, and the police. Many of my contacts on the streets were willing to be interviewed by myself with the aid of video or audio recording. All the street-kids interviewed for this thesis have been assigned pseudonyms in order to protect their anonymity. Additional information would be described and interpreted by myself as a result of intensive observation.

The following projects served as a preliminary stage of my research:

- (1) The recording of an interview with two Montreal street-kids: Paul and Don. (Pilot Project)
- (2) The documentation of an art project carried out at a rehabilitation centre for teenage drug and alcohol abuse. (Pilot Project)
- (3) The collection of student works and the keeping of a journal while working with abandoned Brazilian street-kids in Guaruihos, Sao Paulo, Salvador, Aracaju and Recife.
- (4) The collection of student works and keeping of a journal while



working with favela street-kids in Guarulhos, Brazil.

Following this preliminary stage I chose a programme with which I became acquainted during my travels in Brazil and decided to prepare an in-depth study of it. Thus, the final stage of my data collection was:

- (5) An intensive observational and reflective study involving visits to Projeto Axé and interviews with Projeto Axé staff and kids. This project, situated in Salvador, Bahia, is devoted to creating a future for the street-kid.

Included is a description of my role in the events and those of other professionals, as well as the social context, that of a programme aiming to improve the situation of street-kids. The need for street-kids to develop a sense of self-esteem or self-worth was central to this endeavour.

## CHAPTER 4

### OBSERVATIONS AND INTERVENTIONS IN SITUATIONS IN MONTRÉAL WHERE ART EDUCATION WAS USED TO RE-CULTURE AND RE-EDUCATE STREET-KIDS (1993-1996)

Montreal's street-kids were not unknown to myself and my family. My youngest daughter was well acquainted with them. They were her friends! And they became our friends. I became very well acquainted with two of these kids, Paul and Don. They consented to be interviewed using audio and video equipment. Paul was very cooperative and he spent many hours describing his life experiences to me. We also talked about the time he spent in correctional centres and the existence of various other centres in Montreal. It was Paul who introduced me to one of the educators at a correctional centre and other professionals working in the same field.

One of the centres that Paul talked about interested me and with his help I managed to organize a few interviews with some of the professionals at this centre. It was an alternative centre staffed by professionals trained to help teenagers cope with a drug and/or alcohol abuse problem. I also made an appointment to obtain permission to start an alternative art class with the participating adolescents. During this appointment I was tested by a family therapist for biases and prejudices. I took two tests that were given on two different occasions.

Thus, I was allowed to start an art class at this alternative drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre for adolescents. I was also able to use this art class as my pilot project. Those attending this centre had to be from 12 to 19 years old. Some clients came directly from their families while others were street-kids. They all had drug and/or alcohol-related problems.

In the first two years of the pilot project, I offered a two-hour art class every Friday. Adolescents were free to attend to learn different art techniques and gradually create their own work. I realized that even the most basic techniques needed attention.

A few changes were made for the year 1995-96, my third year of research at this centre. First, the art class, or creativity class, became part of the regular system and adolescents were obligated to attend this class as part of their rehabilitation.

In previous years, the person responsible for volunteers had also been an educator at the centre. He was very energetic and had a very positive attitude about the art class. But as a result of changes in the centre, in 1995-96 the time I spent with the adolescents was cut in half, leaving only one hour a week for the art class. The philosophy which I had shared with the previous educator regarding art education and my research, was not as well understood by the people who were now responsible for the class. Quick and easy crafts were now a higher priority. But through all this change we still managed to engage in "art education" per se. This included teaching art techniques, art history, and whatever I could incorporate regarding other art subjects, including basic art and time to review already-learned material.

Teaching at the centre had now become a new challenge. Varied mediums were used, such as acrylic paint, papier-mâché, ceramics and fimo. The adolescents learned to apply acrylic paint to canvas as well as learning ceramics and papier-mâché. They learned how to combine their colours and to create other colours. Learning to work with a brush, spatula, and fingers proved to be very interesting for each adolescent.

The process used in collage did not seem to inspire many. But I later discovered that they had been doing collage in past creativity classes and therefore were more attracted to new mediums.

During the first two years, young women outnumbered the young men by about two to one. In the third year, the young men outnumbered the young women by about three to one. During the first two years, the number of participants varied from one week to the other. One week there would be five or six adolescents participating in class while the next week none would show up. I was the only consistent element during the first two years. I would always stay for the full two hours and work on my art. Many of the adolescents would just drop in to say hello and ask what I was doing. They usually stayed awhile before leaving. But during the third year of this project, I often had 10 to 12 students. This was probably due to the fact that they were required to participate.

During the three years, whether I was teaching one adolescent or twelve, there was always a need to go back to basic art techniques. Some had to review how to create different colours. Others needed to re-learn what they had been taught in high school art classes. The magic for them was to learn the basics of art. Each adolescent reminded me of a young child experimenting with colour, surface, and medium. The child loves to start by experimenting. So does the adolescent. When an experiment proves successful, the child gets excited about his/her achievement. The adolescent is the same. The young child gradually refines his/her scribbles and finally uses memory, imagination, and feeling to create. The adolescent also gradually gains confidence and uses memory, imagination, and feeling to create his/her work -- but

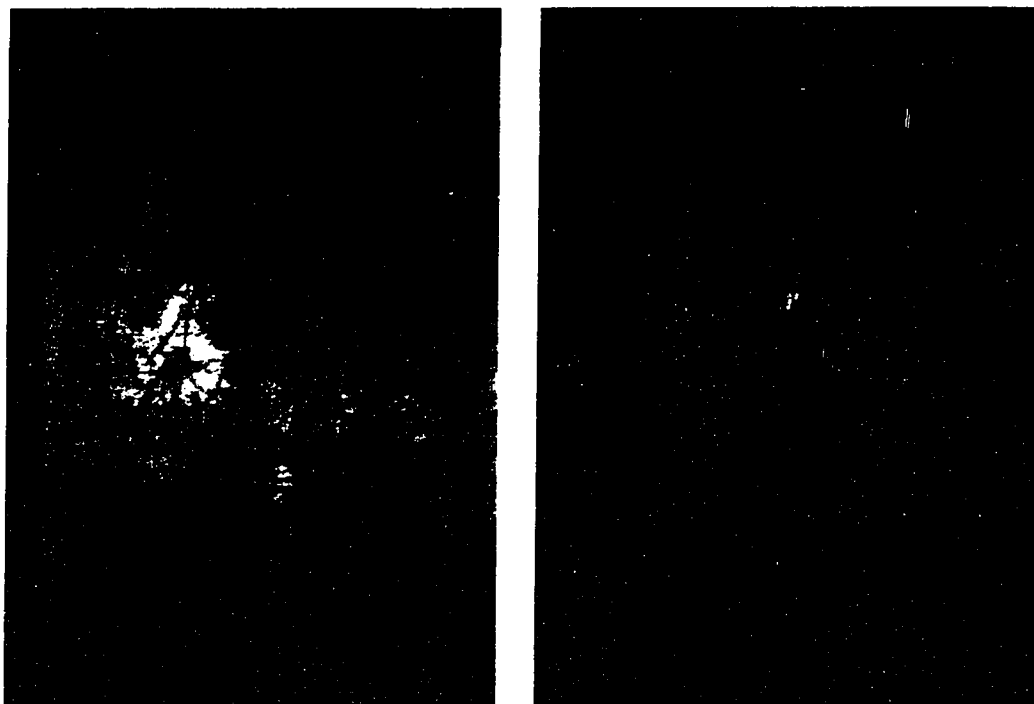


Figure 1. The adolescent slowly regains confidence by scribbling  
(Montréal)

only after also having experimented with scribbles (Figure 1). Howard Gardner wrote (1980) that at first the child distinguishes between delight and anxiety, light and dark, when creating. So does the adolescent when he/she first experiments with colour and form. Gardner also suggested that "even as the young child gains intense affective satisfaction from his involvement in the arts, he also is aided in confronting critical emotional issues--insistent feelings, fears, anxieties, and wishes, which are nowhere so clearly addressed and articulated as in the drawings" (Gardener, 1980, 268).

The term "art" usually has very definite connotations for each adult. For the child, art is primarily a means of expression which changes as the child grows (Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1987, 6-7). While teaching, I have observed that many of our adolescents have lost their own means of creative expression. But they slowly regain confidence by scribbling.

I have noticed that they can test their newly-found confidence to see if they will be ridiculed or if it is safe to take risks. For example, let's say that the adolescent wants to draw a bird. The adolescent thinks he/she cannot draw a bird and usually says so in various ways. But he/she usually decides to test the ground anyway. The adolescent will then either scribble or draw an extremely deformed bird. Then come the giggles and the laughs which are encouraged by the adolescent in question. But as the adolescent experiments and picks up on the positive comments coming either from the educator or a peer, he/she starts asking questions. He/she becomes more comfortable with the environment, with his/her peers and with the educator. Once this has

happened, the adolescent starts asking more questions. He/she wants to know about colour, contour, form, etc. He/she is ready to learn. The process is long, but well worth the wait.

When I first started my research at the centre, I had to unlearn much of what I had learned about the discipline of teaching adolescents in regular institutions. Alternative teaching often involves basic art as taught to the very young child. But here we are teaching 12-, 13-, 14-, and even 18-year-old individuals for whom the basics are very important. Yes, some have probably already learned basic art techniques at school or even in private courses. Whatever the case may be, we must not forget that all these young people have been through very rough times. They need time to re-assess and recall past knowledge. My observation has been that asking adolescents to make a personal assessment of their own knowledge in art seems to have, more often than not, positively affected their sense of self-worth as well as helping to reinstate their belief in their own capabilities and creative potential. We must never underestimate the adolescent's potential. But, also, we must not always assume that the adolescent remembers or knows a given procedure in art just because he/she is an adolescent rather than a child. Such an assumption risks leading the adolescent to feel put down, thinking that the educator sees him/her as ignorant. This could detract from rather than add to a sense of self-worth. This aspect of alternative teaching may be difficult for the educator who is teaching basics to adolescents instead of children. The educator has to gain their confidence so that they feel free to ask the most basic question. A whole new approach has to be taken and the word patience takes on a new meaning.

At one time or another during our art sessions, each adolescent used acrylic paint. A series of steps was used to teach them how to paint on a canvas. The adolescent learned how to make a frame, stretch the canvas and gesso it. The adolescent would have a week to figure out what composition he/she wanted to create. When the time came, many decisions had to be made by the adolescent; the size of the brush, the colours to be used, the orientation of the canvas (horizontal or vertical), the position of the canvas while painting (on the wall, on the table, on an easel), what kind of brush strokes should be used, etc. The steps were not always in the above order. For example, if the adolescent had a tough week, perhaps he/she would not be in a mood to stretch canvas. This was accepted. I always had a canvas that had already been stretched and sealed with gesso. I also had pieces of canvas on the wall that simply needed to be sealed. Whatever the situation, I would try to accommodate it in such a way that the adolescent would still have a chance to experiment and learn at least one new technique in art.

When the adolescents started to paint, it seemed as if magic started happening. Students became extremely involved in colour. They imagined a colour and then tried very hard to produce it. They questioned and they experimented until they were satisfied. Colour seemed to be very important to them. The more they experimented, the more they were amazed at the results. They also became frustrated when they could not make the colour they had imagined.

This is one example which shows how alternative teaching can differ from classroom teaching. In classroom teaching, colour is often taught first. More often than not, in high-school, it is assumed that students



know how to blend colours. With these adolescents, I realized that experimenting often occurs first and is extremely important to the adolescent. It seems to create a certain security, a certain sense of reassurance.

At first, students often insisted that they knew how to blend their own colours. I let them experiment. It can be a big step to admit that you do not know how to do something, especially for these kids who are viewed as being tough and dangerous. When they did admit that they did not know how to do something and then would ask my opinion, I knew they felt comfortable with me and that I had managed to overcome a very important barrier. I was no longer an outsider. I had won their respect. At that point, art education was finally under way and the kids were interested and listening.

## CHAPTER 5

### OBSERVATIONS OF SITUATIONS IN BRAZIL WHERE ART EDUCATION HAS BEEN USED TO RE-CULTURE AND RE-EDUCATE STREET-KIDS (1994)

Brazil has a culture of its own. To fully understand how to teach art to street-kids, the art educator must, first and foremost, be aware of the population involved.

