PLAYING TO GROW: 
A Primary Mental Health Intervention 
With Guatemalan Refugee Children

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Adaptation and implementation of a primary mental health project based on work with children affected by political repression in Guatemala and Argentina are described. This intervention model utilizes a variety of expressive arts techniques to help children express their thoughts and feelings about growing up in exile. The model emphasizes the training of community members in the theory and methods of the intervention.

Mental health professionals working with children affected by political repression (here used to refer to the sanctioned use of terrorism by the state against its own population to silence opposition to oppressive social, economic, or political conditions), as well as other forms of political violence, have recently begun to recognize the importance of developing culturally appropriate mental health interventions that can help children make sense of their chaotic environment and begin to recover from the trauma and loss produced by violence. Innovative approaches have been developed in a number of countries, including, though not limited to, Argentina (Costa, Iborra, Maciel, Suardi, & Lykes, 1989), Nicaragua (Metraux, 1988), Guatemala (Lykes, Maciel, Iborra, Suardi, & Costa, 1991), Mexico (Promoción de Servicios de Salud y Educación Popular, 1990; Saenz, 1991), Belgium (Barudy, 1988), and Mozambique (Boothby, 1990). Several of these programs use models that emphasize the training of nonprofessionals with the object of empowering marginalized communities that have minimal access to professional mental health services. Community residents are trained as lay workers (commonly referred to as mental health promoters) who can identify and respond adequately to common mental health problems.

In 1982, a group of Argentinian psychologists, actors, and teachers formed the Movimiento Solidario de Salud Mental [Solidarity Movement for Mental Health] (MSSM) to explore ways of addressing the mental health and developmental needs of Argentinian children affected by the violence of the military dictatorship that ruled Argentina from 1976 to 1983. Out of the MSSM, the project Creative Integral Work-

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shops for Children was created (Costa et al., 1989; Lykes et al., 1991). This project, also referred to as Tecnicas Creativas (Creative Techniques), consists of psychosocial assistance groups, which utilize a variety of expressive and creative arts techniques (e.g., collage, collective story-making, and sociodrama), as well as theatrical exercises emphasizing different forms of physical play and movement. The workshops provide a therapeutic space within which children can express their thoughts and feelings related to the impact of Argentina’s state terror on their lives. Through their participation in the workshops, children also recover their capacities for play and spontaneous expression, and develop a sense of self-efficacy, thus countering the silence and creative inhibition imposed by the “culture of terror.”

In 1988, the MSSM, in collaboration with M. Brinton Lykes, a North American community psychologist, initiated a collaborative child mental health project with a Guatemalan community health organization that provides training in basic medical interventions to rural Guatemalans who have limited access to professional health care. The collaboration was aimed at implementing the Tecnicas Creativas project in rural Guatemala, where repressive violence reached genocidal levels in the early 1980s, and where the state continues to impose terror throughout much of the countryside. Since 1988, the collaboration has evolved steadily; health promoters, teachers, and other individuals have received training in the Tecnicas Creativas intervention, and a growing recognition of the potential value of the project has spurred interest in exploring its utility in other Latin American countries (Lykes, personal communication, July, 1991).

THE REFUGEES

Guatemala has a population of nine million; 55% are indigenous (of 22 different Mayan ethnolinguistic groups), and 45% are Ladinos, Guatemalans of mixed Indian and Spanish or European ancestry, who are Spanish-speaking. Most Guatemalan Mayans live in small rural villages scattered throughout the mountainous highlands, the altiplano (Simon, 1987). Poverty in Guatemala is pervasive; an estimated 79% of the population has been categorized as either “poor” or “very poor” (Simon, 1987). Health services are minimal in nonexistent in rural areas, and illiteracy rates range from 67% in urban areas to 81% in the countryside (Comisión de Derechos Humanos de Guatemala, 1986). The inequality that characterizes Guatemala is most vividly illustrated by its skewed land distribution: 66% to 70% of the country’s arable land is in the hands of 2% of the population (Comisión de Derechos Humanos de Guatemala, 1986; Krauss, 1991). Consequently, the mostly indigenous rural peasants, with too little land to feed their families, must migrate each year to work on the export crop plantations on the southern coast. Exploitation is rampant on these plantations, where wages are meager and working and living conditions extremely difficult (Burgos-Debray, 1983). Children often work alongside their parents on the plantations, where miserable living conditions exacerbate rampant diseases of the tropical environment, causing much illness and death among the children each migratory season.

