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# 'CHILDREN IN SOUTH AFRICA CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE'

## An assessment of 'Growing Up in Cities' in Johannesburg

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The article presents the evaluation of two Johannesburg sites of 'Growing Up in Cities', a project that involves children in documenting and improving their urban environments, with respect to the effect of project participation. Participating children and their parents were surveyed or interviewed regarding the project's value and effect on the children. In addition, the children were measured on scales of self-esteem, locus of control and self-efficacy, and compared with control groups. The results of the evaluation are summarized, and claims about the value of children's participation in community development are critically reviewed.

This article reports on an evaluation of the South African site of a project that was conceived during Sharon Stephens's direction of the Children and Environment Programme at the Norwegian Centre for Child Research: a revival of 'Growing Up in Cities' (GUIC). This action-research project involves 10- to 15-year-olds in low-income areas around the world in documenting their own perspectives on the places where they live and in developing ideas for community improvements. Initiated in 1970 by the urban planner Kevin Lynch (1977) in cooperation with UNESCO, the project was revived in 1995 in eight countries, with the support of the Norwegian Centre for Child Research and Childwatch International of Oslo. It was quickly adopted by the MOST Programme of UNESCO (Management of Social Transformations) as well as numerous international and national organizations (Chawla, 2001; Driskell, in press). The project's methods for work with children and youth continue to spread to new locations (see descriptions at [www.unesco.org/most/growing.htm](http://www.unesco.org/most/growing.htm)). One country where GUIC has taken root is South Africa, where the project goal of child and youth participation in improving the urban environment coincides with the nation's

urgent need to build a post-Apartheid civil society as well as address a legacy of poverty and housing shortages in the context of rapidly changing urban populations.

This article presents an evaluation of two GUIC sites in Johannesburg: Canaansland, an African squatter camp, and Ferreirasdorp, an Indian community. In keeping with the provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, together with Agenda 21 from the UN Conference on Environment and Development, and the Habitat Agenda from the Second UN Conference on Human Settlements, GUIC pursues a number of objectives:

- Gaining an understanding of children's environmental interests and needs through participatory research;
- Applying this information to the design of programmes and activities to improve life quality for children and their communities;
- Pressing for effective urban policies for children;
- Organizing public events to draw attention to urban children's rights and needs;
- Increasing the capacity for participatory research and action among academic researchers and the staff of community-based organizations.

These objectives coincide with many of Sharon Stephens's commitments, including her interest in the relationship between local 'ecologies of childhood' and global forces, children's participation in environmental activities and decision-making, and children's own experiences of changing environments (Stephens, 1994). Even after she left the Norwegian Centre for Child Research to take up a position at the University of Michigan in autumn 1995, Stephens remained on the project's advisory board until her death in 1998.

This article focuses on the influence phase of participatory action-research on the young people of Canaansland and Ferreirasdorp. Many claims have been made regarding the benefits of participation for children, including enhanced self-esteem, a greater sense of self-efficacy, an internal locus of control, greater awareness and appreciation for democratic processes, an increased sense of responsibility for their communities, and improved communication and problem-solving skills (de Winter, 1997; Hart, 1997; Stapp et al., 1996). Through describing the use of multiple methods of evaluation, which engaged both children and their parents, this article critically examines these claims.

## **Canaansland and Ferreirasdorp**

The work of GUIC in Canaansland represents one of the first detailed published studies of life inside an urban squatter camp from children's perspectives, and one of the first studies of children's responses to a forced eviction (Swart-Kruger, 2000, 2001). Squatter settlements represent a worldwide response to housing shortages, and form a refuge for many families seeking to escape extreme rural poverty or life on urban pavements. In South Africa, it is estimated that about 13 percent of homes are shacks such as squatter housing (van Tonder, 1997).

As a thriving mining and industrial city, Johannesburg attracts large numbers of job seekers and is currently the most densely populated city in South Africa. Informal housing proliferates as people struggle to become financially secure. It is important to understand how these environments function for children. Therefore, GUIC was introduced in 1996 in Canaansland, the largest of 61 squatter sites in inner-city Johannesburg. Located on 1.48 acres of land with only one water tap and no sewerage or sanitation, the camp was home for about 1000 people. The choice of this site was discussed with the mayor of Johannesburg and the chairman of the Executive Committee of the Transitional Metropolitan Council to ensure that some commitment would be made to implement ideas that the project generated. An official letter confirming the support of the Council was received from the mayor before work was undertaken with the children.