In 1994, I arrived in Brazil at a very exciting time. Everyone was watching the playoffs for the world cup in soccer. From the beginning of the playoffs to that final kick, Brazileiros expressed their excitement with artistic creativity throughout the streets of Guarulhos. Children and adults alike painted walls and streets with their football symbol, always including a drawing of their national flag. Graffiti also filled different city walls with varied drawings, such as portraits, T.V. symbols and comic book characters.

Like the graffiti in Los Angeles, I viewed these drawings as representing instant gratification as well as collective national symbolic self-realization. Basic techniques were used to paint these scenes on the roads and walls throughout the city. It was obvious that the artists had observed commercials on television and signs in store windows or on roadside posters. They reproduced these symbols and sometimes added some of their own. I observed this type of art being produced mostly in the poorer areas of Guarulhos.

Ideally, in Brazil, education should enter the scene not by obligation but by necessity for both physical and psychological survival. It would enable a child to become fully integrated into mainstream society

or as Brazilians would say, become a good citizen of society. In reality, in most of the public schools, it is common to find a six-year-old child sitting in a first grade class alongside a 14-year-old adolescent. Families often view it as more important for the child to beg, shine shoes, wash car windshields or steal to help keep them alive than for the child to go to school. Incidents of rape and sexual abuse are common in the home, perpetuated by step fathers, and on the streets by certain authority figures. Alcohol and drugs, such as crack and speed, also play a role. The survival of these children and, by default, the society they live in, is threatened. The need for education is quite obvious to all street educators in Brazil.

Most Brazilian street-kids find themselves in a very different situation from that of Canadian street-kids. The setting is quite different as well as the cause which drove most of them to the streets. In Brazil, the principal cause is poverty. Very often, the child goes into the street to help the family survive. Many of them have a stepfather with whom they would rather not live. So they often choose to sleep on the streets. Sometimes the family moves away and the child finds himself/herself abandoned by the family. Then the child must survive on his/her own.

While in Guarulhos, I worked on the streets at night with a psychologist, a lawyer, a nun, a teacher and two volunteers. We would approach homeless street-kids who varied in age from 5 to 15. The street-kids already knew the people accompanying me and would greet them with open arms. I was asked by the above street educators to have these kids draw, colour, write and count. They told me that these children had a

profound need to express themselves.

During my stay in Guarulhos, a group of nuns took me in and gave me room and board. I was very comfortable there and the atmosphere made it quite easy for me to focus on my research. It was there that we prepared food for the street-kids we would meet at night. We prepared sandwiches and thermoses of milk and juice. Afterwards we drove to the centre of Guarulhos, in front of a small cathedral where we would be met by the street-kids. My first session with these kids was on June 16, 1994, from 8 to 11 P.M.

My first experience was dramatic. Three kids were waiting for us in front of the cathedral. Not long after, we were surrounded by about 20 street-kids. I thought I was prepared for all this. Not so. It took some time for me to get used to it. Many were reeking of bad odours. Their dirty little bodies and runny noses sometimes reduced the pleasure of their tight hugs, warm smiles and their use of the word, "chia", which means auntie--a word that was always whispered with love and affection.

Our first action was to take out some recycled computer paper, a box of broken crayons, some pencils, dominos and small puzzles. Once the material was out, each child immediately started drawing, counting and writing. They would ask us to count with them and show them how to work small additions. When they drew, they asked no questions. It was remarkable how absorbed and concentrated they were. They would ask for a sheet of paper (Figure 2) and the minute they would receive one, they were ready to create. The subject matter appeared to be much more important than the colour to be used. Each child would first draw with a pencil or a coloured wax crayon. While drawing, absolutely no questions were asked.

One young child in particular who was about seven years old (many of these children do not know their real age), would draw, look at me and run away. Once I would pick up the drawing and look at it, he would come back and create yet another drawing. He would never colour them in though.

Another child sat on the ground and did a rubbing of the tiles, using coloured wax crayons.

Many of the children would ask us to write their names on their drawing. Their names seemed to be very important to the children.

As mentioned earlier, one usually cannot be certain of a street-kid's age. So it was nearly impossible to indicate the age of the child on a drawing or anywhere else. They often do not know when they were born and many of them are out of touch with their parents. And the parents themselves may have no idea of the date of birth of their own child. So my estimations of Brazilian street-kids' ages are just guesses.

Most of the young boys I met that night and the following nights drew boats, trucks and houses. Most of the young girls drew houses, clowns, trees and flowers.

Colouring appeared to be boring for them. I remarked earlier to what extent these children became absorbed in their drawing: Colouring was quite different. It was as if colouring was just an added touch (Figure 3) which really did not make much difference in their valued drawing. If they did use colour it was never very bright. When drawing or creating, the child seemed to be in another world. I did not observe this when the child added colour. While they were creating, they were completely absorbed. When they drew, they seemed to be thinking, remembering, creating, composing, and organizing. While colouring, they were simply



Figure 2. They would ask for a sheet of paper  
(Street-kids at night in Guarulhos)

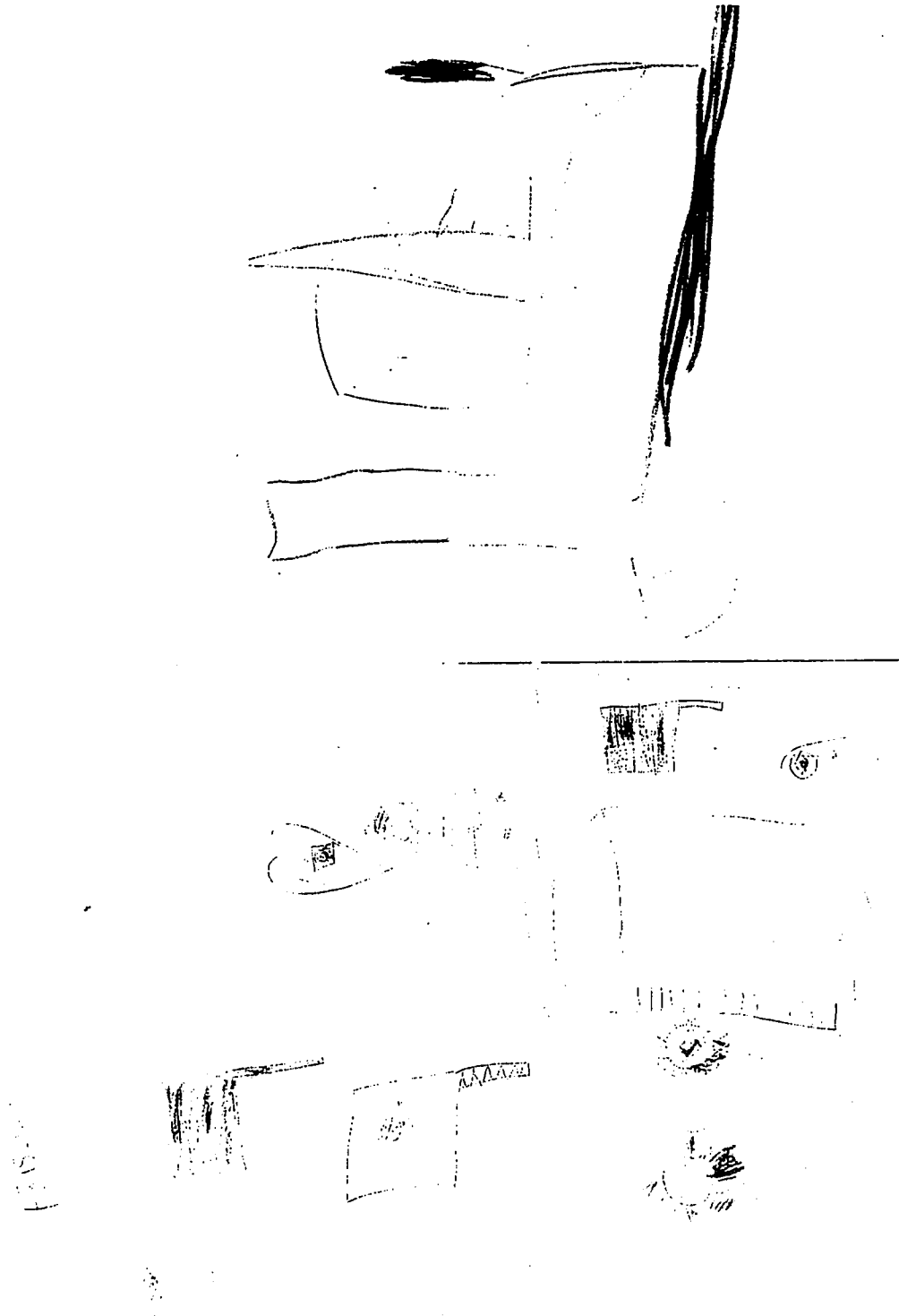


Figure 3. Colouring was just an added touch  
(Street-kids at night in Guarulhos)

filling in the spaces which had already been created. They did, however, make choices when colouring. The important part of colouring, for these street-kids, involved choice and memory: "What colour should I choose?", "What colour is this object?". But most of the time this did not preoccupy them quite as much as drawing. They often simply chose a colour they liked and coloured in their space. Some of the street-kids would play games with the dominos. They were very creative. They made roads and houses or they would put the dominos in rows and watch them fall. Puzzles also attracted them; simple little puzzles about four inches by four inches. Whether the child was playing dominos or drawing the simplest of symbols, I could observe that they were developing skills. They were doing their best. And of course it was obvious that they were expecting some kind of reinforcement—a smile, a tap on the shoulder, a word of approval.

Near the end of the evening on the streets of Brazil, we would sing songs and skip rope. Afterwards, we would sit in a circle to eat and drink (Figure 4). For some of these kids, this was their first and only meal of the day.

On June 18, three women and I walked into the small favela homes on the side of the hills surrounding Guarulhos. This favela is one of hundreds in this town. We had walked about two miles to get there and were received by smiling faces and hugs. We were also addressed as "chia", or auntie. This was the first time these children had met me. The reception was warm and accepting. I felt like a pied piper as many children followed us to an open area which the municipality had cleared to serve as a children's playground. The children who followed us varied in





Figure 4. We would sit in a circle to eat and drink  
(Street-kids at night in Guarulhos)



Figure 5. Favela kids

age from two to fourteen.

Since this was my first time with the favela kids (Figure 5), I simply assisted the others. The first step was to have the kids sit on the ground. We all sat in a circle. Maria, an educator, began telling a story about a cobra and birds. As she told the story, she would act out each part. On her right hand she had a sock which was decorated like a cobra and on her left hand she held a piece of white paper which resembled a bird.

When Maria had finished telling the story, she asked the kids to answer some questions about the cobra and the birds. The kids were only too happy to answer the questions. Then we represented the cobra on paper by drawing spirals. Each child was asked to colour in the cobra (the spiral), with coloured wax crayons. The next step was to cut along the line on the spiral with scissors. Some of the children did not know how to use scissors. For these children, we would take the time to try to teach them how to cut with scissors. When a child had made the effort and still couldn't manage, we would cut the spiral for him/her. Once the spiral was cut out, each was given a piece of string. The string was knotted at one end, while the other end was drawn through a hole made at the cobra's head. As with the scissors, if a child could not make a knot we would try to teach him/her how to do so. If a child was unable to make a knot after genuinely trying many times, we would do it for him/her. Then the cobra was pulled through the air and the spiral would rapidly twirl. The kids seemed to enjoy this tremendously.

We followed the same procedure for the bird. The only difference was that the bird remained white and no colouring was necessary. The little

bird was cut out, creating two wings in one piece of paper. The piece of paper was stapled in the centre leaving a small ring the right size for a small finger to slip through. The children were all very excited, even the 14-year-old youths. We worked together for at least two hours.

I have to mention that working with these children was still both physically and mentally draining for me. Why? Well, I realized that I was still at a point of exploration when I should have been at the point of observing to discover. In other words I was experiencing overwhelming emotional and cultural shock.

In order to better understand the context of these children's lives, I continued to visit the people in the area of Guarulhos and the outlying villages. I saw that farmers grew sugar cane and cultivated sweet potatoes. I spoke with the families. I also ate with them and we discussed religious beliefs, politics, and superstitions. Even though many of them were living in the worst of economic situations, their warm hospitality and their love of life spoke of a peaceful and simple people. They received me with warm smiles, hot sweet coffee and home made bread in their beautifully structured homes made of mud bricks and bamboo poles. I also ate popcorn and sweet potatoes with the farmers. I observed what they did and who they were and sometimes forgot who I was, where I was coming from and what my own beliefs were. This was O.K.. It left my mind clear to listen, hear, look and observe. I later took notes of everything that had been observed and discussed, not forgetting my own personal feelings. The pertinent aspects of these notes will be discussed later in this text.