In the early 1970s, peasants began organizing themselves into rural labor unions and work cooperatives, aided by lay Catholic Action workers who offered literacy training and other types of assistance and empowerment programs to improve their lives and raise their political consciousness. At the same time, an armed guerrilla movement, composed initially of disenchanted army officers and later incorporating poor Indian and Ladino peasants and workers, was taking hold in the altiplano.

Beginning in 1981, thousands of Guatemalans, the majority of them Mayan Indians from the country’s western highlands, fled across the northern and western borders into the Mexican state of Chiapas.
The Guatemalan army had initiated a brutal counterinsurgency campaign aimed at silencing the growing popular opposition to the oppressive socioeconomic and political status quo; in addition, the counterinsurgency was intended to eliminate the armed opposition movement. Hundreds of Indian villages were leveled, and tens of thousands of innocent civilians were killed or "disappeared." It is estimated that up to a million Guatemalans fled their villages and became internally displaced (desplazados), hiding in the mountains or living in obscurity on the outskirts of major cities. Between 150,000 and 200,000 Guatemalans fled north to Mexico, and another 100,000 to 200,000 fled further north to seek refuge in the United States (Barry, 1992; Freyermuth & Hernandez, 1992; Jonas, 1991; Simon, 1987).

Some 46,000 Guatemalan refugees, who are officially recognized by the United Nations and the Mexican government, are now living in camps in the south of Mexico. The camps are funded by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and are administered by the Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance. In 1984, in response to frequent raids made by the Guatemalan army into Mexican territory and subsequently into the camps, the Mexican government forcibly relocated about half the refugees from Chiapas, where the original camps were located, to the neighboring state of Campeche, and further east to Quintana Roo.

It is about 11 years since most of the refugees left Guatemala. During the past decade, thousands of children have grown up in the camps, and thousands more have been born in them. While several nongovernmental organizations as well as the UNHCR have sought to assist the refugees in meeting basic physical needs (e.g., shelter, food, and infant nutrition programs), little attention has been paid to the mental health needs of this population, which has endured the highly significant trauma of political violence and forced exile. Even less attention has been paid to the mental health and developmental needs and problems of children living in the camps, despite the fact that children under the age of 16 constitute between 50% and 60% of the refugee population (Aguayo, Christensen, O'Dogherty, & Varesse, 1987). This neglect probably reflects the more apparent saliency of needs related to basic physical survival; on the other hand, it is consistent with a general historical neglect of the mental health needs and problems of refugee populations, particularly those living in refugee camps rather than in countries of permanent resettlement (Miller, in press).

Refugee Camps

In Chiapas, approximately 23,000 Guatemalans live in some 127 refugee camps (Asociación Para el Avance de las Ciencias Sociales en Guatemala, 1992; Garaiz, 1992). The work described in this article took place in two camps, referred to as Camp A and Camp B. Work in the former was for an eight-month period and in the latter for a two-month period. The camps differed significantly in several ways: the residents of Camp A were primarily Chuj-speaking Mayans, those in Camp B were primarily Jacalteco Indians (two ethnolinguistic groups from neighboring geographic regions of northwestern Guatemala). Camp A is in a temperate zone with highly predictable rainfall and has about 200 families; Camp B has only 30 families and is located in a subtropical zone, with mid-day temperatures reaching above 90°F and hazardously unreliable rainfall. Camp A, with houses sparsely situated, is reminiscent of a mountain village; Camp B, with houses built close together, looks like the temporary refugee settlement it is.