This was all very helpful for me later when associating with the street-kids. It helped me understand more easily how art education could be an asset for the street-kid. I also felt less like an outsider because now I knew more about their culture, or rather, about their past culture, since Brazilian street-kids belong to a new culture, the culture of the streets.

In subsequent weeks, three of us would bring hot coffee and sweet bread to the young adolescent street-kids who hustled at the market place (Figure 6). These kids were from the favelas.

I also met some people who worked in a day-care centre (Figure 7) for young children from the favelas. They showed me art that had been produced by the children. Some of the work had been prepared by the educators and the children simply needed to fill in the spaces with coloured wax crayons. Lanterns and drawings were exhibited. Some drawings were emotionally expressive, while others depicted more objective subject matter, but all the drawings were very energetic.

The children's ages varied from 4 to 10. Each child had his/her own personal organizer in which to put his/her art. The educators had started teaching them how to write through drawing and colouring. For example, one sheet had a bee on the left side. There was a wave leaving the bee which the child had to follow with a coloured crayon once the bee was coloured in. This wave connected to another bee on the right side of the paper.

I also went to a public school (Figure 8) where I was allowed to visit different classes. One of the classes which I visited was the art class. The teacher who taught this class had been teaching art for more than 25 years. While the children, aged 7 to 14, were creating small



Figure 6. Young favela street-kids who hustle at the market  
(Guarulhos)



Figure 7. Day-care centre for favela kids (Guarulhos)



Figure 8. Art class (A public school in Guarulhos)



objects such as farm animals, I examined the medium being used. It was a commercial type of papier-mâché. A small box contained two sticks of soft materials. Each was wrapped in foil. The student would unwrap the two sticks and blend them together until the blend became smooth and malleable. The teacher showed me numerous books in which the students had drawn. The images in these books consisted of visual observations, geographical forms, dot art, shapes, shading and weaving.

The art teacher also showed me different works made from papier-mâché and gave me a sample (a chicken) which she had made. She explained the process to me. The child first formed a shape with paper and masking tape and afterwards covered the shape with papier-mâché. This material hardens when left to dry at room temperature. Once the object had dried, the child painted it with acrylex paint, a form of gouache. Finally the piece was covered with varnish.

The children were very excited when the teacher was showing me their work. I spent more than one hour with these children and when I managed to finally reach the exit they hugged and kissed me and showered me with gifts and letters.

When I got back to my dwelling, it was time to prepare food and drinks for the street-kids. We picked up four of the kids on our way to the area where we usually worked with them. The others were waiting for us. They asked for paper and pencils. These children loved to use numbers, write their names and, especially, they loved to draw. That night, they concentrated mostly on drawing. If they had trouble with a drawing, they would ask how to continue. Never once did any of them hesitate when presented with paper, pencil, or wax crayons. As soon as

the materials were available, they started creating. Not once did I hear a child say that he/she did not know what to draw or that he/she was not good in art. As they coloured, they would name the colour of crayon used. Whether they were in an aggressive mood or in a joyous mood they would always draw something. And usually that something seemed happy.

On June 27, 1994, I made a special visit to São Paulo. I was accompanied by a young lawyer who introduced me to people involved in the Pastoral Do Minor. These people worked with street-kids. Most of them had a regular job and gave at least six hours per day of their time to help with the street-kids. They worked on shifts, some during the day and others at night. They managed to open two houses near the centre of the city of São Paulo. One of these houses lodged street-kids during the day and the other house lodged some eight street-kids at night.

On June 28, 1994, I visited the day house. This is where street-kids came to relax, wash their clothes, eat and participate in art sessions. They showed me some ceramic pieces which they had made, as well as banners and games they had created. An art educator came in regularly once a week to teach them techniques and to guide their art-making.

A 15-year-old boy whose legs were deformed as a result of malnutrition, insisted on drawing something for me. He knelt at a small table and using a pencil, started to draw a flower. He was very concentrated on what he was doing. Each line was meticulously drawn and each stroke of the pencil was as important as the other. Each flower was outlined first and detail was added once the main form was drawn. The drawing was completed by the casual addition of colour with pieces of wax

crayons or coloured pencil. As I had already noticed with younger street-kids in Guarulhos, this older adolescent was also much more absorbed by drawing the outline of his composition than colouring in the empty spaces. But unlike many of the drawings I had seen, he used coloured pencils and coloured crayons to make some of his outline.

A 15-year-old girl also wanted to draw something for me. Standing over a small table, she started her drawing very much the same way her colleague had, with one exception: The contour of her drawing was made with a lead pencil. She then traced the contour with coloured wax crayons and never filled in the empty spaces. Four little red hearts formed the centre of the flower. When applying colour she was not as meticulous as the young man had been and seemed less inspired, even though each colour was carefully chosen. They both signed their work and wrote a little message for me. As they did so, they asked the street worker how to spell certain words. When composing their drawing, each of the adolescents was beaming with joy (Figure 9), indicating pride and satisfaction in their work.

On June 29, I was back on the streets with the street-kids of Guarulhos. The regular kids showed up. It seemed as if this was an all-new experience for them. Most of them picked up pencil and paper and started drawing. They were as concentrated as ever. Some didn't even bother putting in colour before starting another drawing. I realized that many of them did as the kids in São Paulo had done: Some drew the contours of their drawing with lead pencil and others used coloured pencil. But most did not fill in the empty spaces of their drawing. All of them made a full outline of their drawing before doing anything else, with the



Figure 9. Each of the adolescents was beaming...indicating pride and satisfaction in their work (Sao Paulo, night)

exception of one who loved making rubbings from the stones and tiles on the sidewalk and on the ground.

A week passed and I was back in São Paulo where I had an interview scheduled for July 6, 1994 with a street worker named Joana. Joana, along with other workers, had been working in different communities aiding pregnant women, undernourished children and poor families. They had a program providing treatment for persons who had physical problems, using alternative medicine made from various local plants and herbs. This program had been developed over a period of five years. Joana had been working with street-kids since 1993. She had first worked for six months in a night shelter but left soon after, because she "could not continue working under conditions where money was being used for purposes other than children and where there was much political bad will" (Interview with Joana, July 6, 1994).

Joana worked with the Pastoral do Minor group, whose primary objective was to aid children and adolescents. Joana and two other workers had opened the two houses in São Paulo I mentioned previously, one open during the day for activities and medical attention, and the other open at night. She was one of the people who worked principally with young pregnant girls on the streets. When I met her, she was also working at the day house because it had just opened and also because cold weather was keeping the house very busy and extra help was needed. Joana also still kept contact with the kids on the streets to maintain the precious relationships she had formed.

Joana described the work of the house which provided food and lodging for up to eight adolescents at night. She said that these

adolescents were gradually learning to live away from the street. She also told me that these youths "started by going back to school, re-establishing ties with their families and getting to a point where, when they reach 18 years of age, they can move out, live in a rented room, have a job and eventually begin to live their own lives and be responsible for themselves. "A long term project!" she smiled.

Joana also described activities on the streets where the workers would bring along paper, pencils and drawing tools, as well as balls, dominos, checkers and other games to play.

They usually brought simple things; "...a ball, a patuca, a little leather object with feathers, a native game, you bat the object back and forth" (Interview with Joana, July 6, 1994).

She continued, "some also ask to be shown how to add and subtract. They also want to practice their writing. At night volleyball or soccer is played. Kids ask us to tell stories. Really, it's to be a presence to these kids. They know there's somebody on the streets who cares about them. Now, after the time I've been on the streets they know who I am, they know they can trust me" (Interview with Joana, July 6, 1994). I asked Joana about the art classes that were taught at the day house. She informed me that "ceramics, clay is important, it releases a lot of things. The conversation that goes on while they're using the clay gives us some clue as to how they are thinking, what they're feeling... because they can manipulate something with their hands, it seems to give them a certain confidence (Figure 10). Incredible! They're more relaxed when they're using clay, they're making something, they're modelling it, and at the same time it's something they've created and so they see something

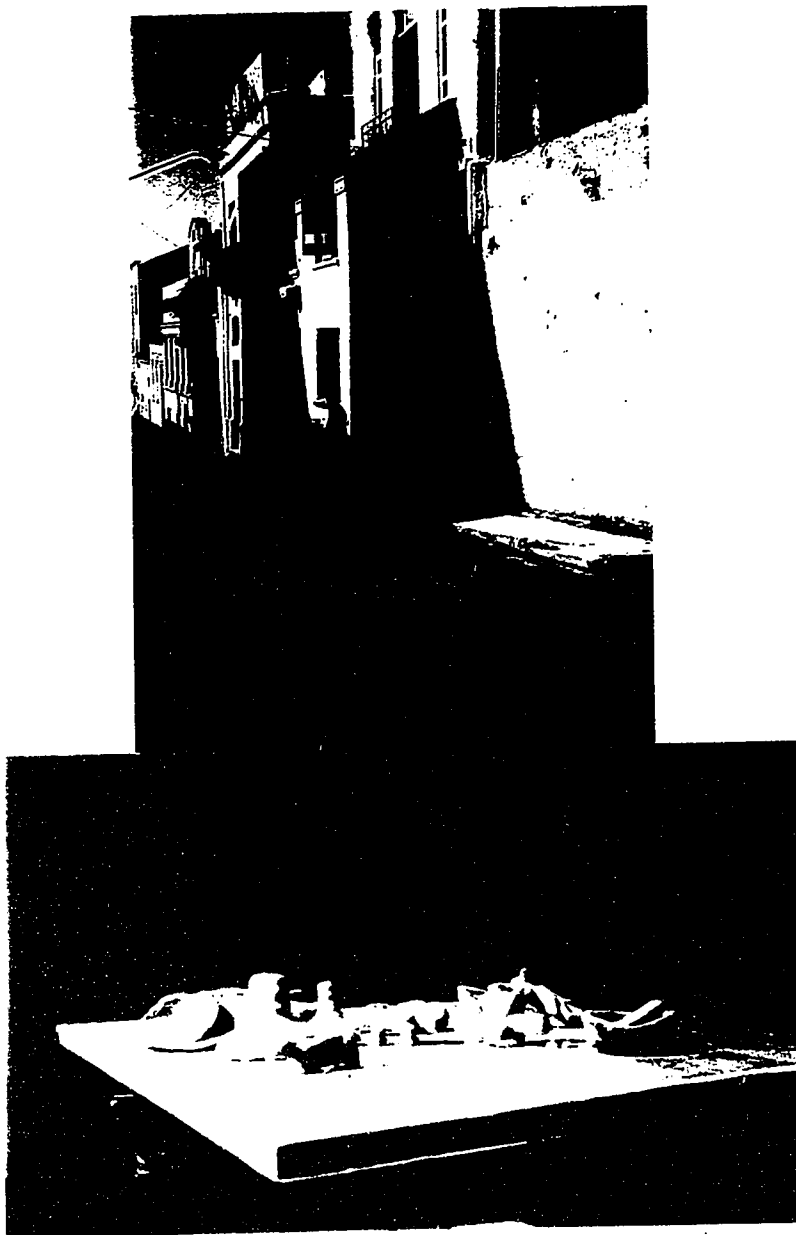


Figure 10. "Because they can manipulate something with their hands it seems to give them a certain confidence...they see something they've done right there in front of them."  
(Day house for street-kids, Sao Paulo)

they've done right there in front of them. They seem to be a lot more open...It seems to release a lot of barriers that are there. They work naturally. Because the kids on the street have learned not to trust..." (Interview with Joana, July 6, 1994).

It seemed quite obvious that these street-kids were willing to learn. But this could not happen without the proper contact and a proper approach made by the educator to help the street-kid enter into the learning mode.

Back on the streets of Guarulhos, at night, the situation had varied. This time the psychologist tried to organize a project with the street-kids. The project included making pipas (kites) and selling them. She discussed material, cost and production. The idea was interesting but the timing was off. The kids were too agitated to listen. They were very mischievous. They disturbed pedestrians. They interrupted traffic. They beat up on peers. They stole from peers. They did just about everything they could to get into trouble. We decided to bring out food and drinks to calm them down. By then they were too tired to listen. A little four-year-old street-kid fell asleep in my arms, while others sat on the ground and relaxed.