The residents of both camps fled the genocidal violence of the early 1980s, inspired by different massacres. The residents of Camp A fled from a cluster of villages near Guatemala's northern border with Mexico when news of massacres in neighboring villages reached them; most went north
into the mountains of Mexico, whence they eventually descended into settlements that became the refugee camps. The residents of Camp B, on the other hand, were nearly all from a single village from which they fled when arriving soldiers murdered several members of the community, setting their homes ablaze (one child's earliest memory was of standing on a hilltop surrounded by trees, watching the flames leap from his house); they crossed Guatemala's western border to the relative safety of Mexican communities and moved into a series of refugee camps, the most recent of which is Camp B.

Children in both camps worked extraordinarily hard. Much of their day, when they were not in school, was defined by a multitude of chores, some divided according to gender, others not. Boys went into the mountains to gather firewood, while girls helped their mothers wash clothing in local washing holes or streams. Boys helped their fathers with agricultural work when available, tending the milpa (fields of corn in which beans and other vegetables and herbs are often intercropped), while girls helped to take care of their younger siblings. In Camp A, girls over the age of seven were rarely observed playing in public places. Play did occur, but social interaction among girls often took place in the context of joint chores; on the other hand, boys could regularly be seen playing soccer or card games during the afternoon or early evening. Examples of spontaneous mixed-sex play were never observed in Camp A. In Camp B, children of both sexes played more visibly and more frequently, and mixed-sex play was not uncommon.

THE INTERVENTION

This article reports on the adaptation and implementation of a mental health intervention program undertaken while the present authors were conducting field research in the two Guatemalan refugee camps in Chiapas, focusing on the mental health and psychosocial development of Guatemalan refugee children (Miller) and the gender and ethnic consequences of exile for indigenous Guatemalan women (Billings). Adapted from the Tecnicas Creativas project of Argentina and Guatemala, the intervention was implemented under the name "Jugando Para Crecer: Talleres de Salud Mental para Niños" (Playing to Grow: Mental Health Workshops for Children).

Like its predecessors, the Playing to Grow intervention utilizes a variety of expressive arts techniques to assist children in safely and creatively exploring salient issues related to the unique experience of growing up in exile. Individual as well as collective drawing and painting provide children with opportunities to express their thoughts, feelings, and fantasies regarding a variety of preselected as well as open themes. Sociodrama and role-playing permit children to discover and examine critical aspects of their culture and history in a creative manner. Collectively created stories are developed around themes of exile and return, as well as around topics related to everyday life in the camps, such as gender-related chores and sibling and peer relationships. Various other expressive techniques, including small group collages and collectively made drawings, are utilized as well. In addition, each session begins with a large group Juego de Calentamiento, or warm-up activity, that facilitates the development of intragroup trust. These activities are also intended to provide a safe, structured setting in which children can actively play with each other as well as with the participating adult coordinators.

Therapeutic Sources

The therapeutic and educational value of art, different forms of dramatization (e.g., sociodrama, psychodrama, and role play), and other expressive arts activities have long been recognized by mental health professionals as well as pedagogists. Torrance (1968), for example, utilized a variety of creative activities (e.g., art, dramatizations, puppetry) in the highly innovative creativ-
itory workshops he ran with socioeconomically disadvantaged African-American children in Georgia in the late 1960s. More recently, Barudy (1988) has described innovative mental health workshops implemented with Latin-American refugee children. Like Torrance's creativity workshops, the intervention discussed by Barudy used such expressive techniques as drawing, puppetry, and dramatization to help children express and integrate painful and frightening feelings and memories related to experiences of political repression and exile.

Therapists and teachers have employed a variety of innovative play techniques in their work with children (Gil, 1991; James, 1989; Raths, Harmin, & Simon, 1966). There is a growing literature on both the therapeutic and the pedagogical value of psychodrama with children (Hawley, 1988; Pavlovsky, 1987; Shearon, 1980), and there has been an increased recognition of the instructional value of small-group cooperative activities that encourage student participation, in contrast to traditional forms of teaching that emphasize student passivity within a competitive, large-group setting (Hawley, 1988; Kruper, 1973; Raths et al., 1966). Through the use of creative play techniques that encourage cooperation and active participation, children are able to express their thoughts, feelings, and conflicts, and learn new ways of problem-solving that promote self-esteem and enhance their sense of competence (Axline, 1969; Schaefer, 1993; Torbert, 1990).

The present work, then, has its roots not only in the work done on the Tecnicas Creativas project in Argentina and Guatemala, but also in innovative approaches to child therapy and alternative approaches to formal education. For the most part, the specific activities used in the Playing to Grow intervention are not new; many were derived from books and training manuals, many by word of mouth from others working creatively with children in a variety of mental health and educational settings. This intervention is new only in terms of the structure given to the techniques. They have been adapted here for use with indigenous Guatemalan refugee children growing up in a particular sociopolitical and sociocultural context.

**The Workshops**

The Playing to Grow model is a preventative intervention aimed at facilitating children's psychosocial and sociocultural development, and at providing a context in which feelings such as anxiety, sadness, and confusion resulting from and related to historical events, as well as to current life experiences, can be expressed. The primary goals of the intervention, as implemented in the refugee camps, included the following:

1. To provide children with a variety of creative, enjoyable, expressive arts techniques through which to share their thoughts and feelings about various issues in their lives.

2. To create a safe and supportive context in which children could examine positive aspects of their homeland and culture, as well as questions and concerns about the violence of the past and the resulting exile.

3. To facilitate the development of children's capacity for creative thinking and activity through such techniques as individual and collective drawing, group storytelling, and sociodrama.

4. To encourage timid children to join in group activities through the use of carefully selected games and exercises specifically designed to facilitate participation.

5. To introduce to the teachers (agriculturists with limited formal education and training in instructional theory and methods) the idea of play and the expressive arts as legitimate and useful instruments of pedagogy.

Camp teachers were provided with extensive training in the Playing to Grow intervention, following which support was provided while they coordinated an actual workshop with a group of 15-20 children. Other intervention models have empha-
sized the training of community members already trained and working as health promoters (Lykes et al., 1991). In the refugee camps, the teachers had considerably greater contact and experience with the children, as well as more interest in the project, and were therefore well suited to both comprehend and implementing the intervention. The ultimate goal was to leave in place a model of psychosocial and pedagogical intervention both familiar and readily accessible to the schoolteachers in the two refugee communities.

In each camp, approximately 20 children aged seven through 15 participated in five-week workshops that were co-led by the schoolteachers. A roughly even number of girls and boys participated in each camp. The workshops were conducted in Spanish, although occasionally the teachers in Camp A would translate specific phrases or complex instructions into the camp’s primary indigenous language, Chuj. All the participants in the Camp B workshop spoke fluent Spanish.

Activities

Each session began with a warm-up activity, as described above. These were varied but, typically, involved a good deal of physical activity, were sometimes competitive, sometimes cooperative, and occasionally both (e.g., cooperation within small groups that were competing against one another). The warm-up activities helped the children develop a sense of group cohesion while enjoying games that facilitated participation and minimized anxiety. The intense activity level of several of the warm-up games also helped children expend some energy so that they could concentrate better during the more focused main activities that would ensue.

The following descriptions are of two examples of warm-up games.*

The Basket of Fruits. The children sit in a circle, on chairs or benches whose places are marked with chalk or stones. The coordinators ask the children to shout out three types of fruit and when three have been agreed on, each child is assigned to a type. One child then moves to the center of the circle, and his or her seat is removed, leaving one more child than there are chairs. The child in the center shouts out the name of one or more of the three types of fruit, and children in the corresponding fruit groups must exchange seats. If the child in the center yells “Fruits!,” everyone must exchange seats. The child in the center tries to find a seat during the exchanges, thus creating a race for the available seats. Whoever is left without a seat goes to the middle and the game continues.