On July 16, 1994, two missionary nuns and I went to the favela (Figure 11). Many kids joined us as we walked among the small huts. At least 15 young people gathered around in only a matter of a few minutes. We brought them to an open area and I worked with them for about three hours. Ages varied from about 2 to 14. We used white recycled computer paper, glue, scissors and coloured crayons. A small cat roamed around and became our mascot. The cat also became our theme. The kids were asked to





Figure 11. Art class with favela kids (Guarulhos)



Figure 12. RECULTURARTE: A centre for reeducation, culture and art (Guarulhos)



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Figure 13. RECULTURARTE (Newsletter)

draw whatever suited their fancy but the cat often appeared in the drawings.

I managed to keep 44 of the drawings created by the favela street-kids with whom we worked during the day. All but seven of the drawings have an outline and empty spaces were not filled in with colour. Thirteen of the 44 drawings were created by a young 11-year-old boy. All of his drawings were outlined in black and none of them were filled in with colour. Coloured crayon was used for the outline of all the other drawings including the ones where the empty spaces were filled in with colour.

I had another look at the drawings created by the "abandoned" street-kids with whom we worked at night. They always gave us all their drawings and the street workers would keep them all. Between the beginning of May and the end of June, I managed to keep 45 of those drawings. Of these, 14 had been coloured in. These 14 drawings had been made by six children. Nine of these 14 drawings were created by only three of the six children. Again I noticed that only an outline and very few details have been drawn by the majority of the kids. Very few of them even bothered to fill in the spaces with colour.

By July 20, 1994, I had flown to the city of Aracaju, situated north of Sao Paulo in the State of Sergipe. The principal aim of my trip to the Nordeste area was to visit centres where educators worked with street-kids and to observe what was being done. Was art taught to the kids? How? To what end? While in Nordeste, I was always accompanied by a person who worked with the Department of Human Rights and the Department for "Battered Black Women".

Not long after my arrival in Aracaju, I had an opportunity to visit a centre subsidized by the government. This centre was feeding more than 50 kids a day and lodging about 30 boys at night. Art classes were organized by an art educator. Natural products such as shampoo and detergent were made by the kids. They also painted on ceramic flower pots and created various collages. These products were sold by the kids at a market. Afterwards the money was divided evenly among the kids who had participated in the making and selling of the natural products and the flower pots. The money was not given directly to the kids but, rather, it was put into each child's individual bank account. The child then used this money to buy shoes and other necessities.

The next day, we ended up in another area of Aracaju and I visited a project called "Reculturarte--Reeducacao, Cultura et Arte" (Figure 12). Financing for this project came from World Vision. The project's themes are education, culture and art. Every month they printed a small journal prepared by kids and educators (Figure 13). The front cover was nearly always decorated with a drawing made by one of the children. Activities were dance, music and visual arts. A prerequisite for participation in the project was that the kids had to stay in school or go back to school, as the case may be.

I made a presentation to communications students at the Universidade Federal de Sergipe, situated in the city of Aracaju, on art education and how my research related to it. The next day I travelled to Salvador, Bahia, an eight-hour bus ride south of Aracaju. In Salvador, I was allowed to take a course on citizenship education, aimed at aiding educators to better understand the population of children (i.e. a blend of

street-kids and favela kids) which they are teaching and in the process, guide these children towards a better future. This course was given the Salvador Municipal City Hall by UNICEF and Anistia International.

At this course, I was able to meet many interesting people. One of these was Cesare de Florio La Rocca, coordinator of Projeto Axé. I discovered that he had organized this project aimed at re-educating street-kids, getting them back into school, helping them find jobs, and most important of all, helping them regain their self-confidence. I also had a short visit with one of his employees at the offices of Projeto Axé.

I viewed a short film describing the project and was impressed by its excellent organization. I wanted to know more. I began making arrangements for further research, but lack of time forced me to make arrangements for a future visit to Projeto Axé. I finished the course at the Salvador Municipal City Hall and received my certificate.

As I travelled back to Aracaju, I reflected on the information that I had received during the course and reviewed my course notes. One point that seemed particularly relevant to educators was the idea that "education for creativity will always be a way to transformation." "Transformation education," however, requires patience: Sometimes results are not immediate. On the streets, when applying alternative art education to street-kids, patience is always required if educators are to awaken the creative mind.

Also, Albert Einstein was quoted as saying that "intuition is fundamental in the scientific process". In effect, experience has led me to believe that it is the basis for all creative processes including alternative art education for street-kids.

After a small trip to Recife, I returned to Aracaju to board the plane for Guarulhos, and thence to Montreal, with plans to return to Salvador for a more in-depth study of Projeto Axé and the teaching of art to street-kids.

## CHAPTER 6

### OBSERVATIONS OF A PROJECT IN NORTH-EASTERN BRAZIL WHERE ART EDUCATION WAS SUCCESSFULLY APPLIED TO RE-CULTURE AND RE-EDUCATE STREET-KIDS: PROJETO AXÉ (1995)

By June 5, 1995, I had started a detailed study of Projeto Axé. Beforehand, Projeto Axé personnel had asked that I fax them my thesis proposal as well as a description of my research methodology written in Portuguese, along with a research plan including a questionnaire for both street kids and educators.

#### Interview with a Pedagogical Coordinator

My first interview at Projeto Axé was with Evalda Vilanova, the project's pedagogical coordinator on June 5, 1995. She graciously informed me of the story of Projeto Axé, its philosophy and its work, from its beginning to the present day. A pedagogue with specializations in educational orientation and psychodrama, Evalda Vilanova had been working in this field for 25 years. She had been Pedagogical Coordinator at Projeto Axé for four and a half years.

Evalda Vilanova told me that Projeto Axé had been working with street-kids since June 1, 1990. She mentioned that in five years the project had managed to approach from 7,000 to 10,000 children. She also said that Projeto Axé had approximately 28 educators working on the streets of the city of Salvador in the state of Bahia. At least 67 educators and helpers were working in the project. Altogether, between the street, the office and the projects, there were approximately 156 individuals working with Projeto Axé. She also said that financial help came from numerous sources, such as Directos Humanos, Tourism, UNICEF,



Prefeitura, Pommar, and Italia.

Evalda Vilanova described Projeto Axé's four pedagogical workshops:

- (1) paper recycling (writing paper, boxes, etc.)
- (2) silkscreen (cloth, shirts, etc.)
- (3) forged iron (iron works where material for fences is made as well as furniture and various other artistic objects)
- (4) Moda Axé, where individuals learn to make clothes and design fashion.

The project also worked with other artistic groups such as a circus (Figure 14), Capoeira, which is a Brazilian dance form and percussion band groups (Figure 15), all of which will be discussed later in this chapter. I was continuously reminded that none of these courses represented an end in and of itself. Valda said that, through these workshops, the educators addressed the question of the child's life, helping him/her to internalize a constructive attitude toward the working world. The child learned that he/she not only has rights, but societal obligations as well.

Evalda Vilanova spoke of a pedagogical journey in relation to the street-kids. Street education is the first phase of that journey. "With this perspective in mind," she continued, "the educator goes onto the street and tries to create a future with the child, for the child" (Interview with Evalda Vilanova, June 5, 1995).

In relation to street-kids' futures and Projeto Axé's approach, Evalda Vilanova made it clear that a child's alternatives were limited. She explained that "being on the streets, the child becomes gregarious and he/she creates links with groups or gangs in the street and creates certain dynamics. In doing so the child ends up creating another culture"

(Interview with Evalda Vilanova, June 5, 1995).

The educator would slowly start by entering this space and cautiously introducing changes in the children's world view. Evalda Vilanova described how the educator would guide the street-kids towards a different way of life by, first of all, creating affectionate ties with them. This would enable the educator to approach the child and help him/her understand the reason he/she is on the streets. The educator would make the child understand that he/she was not at fault for this situation. In Evalda Vilanova's view, the child on the street would often feel extremely guilty and his/her self-esteem might be non-existent. Therefore the educator would help the child become aware of the causes behind his/her ending up on the street. Together, the educator and the child would develop a better outlook on the child's life.

About the larger causes underlying children's abandonment on the street, she said:

The first thing that we should understand is that the existence of abandoned children is the reflection or the result of abandoned families and a disorganized family is the result of a disorganized society which provokes a lack of structure in the system, within both economic and social structures. This interferes with human relationships and as a result the child ends up on the street. (Interview with Evalda Vilanova, June 5, 1995).

Evalda Vilanova also explained that, as an educational project aimed at developing better citizens, Projeto Axé included a literacy program. She commented, "here at Projeto Axé, we are aware that without knowledge of reading and writing it is difficult to be a good citizen. Literacy permits the child to be a good citizen and become a good member of society...the child goes back to school with a more critical mind" (Interview with Evalda Vilanova, June 5, 1995).

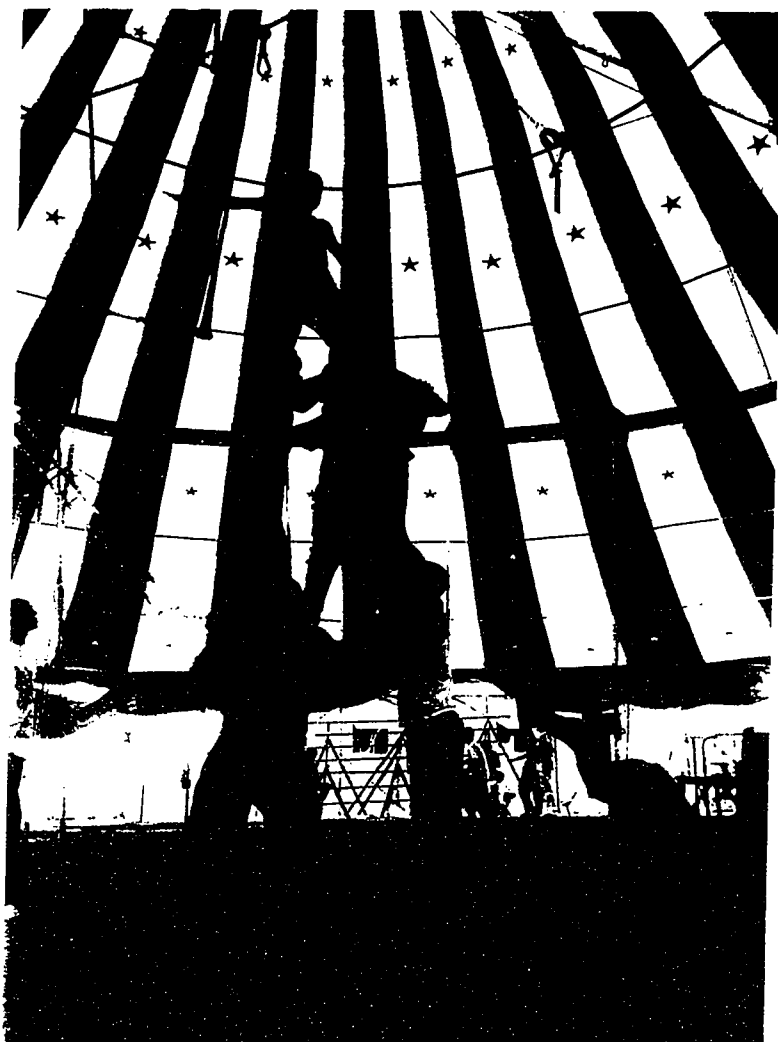


Figure 14. The project also works with other artistic groups, such as a circus.