The children in the camps grasped the rules quickly and became very involved in the game. In both camps there was a great deal of laughter amid the flurry of racing to grab a seat, and even the most timid and withdrawn children quickly became active participants. Some of the more confident children began to experiment with their role in the center of the circle by telling stories in which they would casually mention the name of the fruit (e.g., “I was in the market shopping when I came upon a pile of apples...”). The sense of pleasure was visible in the children’s faces as they demonstrated their creativity in the supportive context of the group.

Statues. The children are divided into two groups, each standing behind one of two lines, some 30 yards apart. Two volunteers come to the center between the two lines, and, when they clap their hands, each group has to cross as fast as possible to the other’s line without being touched by the two children in the center. Once touched, children become “statues,” that is, they must remain immobile until all the remaining children have also been touched.

As with the Basket of Fruits, this activity quickly elicited the participation of all the children, and brought out different levels and types of cooperation between the two children in the center as they sought to turn their peers into statues.

*These games have different names and variations in different settings. These particular versions were found in a wonderful book of children’s games entitled La Alternativa del Juego (The Alternative of the Game). Unfortunately, a copy of this book that was missing the first few pages was used, and efforts to trace its authors have been unsuccessful.
Other warm-up activities used in the five-week workshops included *Pato Pato Gan- zo* (Duck Duck Goose), a surprising hit among children of all ages; *El Nudo Hu- mano* (The Human Knot), a fairly tranquil game in which children standing in a circle blindly grasp hands and attempt to undo the knot thus created without releasing their hands; and a variety of *Carreras Ex- traordinarias* (Extraordinary Races), including piggyback races, three-legged races, and wheelbarrow races. In addition to promoting intragroup trust and providing children with the opportunity to play for a set period of time in a mixed-sex context, the warm-up games helped children feel more alert and less distracted during the main activities.

**Main Activities**

The main activities constitute the core of each session. In them, different expressive arts techniques are utilized to help children express and reflect on specific life issues, some related to the history and experience of exile, others to aspects of everyday life not explicitly linked to exile. In the workshops implemented in the camps, five main activities were used: collage, individual drawing, collective drawing, collective story-making, and sociodrama. Two of these activities, sociodrama and individual drawing, are described here.*

*Individual drawing.* In this activity, blank paper, colored pencils, crayons, and watercolor paints were distributed to the children, who were then asked to make a drawing or painting addressing the following questions—Camp A: “Why did my family leave Guatemala?” Camp B: “What will I see on the road that goes back to Guatemala?”** The idea behind the first question was to have children express, through drawings, their understanding of why they were living in exile, and to address doubts and misconceptions about these historical explanations. The second question was intended to elicit children’s ideas, fantasies, and concerns regarding the impending return to Guatemala of the majority of Camp B residents. This question had the specifically preventative aim, via expression and discussion of feelings and concerns, of alleviating anxiety regarding return to a country about which they had heard so many frightening stories.

The Camp A drawings and paintings contained vivid images of soldiers, planes, and helicopters killing innocent *campesinos* (farmers) in their fields or houses. The level of brutality manifested in the children’s drawings clearly reflected stories of violence they had heard at home and elsewhere in the camp community. The children’s responses to the teachers’ questions about their pictures were generally brief, but their comments, along with the teachers’ own responses, permitted an elaboration of the history of violence and exile. Most of these children had overheard and perhaps participated in discussions of this history elsewhere; here, they had a unique opportunity to express their ideas and feelings around the issues of violence and exile creatively, in a safe and structured setting where misperceptions could be corrected and additional information provided, and where they could receive recognition for their creative productions.

The drawings in Camp B, which focused on the return to Guatemala, were also full of soldiers, helicopters, and planes, as well as buses carrying the returning refugees home to their new villages. Interestingly, several children expressed a sense of cautious optimism in these drawings, depicting soldiers who watched the refugees’ return but did not intervene or harm them. In de-

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*A detailed and illustrated description of the full range of main activities included in the Playing to Grow intervention is available in a recently published manual, available in English and Spanish (Miller et al., 1993).**

**The idea for this question comes from work done by the Comité del D.F. Para Ayuda a los Refugiados, a highly committed and creative organization that works with Guatemalan refugees in Mexico City as well as in the camps of Chiapas.*
scribing their pictures verbally, however, the children’s ambivalence and anxiety surfaced. They found the soldiers and their military hardware menacing, expressive of the children’s fears regarding what might await them should they return to Guatemala. The children—girls as well as boys—were eager to talk about their pictures, showing none of the timidity seen in Camp A. Examples of their comments include:

Helicopters watching the people return to their land, the people feel afraid, others feel happy....they feel afraid because of the soldiers, the soldiers watching in the helicopters.... (11-year-old boy)

Buses full of people...helicopters with soldiers watching the people. The refugees feel happy, some feel afraid, they think they are going to see the violence again. The soldiers want the refugees to return. (ten-year-old girl)

These are soldiers watching, and these are the houses of the soldiers. Nothing’s going to happen to the people when they arrive. The people are afraid of the soldiers...because they kill. (11-year-old girl)

Sociodrama. Sociodrama is a useful and enjoyable form of dramatization that can be used in a variety of contexts to address a wide range of issues. The term is used to refer to the enactment of a particular scenario in which no scripts are used and the actors have considerable freedom to improvise within their assigned roles. In the workshops with the refugee children, a sociodrama was developed in which children were able to learn about and dramatize a typical Guatemalan marketplace. Markets play a central role in the social and economic lives of rural Guatemalans. They serve as the main economic sphere in which vegetables, fruit, meat, small animals, and household goods are bought and sold. In addition, they serve an important social function by regularly bringing together people from nearby towns and villages. This central element of Guatemalan life is largely unknown to many of the children, however, since there are no markets in the camps. With the increasing prospect of a return to Guatemala, it seemed an opportune moment for the children to discover and recapture an important part of their culture.

The activity began with the children “brain-storming” the various goods one might find in a market (e.g., chickens, carrots, hammers, apples, etc.). The teachers then taught the children about Guatemalan currency and explained the practice of bargaining for a good price. The children drew pictures of all the items they had identified as commonly being for sale in a market, while the teachers drew different denominations of Guatemalan money. Three children volunteered to be vendors and were each assigned a table on which to place their wares (i.e., the pictures drawn by the children). The money was equally distributed to the rest of the children (the shoppers), and the market was declared open for 30 minutes, after which each vendor’s take would be counted. A flurry of excited motion ensued as the children rapidly became involved in their respective roles as buyers and sellers. There was a great deal of laughter and visible pleasure as “money” exchanged hands and “chickens” and “vegetables” were examined and purchased. There was little sign of bargaining, a concept apparently still too novel to the children. At the end of the allotted time, the vendors counted their money, and a winner was announced. A discussion of the activity followed, focusing on the relevance of this experience to daily life in Guatemala. It was pointed out that this activity had particular importance for the girls in the group, because the usual vendors and buyers in rural Guatemalan markets are women.

DISCUSSION

The Playing to Grow project was subject to certain limitations, which are noted along with its advantages in the following discussion. Evaluation of the project is based on the authors’ own observations and impressions since conditions of adaptation and implementation in the camps prohibited formal pretest and post-test evaluation of the intervention’s effectiveness.
To implement the Playing to Grow project in the two camps, the authors traveled each week to the sites, gathered the participants together, and conducted the training. This procedure evolved from the necessity to conduct field research while developing the project in the two refugee communities. Fortunately, the dual approach proved advantageous in many respects. Working directly within the two camp communities developed relationships that advanced the project. Our ongoing presence made us familiar with the obstacles confronting implementation of a mental health intervention project in these communities. Thus, collaboration with the teachers was facilitated in dealing with problems as they arose. The weekly meetings also provided an opportunity to raise and address doubts and questions in an ongoing fashion. This constant circuit of dialogue and feedback was important to the eventual success of the project.

On the other hand, working in two communities limited the number of people reached. The more common model of health and mental health promotion training utilizes a large-group format with participants from many communities who will implement what they have learned when they return to their homes.