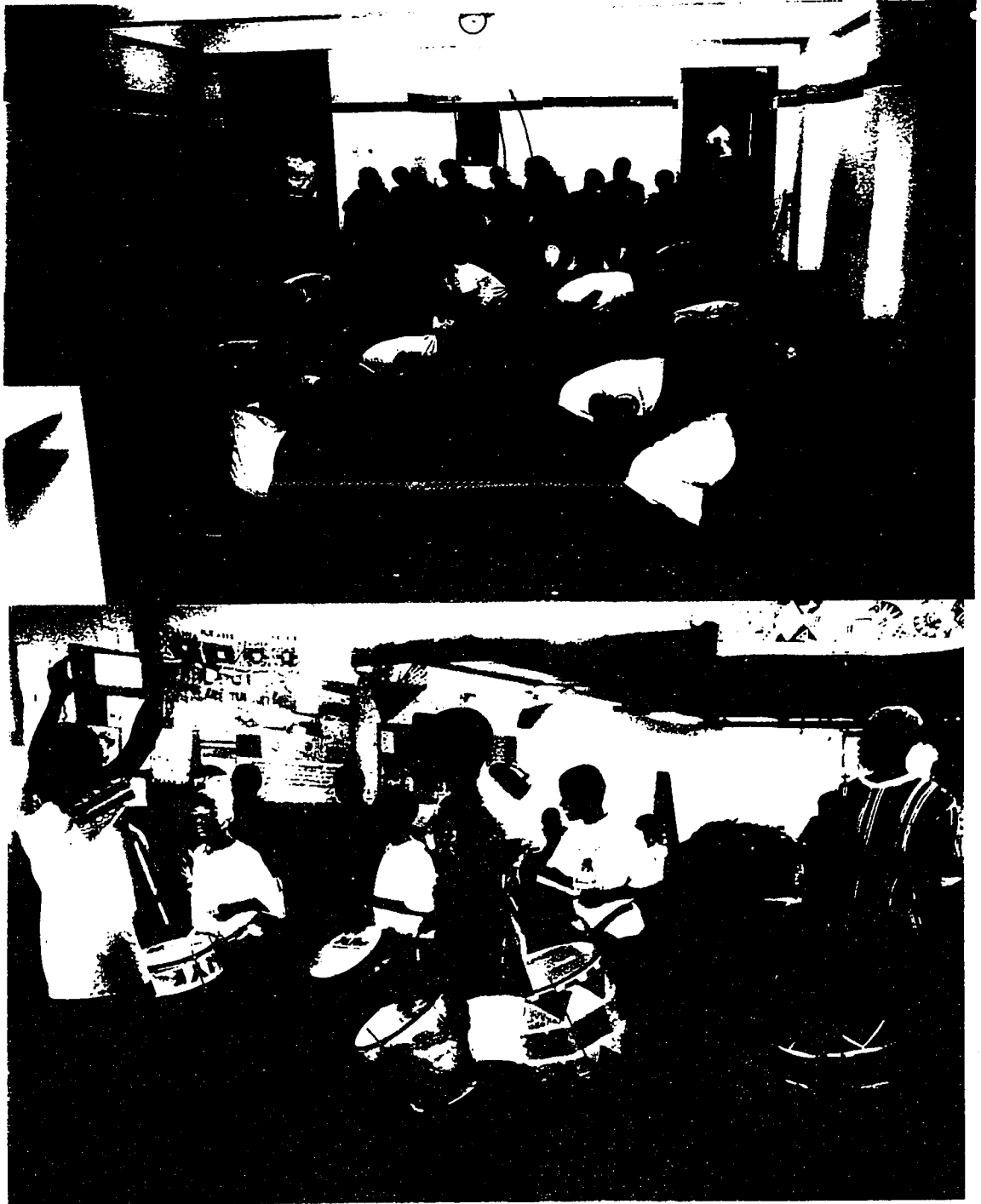


Figure 15. Capoeira and band groups

Projeto Axé personnel would make sure that the child really wanted to return to school before trying to re-integrate him/her into school. This is what Evalda Vilanova called "the pedagogy of desire... even if the school has problems, it is important that he/she goes to school as a critical citizen" (Interview with Evalda Vilanova, June 5, 1995). She pointed out that street education, including literacy, was Projeto Axé's first phase in children's re-integration into school.

Before children were permitted to choose a pedagogical unit such as the circus, Capoeira, band, paper making, etc., they were taught about their roots as a people of colour. Before joining any of the units, the street-kid also had to be reintroduced into a home or a family through the intervention of a street worker/educator. Evalda Vilanova explained:

As we reinstate self-esteem we also introduce the cultural roots. Most of these children are black and they should be proud to be black. Being black is part of self-esteem and identity.... We presuppose that when we work with identity we need to work with cultural roots and we have to keep this in mind at all levels.... The child has to understand himself and identify himself as a black person living in Bahia, in Salvador and as a citizen of the world. It is necessary to look at new ways to approach the problem. They need to reassess their culture. This becomes a historical process. The child needs to do this with an international, a global view. (Interview with Evalda Vilanova, June 5, 1995).

Evalda Vilanova said that Projeto Axé also tried, with permission from the child, to find his family (parents, relatives, etc.) and to create in the child a desire to return to the family. Projeto Axé staff would work with the child and the family throughout this lengthy process. She reported that, when it was not possible to unite child and family, there were other alternatives. For the adolescent, Projeto Axé would rent a room and for the younger child, Projeto Axé would work with institutions to prepare him/her for the transition from street to home.

Projeto Axé also oriented the instructors of each unit so that their approach to the children would be in keeping with the philosophy of Projeto Axé. Then the supervisor from Projeto Axé would complete the pedagogical course of action in order to guarantee the logic or coherence of the process. For example, Evalda Vilanova said that at the Picolino School (circus), the instructors and the Projeto Axé educators would work together, linking technique and pedagogy. She also said that:

The activity is but a means to permit the child to build a better future. And the culture is a means to situate the child in the world. Culture is a pedagogical instrument, not an end in itself. All these activities are not an end in themselves but a means...The objective is pedagogical. The objective is to supply the child with skills that he/she can use to continue building a future, creating other identities... We bring this child to a point where he will internalize the basic presupposed knowledge for the workforce...the child needs to have an internalized attitude. This attitude needs to be part of him/her. All activities are pedagogical alibis". (Interview with Evalda Vilanova, June 5, 1995).

After Evalda Vilanova had summarized the most pertinent information, views and philosophy behind Projeto Axé, she asked me to return later that day to pick up an agenda which she would prepare in accordance with my program plan.

I also had the honour, once more, of meeting Cesare de Florio la Rocca, the person who had started Projeto Axé five years earlier. He briefly spoke of the goals of Projeto Axé and its accomplishments.

#### Informal Meeting with Two Street Educators and Four Street-Kids

I had prepared various questions for interviews with street-kids. These were:

1. How old are you?
2. What is your first name?
3. Do you live in Salvador, Bahia?



Figure 16. Interview with educators and street-kids

4. Have you always lived in Salvador?
5. How did you find out about Projeto Axé?
6. What was the first thing that attracted you to the art project at Projeto Axé?
7. How did you decide what was to be your first work in art?
8. Explain to me how you created this piece of art.
9. What other material have you worked with so far?
10. Why have you chosen certain material?
11. Do you think that Projeto Axé should keep its art classes? Why?

I also had questions prepared for the educators. These included the following:

1. Are there more children or more adolescents on the streets in this area?
2. Are art activities important to the street-kids?
3. How long have you been working in this area?
4. How and when is the child first introduced to the pedagogical units?
5. How many educators are on the streets?
6. Why have you chosen to work with these kids?

Questions varied somewhat from person to person, depending on the responsibilities different educators had, the interview situation, the environment and respondents' willingness to answer.

All the street-kids interviewed for this thesis have been assigned pseudonyms in order to protect their anonymity.

My first encounter with street-educators was with a young man and a young woman (Figure 16) in a small park not far from Praça da Sè. The area was called Praça da Piedade. Another educator had worked here



previously for four years. The educators which I met on this day, June 6, 1995, were new to the area. I was informed that a street-educator would usually change areas after 2 1/2 years. They rotated in order to get to know other areas and other children.

While the street-educators were telling me the above information, I asked one of the young men who had just arrived to hold the microphone for me. He was very pleased to do so. His name was Paulo. The educators had recently visited Paulo's home. He had been with Projeto Axé for two years and was now interested in one of the units. One of the educators told me that Paulo would spend a week with one unit, just to see if he could identify with the unit. One of the educators said that Paulo loved flying kites and playing football.

I asked the adolescent if he liked art and other activities. He answered that he did like art and found it great to fly kites. Flying kites was his favourite activity. Edivaldo, another of the adolescents, said he liked playing marbles and drawing. One of the educators repeated very much what Evalda had previously stated:

The football, the kites, this is not an end but a means. It is only a step to approach them. During this approach, we pay attention to their interests. First we perceived that they liked games because they often asked to play games like marbles and dominos. Now we are trying to insert the games as part of pedagogy and art. Then they start to have some discipline. Afterwards, they will be able to start to work with reading and writing and other activities such as drawing". (Interview with Street-Educators, June 6, 1995)

For the time being, since these educators are new in the area, games predominate. But even then, work is being done. One of the educators told me that they (the educators and the children) all donated some money and, together, bought a football. They talked with the children and decided that the ball belonged to all of them. They had started a

dialogue.

Another older adolescent, Alberto, who was an ex-student of Axé, was now working for Projeto Axé. He had also gone to England for one month to demonstrate work from Bahia.

The educators also said that Projeto Axé was preoccupied with the literacy of the children but could not interfere in their space. If there was interference, the children would resist. The educators said that they had to arrive slowly "and try to maintain what they [the children] have and then introduce Axé's objectives. The educator's objectives are interlinked without changing their [the children's] habits. Then we link what they have with the Axé project" (Interview with Street-Educators, June 6, 1995).

It was made clear that each child had his/her own pace and that procedures varied. But contacts still had to be made and great care was taken to make good contact and create good links with a street-kid before accepting him/her into a pedagogical unit.

I was invited to meet another group of street-kids who gathered together with the educators in another area to draw, colour and create collage. At least seven children showed up, varying from about 4 to 17 years of age. The educators had a poorly lit area behind an old theatre, measuring about 10 feet by 8 feet, where they had a table, four chairs, crayons, small pieces of wool and string, popsicle sticks, scissors, glue and pencils. This was where I met Carlos.

#### Interview with Carlos

Carlos was a young man of 17 who had joined Projeto Axé in 1991. He

still loved drawing and colouring.

He told me that when he started with Projeto Axé the educators would take down the name of each child. "We would play ball. We had fun. We started to know each other and we started to get more involved together. They (the educators) played ball, flew kites, helped the sick kids, brought them to a doctor, gave them support and affection...bit by bit we started knowing Axé" (Interview with Carlos, June 6, 1995).

What first attracted Carlos was paper making. He said:

First there was school, literacy and then paper making. I liked this a lot. I went to many Projeto Axé activities, such as paper making, Mode Axé and iron works.... My first art work was paper-making. I also made one of my first pieces of art at the iron workshop. All the things that we made we used to show [in an exhibition]. All the things that we made in the iron workshop, for me, were art. I was discovering. With Mode Axé, I worked with a sewing machine, cutting and sewing by hand and did design drawing. At the iron shop, I did soldering, gate cutting and gate soldering. I could have chosen sewing.... It was the program I liked the most. (Interview with Carlos, June 6, 1995)

I asked Carlos if Projeto Axé should continue. He definitely agreed that it should continue. Why? His answer was very clear:

Projeto Axé has to continue because we [the street-kids] have nothing to do here. We walk back and forth without anything to do. Without any art to do, without any knowledge. Then Projeto Axé is good because it develops your brain, the ideas, the knowledge (Figure 17). We get to know new people. It is good. We can't stop this project. Without it we lose the Axé Dream. (Interview with Carlos, June 6, 1995)

#### Projeto Axé and Various Units

During the rest of the week I accompanied two educators, one of whom was the artist working with Projeto Axé. His name was Peta. I questioned Peta about Afro-Bahiana Art. He explained that the majority of the Bahiana population was Afro-Bahiana. Symbols from many areas of Africa are used in their self-expressions, and these symbols are integrated into



Figure 17. "Projeto Axé...develops...ideas...[and] knowledge."  
(Carlos, June 6, 1995)

the Bahiana art, giving it the name of Afro-Bahiana Art.

During the first week of my research, I was introduced to the various units. I visited the Escola Picolino [circus school] as well as the Capoeira class. About 18 students participated in this class, three of whom were girls. The instructor talked about the previous class, discussing the problems which had arisen. Then an article in the daily newspaper was read by one of the educators. The article was about a teachers' strike. This activity seemed a good example of the idea of awareness and literacy. The children, ranging from age eight to about sixteen, were encouraged to ask questions about the teachers' views as well as the government's position. A discussion began. A young girl commented that one chooses to be a teacher to help the children and to help society, not simply to receive a pay cheque. Another young man commented that he would like to become a lawyer, to be able to defend the children.

So far I had met street-educators, circus-educators and Capoeira-educators. The street-educators dealt with children, talked with them, kept them busy and helped them express themselves through drawing, colouring and creating. They helped the children discover a future. The street-educators used what they all called "pedagogical flirting."

The circus-educators developed skills, applied discipline and helped the children gain self-confidence. By doing so they developed self-esteem and pride in what they, the children, could accomplish.

The Capoeira-educators developed an awareness in the kids by keeping them up-to-date with daily news and government decisions. They helped the children build self-confidence and ask questions about both political and

social issues. They helped the children develop a capacity for critical thinking. By doing so, they created, from within, the will and the conviction that is needed to change society and make it a better place in which to live. An example of this dynamic is the child who wanted to become a lawyer.

Formal Interviews with Five Street-Kids, One Psychologist,  
Two Educators, and One Artist-Educator

Circus

Interview with Maria. I began the formal interviews about one week later. I first approached an 18-year-old girl at the Picolino Circus. Her name was Maria. She was very attracted to the circus. She told me that Projeto Axé had revived her, given her a chance to plan for the future. Maria had lived all her life in Salvador and she had two sisters. One of her two sisters had a different mother.

Projeto Axé seemed to have had a very good influence on her. She had helped to get her two sisters off the street, where she herself had been involved in various activities. At first she spent four months with an artisan workshop at Projeto Axé. Then Maria started to train at the circus. She worked on the tight-rope at another circus for a year before she joined the Picolino Circus. When she started at Picolino, she learned how to juggle and work on the trapeze. She liked juggling very much. She said:

First, when I looked at juggling, I thought that it was very difficult and I said to myself that I would never learn this. For one month I didn't train in juggling. I trained only in trapeze and mono-cycling. But one day I decided to train just to see if it was very difficult. I started to train and train and today, in any presentation or show I only juggle... Now we started with new work, which is the tight rope...now I'm doing juggling with the tightrope...It's a kind of work in which you need two years to be

good. I've been working three months and we will have the premiere performance July 8, 1995. (Interview with Maria, June 13, 1995)

The circus had a strong influence on Maria and her experience in it prompted her to think about her future. "I'm studying but later I will be a circus educator," she said. Not only had she learned about circus activities but she had realized the importance of education and of being a good citizen. "The circus is doing many things for me because, beyond the circus art, there is education and citizenship (Figure 18). The work here is not only circus art but there is also education" (Interview with Maria, June 13, 1995).

Interview with the Circus Psychologist: Ana Maria Burchai. As I circulated among these energetic young people I noticed a young lady who seemed quite familiar with the children. I discovered that she was Ana Maria Burchai, a clinical psychologist, who came directly to the circus after her training. She had worked at the Escola Picolino des Artes do Circo for three years.

She worked with the group of children as a whole. She supervised, coordinated classes and worked with children who had specific problems, as well as with teachers. She mentioned that ages varied but Projeto Axé children were usually 10 years of age or younger. Some would stay on to a later age and continue training while others would move on to other pedagogical units.

In the view of Burchai, the circus fulfilled a function and covered material not included in regular schools. She explained:

At the official school the children gain the potential to do things, knowledge, all those things. The circus is the opposite. The circus does not see the child as a potential for something in the future. The circus is something that happens now. In the present, the child is able to produce something, now. It is not something to



Figure 18. "Circus art...is education and citizenship."  
(Maria, June 13, 1995)



be. It is happening now...the circus is concrete. They are working the body. It is a very direct form of education. To educate your own body, all the corporal imagery, the self-esteem, the self-confidence. (Figure 19) It is to confront challenges. They are always confronted with a challenge. And it is not a challenge by the other, it is a challenge within himself/herself, by the situation, by the tools like the tightrope. It is him/her in front of his/her fear, his/her insecurity. Then I think that is very important and very singular, the kind of presentation. It is very important because it works the artistic, the beauty, the vanity, the glow...I think it is complete in terms of personality formation. (Interview, Ana Maria Burchai, June 13, 1995)

Interview with Pedro. My next interview was with Pedro, who represented an excellent example of the effectiveness of the circus program. Unlike the other young men and women who had been interviewed, Pedro was not part of Projeto Axé. Pedro was from a very poor family in the community of Boca de Rio in Salvador just beside the circus area. Circumstances had allowed him to become one of the Picolino Circus instructors. Encouraged by his mother, Pedro had earned a scholarship offered by Anselmo, the circus director. Pedro worked very hard to obtain this scholarship. Then one day, at the end of a 15-day course and a simple presentation in front of the mayor of Salvador and many people from city hall, Anselmo walked to the microphone and announced that the Picolino Circus was offering its first scholarship to Pedro.

Pedro remarked that his heart started to beat fast. "It was the greatest thing for me." Soon after, he gave his first performance during the presentation of "Fantasy," prepared by the Picolino Circus. After two more presentations, he realized that he was losing his will power. He left the circus for a while, realized he missed it and finally came back. Before long, Anselmo invited him to be an instructor. Pedro needed the money to help at home, so this offer was very welcome to him. He said:



Figure 19. "Corporal imagery, the self-esteem, the self-confidence." (Ana Maria Burchai, June 13, 1995)

I was happy. Who wouldn't want to be independent. I come from a poor family and my father was the only one working. We are three brothers and it was hard for my father to provide. The best thing that has ever happened to me is the circus...The circus gives me a place in society where I can develop physically and mentally...I think the circus is one of the most beautiful forms of art. Circus art should never be forgotten. It should not be isolated... More support should be given to circus artists (Figure 20) and to the circus in general. (Interview with Pedro, June 13, 1995)

Interview with Ivan. Ivan became involved in the circus at the age of nine and worked as a trapeze artist with the circus until the age of 32. He then left the circus for a short time. At the time of my interview with him, he had been employed by the Picolino Circus for four years. As the Picolino Circus worked in tandem with Projeto Axé, Ivan worked with all the Projeto Axé kids in the circus unit.

Ivan said that circus art takes away a child's fear. He felt that the child wants the challenge (Figure 21) and the child challenges all the circus apparatus. He believed it was very important for all of them. Approximately 120 children had been trained by Ivan. He insisted that this school should always exist, because, in Bahia, it was the only one of its kind.

Interview with Jean-Paul. Jean-Paul, an acrobat, was a young instructor from France who had been at the circus for only three months. He had trained in this type of work since he was very young and he believed that when one has knowledge, one should share this knowledge and it is especially important to share one's knowledge with children. Street-kids especially interested Jean-Paul.

When he came to Salvador he wanted to learn Capoeira. Someone talked to him about the circus. Since he was going to be in Salvador for three months he decided to give the circus a hand. And since they were working



Figure 20. "More support should be given to circus artists."  
(Pedro, June 13, 1995)

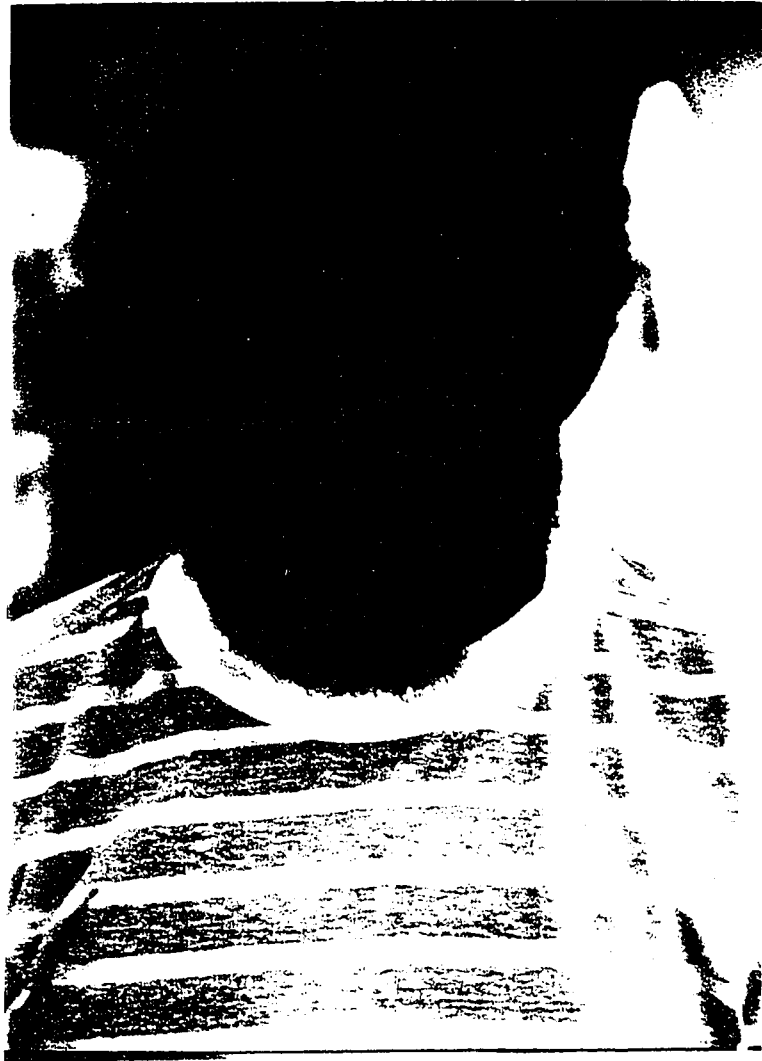


Figure 21. "The child wants the challenge." (Ivan, June 13, 1995)

with street-kids, he wanted to help and, at the same time, learn Portuguese. He realized that the discipline at the circus is very hard for the children, but thought it was a good thing because, as he remarked, "they work with their body" (Interview with Jean-Paul, June 14, 1995). Not only do they experience circus procedures but they also experience valuable education. "They can make a connection between the circus and the education" (Interview with Jean-Paul, 14 June, 1995) (Figure 22).

The circus, Jean-Paul agreed, is a performance. And a performance with children who have energy is very strong. Jean-Paul, who had also worked in Belgium and Germany, believed the circus must live, especially for children.

Following the interview with Jean-Paul, I had a brief meeting with Anselmo, Director of Escola Picolino des Artes do Circo (Figure 23). He confirmed what had been previously said during other interviews.

Soon after visiting the circus, I went to see the Capoeira program with Peta and another educator from Projeto Axé, Nice.

### Capoeira

Interview with Julian. It is here that I met Julian, who was about 14 years old. He used to live in the country but he had grown up in Salvador. He used to be on the streets washing car windshields, sniffing glue and using drugs. This is where he met educators from Projeto Axé. When I met him, he was no longer using drugs. He said "I'm not the child who used to be on the street a long time ago. I've grown older and I think about helping my mother" (Interview with Julian, June 14, 1995).

Julian chose Capoeira because he enjoyed the dance and the rhythm. Before joining Capoeira, Julian worked with the Projeto Axé idea workshop

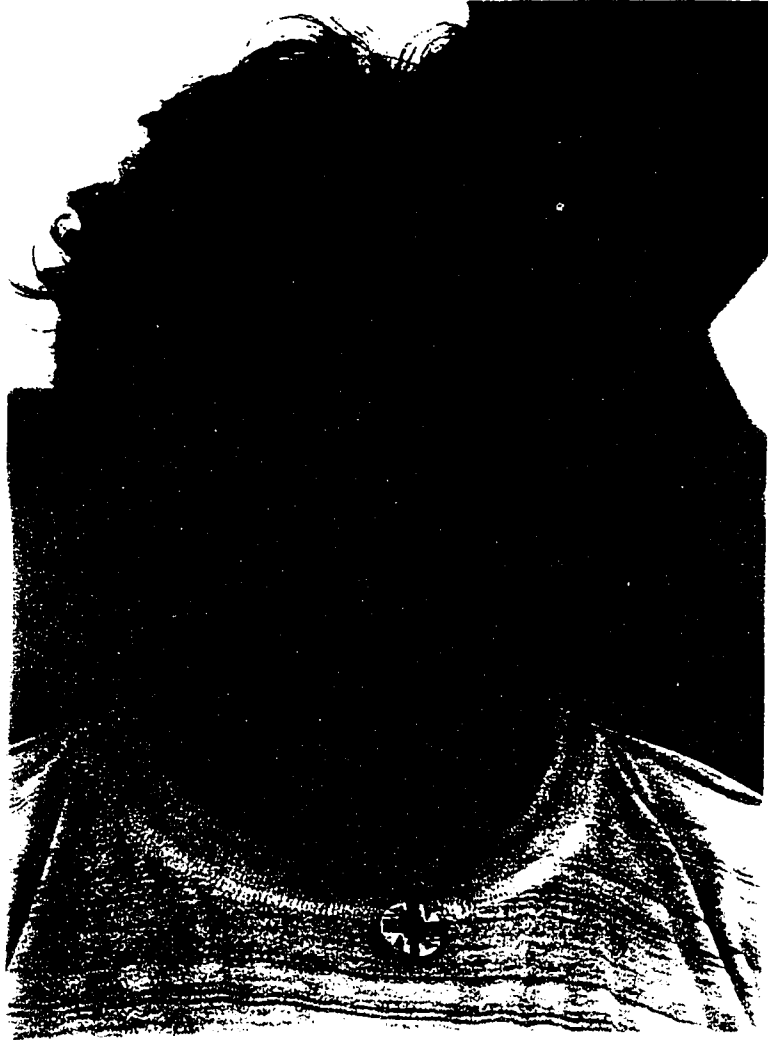


Figure 22. "They can make a connection between the circus and the education." (Jean-Paul, June 14, 1995)



Figure 23. Anselmo is Director of Escola Picolino  
des Artes do Circo. (1995)



for toys. He made toys and worked as a young tourist guide. I asked him what his first work had been and he answered, "I drew pictures of the neighbourhood of Uruguay.... I had to draw poetry (Figure 24). Today I'm able to draw anything.... Art (such as Capoeira) is good because the person starts to know about rhythm and we learn to notice when someone is not following the rhythm, and we can learn to correct this" (Interview with Julian, June 14, 1995).