An integration of the macro approach (training of participants from several communities in a central location) and the micro approach (intensive training of participants in their own communities) may be the most fruitful avenue to explore in future endeavors. For instance, centrally trained participants may be better able to implement what they have learned if they receive supportive follow-up visits in their home communities from workshop trainers.

The experience of adapting and implementing the Playing to Grow project in the refugee camps was both rewarding and challenging. A central question at the outset was how to present the project to the communities. The translation of mental health concepts across highly distinct cultures is invariably a complex endeavor. In this case, two distinct Mayan Indian groups whose languages have no direct translation of the term mental health were involved. This is not to say that problems such as alcoholism, depression, psychosis, and anxiety are not recognized within these communities. It does imply, however, that the ways in which they are conceptualized and responded to differ significantly from those of Western industrialized societies. Indigenous mental health problems, such as susto (a complex psychophysiological response to a sudden fright) and el mal ojo (the evil eye) are understood within a framework that incorporates psychological and religious dimensions and are not readily translatable into Western diagnostic syndromes. With regard to indigenous conceptualizations of children's psychological development, although parents in the refugee camps did not discuss developmental issues with the frequency and elaborate psychological vocabulary of American parents, they nonetheless expressed a strong concern for the emotional, cognitive, and moral development of their children. Unfortunately, the implementation of the Playing to Grow project could not, for pragmatic reasons, await the development by the authors of an in-depth understanding of psychosocial development from the perspective of the community.

The conceptual and linguistic differences between ourselves and the teachers with whom we were working regarding childhood mental health and psychosocial development complicated communication about these topics during the training sessions. In retrospect, it seems probable that the community's indigenous understanding of mental health and psychological development was not adequately incorporated into the training and that Western conceptualizations of these processes dominated. A greater degree of synthesis is strongly suggested for future workshops. For example, the incorporation of psychological concepts and terms employed by in-
dignous Guatemalans such as malcriado (delinquent, or poorly behaved) and listo (clever, or very bright) could facilitate communication regarding activities to improve children's social skills or stimulate their cognitive development. On a more fundamental level, the cross-cultural implementation of any psychological intervention is certainly likely to benefit from an in-depth familiarity with the target culture's beliefs and practices related to mental health and psychological development.

Despite these limitations, several positive effects of the Playing to Grow intervention were observed among the teachers who were trained in the model as well as among the children who participated in the workshops. The community schoolteachers developed a new set of teaching perspectives and techniques, and the children gave wonderfully creative expressions of important psychosocial, cultural, and historical themes. The children in both camps came to anticipate each session eagerly. They readily engaged in the different activities and expressed, through their art, socio-drama, and storymaking, many salient issues with which they were struggling. While themes of violence and bloodshed pervaded many of the drawings dealing with Guatemala, other more positive images of their homeland were expressed as well. Several shy children of both sexes became active participants, sometimes non-verbally (e.g., in drawings), sometimes verbally, in a supportive social context. In addition, intersex interactions took on new forms. For example, when girls found it difficult to participate together with boys in the collective story activity, a discussion ensued in which boys actively solicited the greater participation of girls.

Implications for Future Interventions

The open-ended nature of the intervention's activities lends itself to adaptation for use with other groups of children in markedly different contexts to help them focus on issues and events particularly salient in their lives.

For instance, as part of an undergraduate seminar at the University of Michigan, the students conducted a Playing to Grow workshop with a group of children in a nearby community of Mexican-American migrant farm workers. Several of the main activities in the workshop were adapted to address issues salient to these children's lives, such as migration, changing schools, concerns and hopes regarding the future, and work in the fields. An evaluation study of the Playing to Grow model is also in process at an inner-city elementary school in Detroit that serves a primarily low-income Latino population. Here, too, workshop activities are being adapted to address relevant themes such as gang violence, ethnic identity, the problem of racism, hopes for the future, and gender roles.*

REFERENCES


*A Spanish-language training video and an illustrated manual in English and Spanish are available from the authors for combined or separate use.

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