Julian was convinced that Projeto Axé should continue to help children because it gets them off the street and gives them good values. Julian said "Projeto Axé takes many children off the streets and I now see many who are working to support the family" (Interview with Julian, June 14, 1995).

Interview with Edna. The following day, at Capoeira, I met with Edna, another young person who spoke to me about her experience with Projeto Axé. She said she was 12 years old. She told me that she had been approached by an educator at the bus station. The educator brought her to Santo Antonio, where there used to be a Capoeira unit. She used to spend time at the bus station helping her mother sell bus tokens. At first she was attracted by the circus. She also liked Capoeira because she liked to dance. There was no more room at the circus, so she chose to join Capoeira. She had been at Capoeira for two years (Figure 25). Before that, she had enjoyed drawing with the street educators.

Edna seemed a little more confused about what she wanted than most of the other kids I had interviewed. She was shy and unsure about what she should say. As the educators had repeated many times, the re-education process can be very long.



Figure 24. "I had to draw poetry." (Julian, June 14, 1995)



Figure 25. Edna had been at Capoeira for two years.  
(Interview June 15, 1995)

In relation to that idea, I must mention that, the same day, I observed a young adolescent boy sucking his thumb at Capoeira. I wondered what this behaviour said about the child's reaction to his situation.

#### The Band

My next stop was in one of the poorest areas of Salvador, where children gathered together and learned how to play drums. Not only did the children learn music here but they also had a teacher who gave of her time to teach African legends. The children also learned to read. Another teacher taught them songs and dances. Yet another contributed his time to teach them music, how to play the drums. As at other activities, the children are also given a healthy meal.

I felt very privileged to be allowed to participate with them during this activity. We sang, clapped hands, listened to the band and finished with a meal.

Interview with Reginaldo. I had the opportunity to speak with Reginaldo, a 16-year-old adolescent who had always lived in Salvador. He had been with Projeto Axé for five years. At the age of 10, Reginaldo went into the streets. He lived and slept on the street. "Then a Projeto Axé educator arrived to give me counsel: to come home, to study and to have a better life. He asked me if I wanted to be in an activity, to be in a school and to earn transportation tickets, money, food" (Interview with Reginaldo, June 15, 1995).

Reginaldo became interested in ERE (a cultural project which included Capoeira, band and circus). In addition to participating in ERE, he also attended the paper-making workshop. He was waiting to join the work market. In the meantime he was studying. He had food every day and

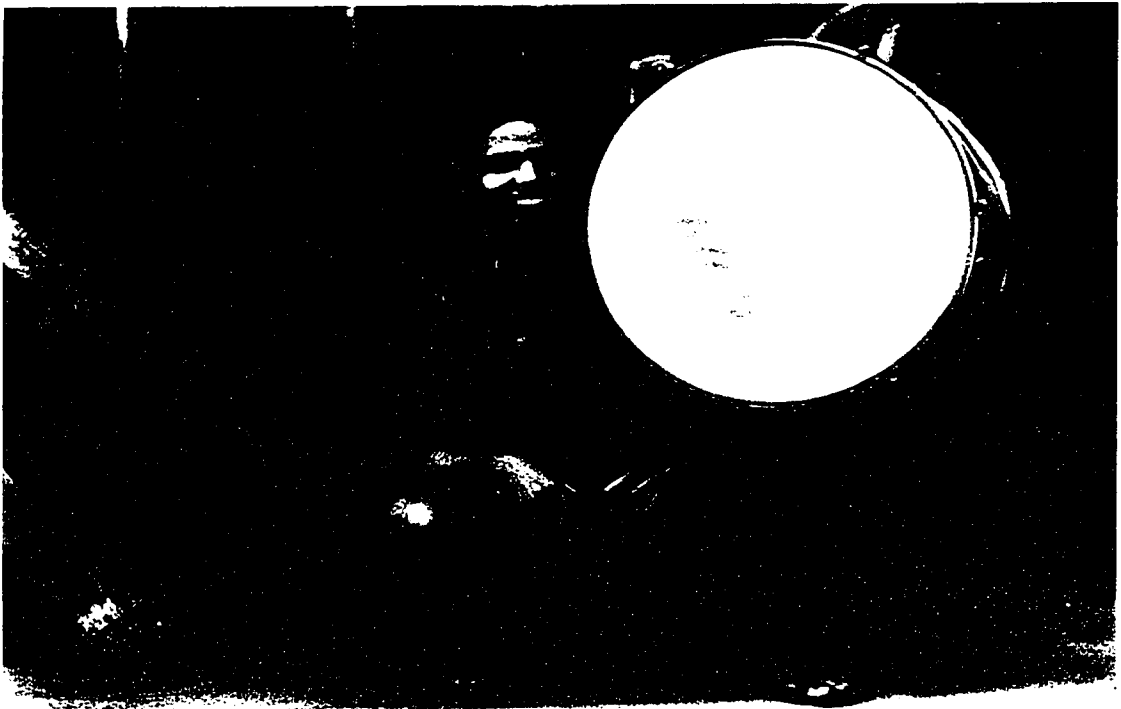


Figure 26. "It is not fair that we be calleda street-kid."  
(Reginaldo, June 15, 1995)

earned transportation tickets and a little bit of money..."I'm living! What is important is that I'm not on the street any more... For me this [being on the street] is in the past" (Interview with Reginaldo, June 15, 1995).

Reginaldo went on to describe the progress that Projeto Axé had made during its five years of existence and how activities grew and more opportunities presented themselves to the children. "We are always developing some work...I like Projeto Axé and ERE because I love to play in the band, to appear on television, present shows because it comes from inside of me. I feel like a professional...We have to think and stay in tune because if we make one mistake, it's a mess" (Interview with Reginaldo, June 15, 1995).

Then Reginaldo explained the situation of the street-kid in Salvador and gave his reasons why Projeto Axé should continue its work:

I wish that Projeto Axé would take more and more kids off the street. These children are needing more than I, because I'm here now. I was a street-kid but now they need more help than I do. There are many children on the street, that sometimes sleep on the street and sometimes the stepfather doesn't want them in the house. Sometimes he [the stepfather] fights in the house with the mother. Then Projeto Axé has to bring more and more street-kids into the activities because they are suffering very much in the hands of men, the police. Others beat them and others kill them. It breaks my heart to see people beating them, treating them bad.

The children don't choose to go on the street. They go on the street because they don't have good support from a good mother, they don't have good orientation. Sometimes the step-father beats them and then they rebel and they go to the street.

This happened to me, I was myself in this situation. I rebelled and I went to the street. Then I discovered an opportunity. Projeto Axé brought me to an activity that they knew would put me in a better situation of being, making me a better citizen like other people. They put me into a school, to be educated. They're giving me food. If I see an opportunity to join the work market, I will.

All the things that I want for me I want for him/her that is on the street. It is not fair that we be called a street-kid (Figure 26). There is not interest in this any more for me. Now we

have to see the present and for the child on the street, in my opinion, I want Projeto Axé to grow more and make the child able to go back home, to educate the child so that he/she may become a citizen like everyone else and fight for his rights and know his obligations as a citizen. (Interview with Reginaldo, June 15, 1995)

Interview with Peta. The following day I talked with Peta at his home. Peta had been working as an artist for 15 years, principally making prints. He told me that Salvador has a very strong African culture which has influenced his art. His art was often termed Afro-Bahiana or Afro-Brazileiro prints.

He started by making prints for Afro groups from Salvador. In the 80s, he had very limited access to books with African drawings and masks, etc. so he began creating his own drawings. These showed an African influence in such aspects as colour usage.

When I interviewed him, Peta had been working with Projeto Axé for four years. He approached Projeto Axé with a printing project, to set up a silkscreen workshop where children could learn the silkscreen art and be able to print T-shirts, clothes, etc. The children created many designs. He set up a project where children could create their own designs, print them and sell the product. By working with ERE, Peta was able to develop the cultural area for Projeto Axé. His proposal seemed to be very well accepted by Projeto Axé and I could tell that the project was also important for Peta personally when he said, "For me, it was very important because, at the beginning, I thought I would teach the child but instead I realized that the child was teaching me" (Interview with Peta, June 14, 1995) (Figure 27).



Figure 27. "I thought I would teach the child but instead I realized that the child was teaching me." (Peta, June 14, 1995)



## CHAPTER 7

### DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

I observed that the majority of adolescents I worked with at the Montreal centre would, at first, be short on ideas. They would often say "What should I draw?" or "I have no ideas." or even, "I can't draw." Once they had decided on a certain arrangement the next most important question was "What colours do you have that we can use?" or "How do I make this colour?". Ideas and colour were very important to them. Technique was often taught as they were experimenting.

In contrast, Brazilian street-kids made life decisions every day. They often did so when still very young. Simply to survive, when only two years of age and already on the streets, children very often were helping their older brother or sister wash cars, beg for money or food, or steal. When I did art with Brazilian street-kids and gave them a sheet of paper, there were no questions asked. They immediately started drawing. Colour was never the main concern. They did not seem worried about colour, material or surface. They freely expressed their imagination and it seemed evident that they enjoyed every minute of the experience. We must not forget that street-kids in Brazil have had very little schooling, perhaps three or four years at the most. Many of them have had no schooling whatsoever. This is probably due to the fact that they end up on the streets at such a young age. School is mandatory by law but it seems that the law is not enforced. Street-kids in Montreal, Canada, contrary to those in Brazil, have, in majority, reached high school. It is understood that most street-kids in Montreal have profited from some type of art education, at one point or another, when they were part of the

school system. In Canada, education is mandatory by law and it is enforced. All this said, it would seem that lack of schooling and its reinforcement of conformity could perhaps have a positive influence on creative freedom. Or could it be that art education in Canada inhibits the creative mind in such a way that young people question their own ability to think?

Howard Gardner observed that "even in children's drawings the final product mirrors the totality of earlier experiences. And if these early experiences include a powerful, persuasive, and pedagogically effective guide to drawing, then the effects will be immediately discernible, even in the works of a child who has yet to reach the age of five" (Gardner, 1980, 93). He viewed the drawing's link to communication and its role in social exchange as being of primary importance. The child also "seeks to establish a link with others by virtue of his drawing" (Gardner, 1980, 24).

In Chapter 4, I observed that the teenagers I worked with in Montreal more often than not started with scribbles when beginning a painting or a drawing. The progress from scribble to the rendition of the actual subject took minutes, but the scribble appeared to be a necessary stage. It seemed as if the teenager was reassessing his/her knowledge, recalling what he/she had already learned in past years. It was a form of personal review leading to the new subject at hand.

One might call this a sort of ritual aimed at inspiring a sense of security: "I know about this and therefore I know enough about the new subject to try my hand at it." As this tactile research progresses, it also becomes a social exchange: The teenager laughs with his/her peers,

makes comments, and, indirectly, discusses his/her feelings of insecurity with the educator. The adolescents in Montreal questioned and experimented until they were satisfied. Reassessing all known material seemed to render the unknown less frightening: Through this activity, the teenager regained self-confidence.

What I find interesting in this process is that the teenager seems to simply want to let it be known what his/her capabilities are, so as not to have anyone expect something he/she cannot produce. Once this is communicated, the teenager seems better able to risk venturing into new territory.

In contrast, the Brazilian street-kids that I observed never asked any questions before starting to draw. They went right to the subject in mind. Most of the time they didn't even colour their work. They were quite absorbed in the drawing process itself. Colour was practically ignored. The child usually wielded the tools at his disposal and created a mark that impressed his/her observers without any coaching from peer or educator. In doing so, the child had to think, remember, create, compose and organize.

Approval was a different matter altogether. In Introduction to Theories of Personality, a book that describes and interprets the major theories of human personality, Hall and Lindzey (1985) noted that Bandura suggested that performance is brought about not only by reinforcement per se, but by the expectation of reinforcement (542). The street-kids didn't always get a sign of approval after finishing each drawing, but they did continue drawing, absorbed as ever. Every now and then they might search for a smile or a comment from peers or an educator. I believe Bandura's

theory is self-explanatory when applied to this situation.

Of course there is much more to Bandura's social learning theory. A child who is learning about art at a very basic level of education inevitably looks for reinforcement to continue producing and therefore learns in the process. This reinforcement guides the behaviour pattern. As a result, the child wants to do better and yearns to learn more.

The above would seem to imply a difference in the level of self-confidence in art-making by street-kids in Montreal and those in Brazil. The street-kids in Brazil definitely showed more self-confidence. The average Brazilian street-kid has spent many years on the streets by the time he/she reaches the average age of the Montreal youth who is starting his/her life on the street. Street-culture seems to elicit self-reliance and self-confidence as essentials for physical survival, whereas the formal school environment seems to foster compliance and conformity. It is obvious that Montreal and Brazilian street-kids have become the products of the environments they have grown up in. The alternative art educator has to take careful consideration of the environment in which he/she finds the street-kid. In other words a holistic approach is required.

Joana, the street worker I met in Sao Paulo, mentioned that when good contact is made with the street-kids, this means that you have won their confidence. It might mean "finding out what their needs are," or simply "getting to know them and being a presence for them" (Interview with Joana, July 6, 1994). This contact is very important in alternative art education if one intends to really teach.

The approach is also of major importance if students are to learn. But then, is a good approach not also very important in the classroom

setting? And does our approach, as educators, not make or break a good learning atmosphere for our students? James Battle has repeated over and over again that negative self-concept is a significant factor contributing to low academic achievement (Battle, 1982, 61) and that our subjective perception of self-worth (self-esteem) determines our characteristic reaction (Battle, 1987, 11). The educator should never underestimate or overestimate the adolescent or child. It is important for the educator to have the youth teach him/her what he/she knows. It is up to the educator to find a way to encourage the adolescent/child to do this.

First, the alternative art educator has to establish a relationship with the street-kid built on mutual trust and respect. Only then will the educator be able to get the information he/she needs to format his/her approach leading to an individualized, effective, alternative art education.

Immediate gratification seems to be an absolute for these kids. When I met two adolescents at a house for street-kids in Sao-Paulo I observed that they were both smiling while drawing. I noticed the same phenomenon when the kids were working with clay. Joana, a street worker in Sao Paulo, reminded me that working with clay was very important for these kids because they were creating something then and there: The result was immediate. The effect of this work seemed very profound and at a deeper level than that of immediate gratification. Perhaps the idea of intrinsic motivation comes into play here. Lowenfeld (Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1987, 383) explained how intrinsic motivation is an important aspect of creative activity. He also advised that "the teacher must deal with the student simultaneously from an intellectual and an emotional

point of view" (Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1987, 383).

The future doesn't promise much for the poorer population of Brazil. I observed that the here and now was what seemed to count for them. I noted that their art represented the here and now: Emotions are expressed through art at election time and when their country wins the world cup in football. The streets in the poorer areas of Brazil are painted to express residents' anger as well as their contentment.

Because of the emotional and motivational bases of learning and thinking, Cropley (1992) has reminded us how important it is to encourage flexible and inventive thinking. I have observed that street-kids are willing to learn and that with the proper contact and the proper approach by the educator, creativity is heightened.

I also noticed that the time to start teaching is definitely not when kids are agitated. This is especially true when working with street-kids. Timing is of the essence and the approach is crucial. When working with street-kids, the mood is often set by the events of the day and the environment. This I observed especially when working with favela kids. What characterizes a successful approach is when the "students go beyond the immediate assignment, when they want to find out things on their own, unrelated to requirements or rewards" (Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1987, 383). This initiative, unrelated to requirements or rewards, is characteristic of intrinsically motivated work.

When working in Salvador, I became aware that the children had to understand themselves and identify themselves as persons of colour living in Bahia, in Salvador and as a citizen of the world and that they needed to reassess their culture (Interview with Evalda Vilanova, June 5, 1995).

They had to regain a sense of self-esteem.

At Projeto Axé I was made aware of art as part of a pedagogical process with the objective of creating self-esteem. In this process, dialogue and trust are very important when approaching the street-kid. The imagination of the art educator is the only limit to the possibilities for dialogue with the street-kids. (Examples of possible interactions include visiting drop-in centres, stopping to talk with the street-kid who begs on the street or the street-kid who washes your windshield, etc.)

Paulo Freire (1973b) described this very well when he wrote that teaching becomes a dialogue. The teacher is no longer merely the one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students. Through the dialogue, the street-educator goes on to foster constructive ideas for the child's future as a good citizen. The street-educator deals with the child, talks with him/her, wins his/her trust, keeps the child busy and helps him/her express himself/herself through drawing, colouring and creating while helping him/her discover a future. This process was termed "pedagogical flirting" by the street-educators of Projeto Axé.

This self-confidence, this pride, is also created by circus-educators, Capoeira-educators and music-educators. The children at the circus learn to educate their own body and confront challenges. They also make a connection between circus and education. This also goes for Capoeira and band sessions. These are all forms of art where the child has to think and learn about his/her obligations.

It is understandable that teaching art in its multiple forms seems to attract the younger population in Brazil. New ideas and techniques are well received by the young, resulting in a stronger belief in their own

creative potential. And the adult can often learn this from the children.



## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSION

Following from my observations regarding the relationship between educators and street-kids, I conclude that showing affection and acceptance of the children is an essential aspect of alternative art education.

It is equally necessary to equip oneself with some understanding of child psychology. Studying examples of certain problem situations between educators and students, along with certain solutions that can be applied, could be very helpful for the alternative art educator. An emotional relationship with the students is necessary. I have noticed that an empathic listening to the child in his/her environment is a very important aspect of alternative teaching of street-kids.

Another expression of one's love for these children is to make sure that the basic physiological needs for survival such as food, medical assistance, clothes and so on, are made available to them. In their Introduction to Theories of Personality, Hall and Lindzey (1985) wrote about Maslow's concept of a hierarchy of needs: "Maslow formulated a theory of human motivation...[suggesting that] certain basic needs, such as hunger and thirst...must be satisfied before other needs, such as self-esteem, can even be felt, let alone fulfilled" (201-202).

Keeping the above in mind, one must not forget that the street-kid is opportunistic and sometimes learning must come before food and play, which are offered as a form of positive reinforcement. This is an example of how one must modify the approach to the situation.

Understanding street-kids also means realizing that there exists

other needs such as becoming part of mainstream society, becoming a good citizen, and being recognized as such. Alternative education is a solution through which the child learns his/her rights as a citizen as well as his/her responsibilities to society.

Through art education the child also rediscovers a sense of self-worth. Those who have never felt good about themselves discover this self-worth for the first time. They experience the power of their own creativity.

It is extremely important that the art educator who wants to teach alternative art knows the population he/she is about to encounter. To reach these kids, we must start at the basic level. Whether they are teenagers or younger, it is still very important to start with basic art concepts. Some have lost confidence in themselves and others have forgotten what they have learned in the past. The art educator must help some of the kids re-discover what they already know and others to discover what they have never learned. Re-discovering something already learned can boost a child's self-confidence and makes him/her proud of the fact that he/she knows how to do what the educator has suggested. "I remember how to do this!" they often said. In Montreal, they would describe the first time they learned how to do it, whether at school or at a correctional facility.

The child who learns something new also usually experiences a boost in his/her level of self-confidence. This often creates an incentive, a curiosity to learn more. The student who already knows the process can answer questions asked by the child who is learning for the first time.

The street-kid in Brazil, I observed, seemed to experience an

enhanced sense of self-worth when he/she realized that he/she remembered what had been taught the week before.

At an alternative centre in Montreal, one young man was very proud to comment that he had learned leather-work in a correctional facility. A girl talked about her father who was a graphic artist. Another girl talked about what she had learned in high school. (I found it sad that many of these kids in Montreal referred to art courses in high school as being dull. The main reason they cited for this was the lack of variety in the courses.)

Whether in Brazil or in Montreal, I observed children or adolescents in alternative art education learning that they can create. They realized that they could learn and that they could remember what they had previously learned. This led them to feel good about themselves. They were able to create and they would be able to create again in the future. The art educator is there to confirm this to them. Thus, the art educator, using patience and basic art, can awaken the creative potential that has temporarily been put to sleep by drugs, depression, despair, etc.

Hall and Lindzey (1985) quoted Maslow as having said that "satisfaction of self-esteem needs leads to feelings of self-confidence, worth, strength, capability and adequacy, of being useful and necessary in the world. But thwarting of these needs produces feelings of inferiority, of weakness and of helplessness" (205).

Anyone who has seen the glow in a child's eyes when discovering that he/she can draw or colour will perhaps begin to understand why this same child will produce dozens of drawings, over and over again. The child wants to create. The child has discovered power. This is the same

reaction you will get from the street-kid, whether he/she is 7 or 17. I feel that this sense of power relates to Julian Rotter's idea of "locus of control" which "is a generalized expectancy about the degree to which we control our outcomes" (in Weiten, 1989, 457). Persons with an external locus of control are "individuals who believe that their successes and failures are governed by external factors such as fate, luck, and chance." Those whose locus of control is internal "consequently feel that they have more influence over their outcomes than people with an external locus of control" (Weiten, 1989, 457). My observations of the street-kids led me to think they tended to have a more internal locus of control. Weiten (1989) pointed out that in a variety of contexts outside the academic arena, "internals" engage in more active efforts to control events than "externals" and are more likely to actively confront problems that arise (487). Street-kids confront problems every day and they definitely deal with them. If they did not, they would not survive.

In the context of art-making, the child experiences the power inherent in the process of expressing his/her ideas. He/she is the agent of control over the art media, giving form to his/her perceptions, feelings and thoughts. Also, in the process, the child earns an external reaction, the approval of others. Discovery of the power of this control leads the child to make an effort to better his/her art. This effort leads to greater mastery, contributing to an even stronger internal locus of control.

Working with these kids entails a major commitment of both time and emotion. The alternative educator soon realizes that he/she is not involved in a chapter in a book or a movie on television. One cannot just

close the book or change channels without having a serious impact on the children's future.

Educators and street-kids have made me see, and I have come to realize through experience, that the work which is done on the streets can have a very positive effect on children's lives. Educators in Brazil have told me that they establish a relationship in such a way as to instill a positive idea of the child's future as a good citizen. They rescue the idealism of these children, what they want and what they think. They specified that the objective on the street is to entice these kids to return to mainstream society, to discover another life, and to make their own way, to become independent. "We make them aware of different things and gradually they begin to discover other things such as their rights and the will-power to do things" (Interview with Street-Educators, June 6, 1995).

My journey into the life of Projeto Axé made me realize that the child is the one who must make the effort. The educators bring about the possibilities, they cheer the child on. But the educator cannot win the race for the child. Each time a child wins the race, it is a little miracle.

Visual arts, circus, music, dance: One of these methods always seems to be at the foundation of each miracle. And literacy always seems to be at the core. With a clear vision of their ultimate objectives, supported by a study of pedagogy and an understanding of the importance of education in the life of a child, the Projeto Axé educators provide an excellent example of alternative art education at its best.

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