Fifteen girls and boys aged between 10 and 14 years took part in the full range of GUIC activities at this location. Because the activities took place during a series of Saturday morning workshops, the children quickly named the sessions 'Saturday school'. In addition to making drawings of their homes and neighbourhood, answering interview questions, taking the researchers on walks to show important places in daily life, role playing, and doing group activities to identify problems, envisage a better place to live and suggest changes to improve Canaansland, the children also took part in songs and games and shared refreshments. When these activities were completed, Mayor Isaac Mogase, of the Greater Johannesburg Metropolitan Council, hosted a one-day workshop at which the children presented the results of their work to the mayor, four regional mayors, city planners, representatives of donor agencies and young members of the city's Mini and Junior Councils. Following these presentations, the members of the audience drafted action plans to respond to the children's needs and the needs of squatter families as well as to urban children in greater Johannesburg as a whole.

Before improvements agreed to at the workshop could be implemented, and without the mayor's advance knowledge, the community was forcibly evicted with no notice and trucked 40 km away to a new location in empty veld, to land allocated for informal settlements by the Regional

Department of Housing and Land Affairs. Several other inner-city squatter settlements were also dropped in this barren region known as 'Thula Mntwana' (Zulu for 'Hush my child'). Here the Canaansland families have had to begin the slow process of rebuilding their lives. GUIC project members have continued to work with them, including securing funds for the construction of a children's centre and adjoining playground in response to the children's identification of these needs. In May 1999, Mayor Mogase officially opened the children's centre on the new site. Named 'Ubuhle Buyeza' ('Good things are about to happen') by one of the project children, it now functions as a centre of community life for all ages. In February 1999, after the workshop and eviction and before the opening ceremony for the centre, 10 children from the original GUIC sample participated in a project impact assessment.

The children of the Ferreirasdorp location of GUIC, which was initiated in 1998, live in two high-rise apartment complexes inhabited by Indian families, just west of inner-city Johannesburg. (For a summary of both project sites, see the GUIC-South Africa website at [home.global.co.za/~sjk/guic.htm](http://home.global.co.za/~sjk/guic.htm).) These families are the remnants of a once large and vital Indian, African and Coloured community that suffered a series of evictions from the 1950s through 1970s under the Apartheid policy of clearing Johannesburg for white residents only. A sample of 25 children, between 10 and 14 years old, was drawn from local primary schools to participate in the project. As in Canaansland, the children did drawings, interviews, role plays and walking tours of the neighbourhood, as well as group activities through which they identified problems and envisaged improvements in their community.

The children in Ferreirasdorp were evaluated after the end of this research phase, before they had a chance to present their results. The mayor's office was also aware of the work undertaken in Ferreirasdorp, so that when the children there completed their research, they were invited to report their findings in the official council chambers at the annual national meeting of junior mayors and councillors from throughout South Africa. As in Canaansland, the Ferreirasdorp children elected four representatives who presented their ideas. In response, junior councillors came up with a scheme to raise money so that some of the children's ideas could be realized. A group of junior councillors painted a large picture of the city, cut it up into 600 pieces, and sold each piece for 5 rand (US\$0.50) during a morning in a mall. With the 3000 rand (US\$300) that they received, the children of Ferreirasdorp decided to fill an empty swimming pool in an old recreation area that had recently been opened to the public, charge 1 rand admission, and, with part of the money, increase security by paying destitute people in the neighbourhood to protect their school surroundings. Meanwhile, the children also submitted reports to the Metropolitan Council. About 2 years after the research phase, the newly appointed manager of the Child Friendly Cities Initiative in Greater Johannesburg invited a small team of councillors to

**Table 1** Summary of characteristics of participants

<i>Group</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Description</i>
Canaansland	10	Relocated inner-city squatter-camp children in the GUIC programme
Thula Mntwana	9	Rural squatter settlement children with no GUIC exposure
Ferreirasdorp	21	Inner-city apartment children in the GUIC programme
Ferreirasdorp control	82	Inner-city apartment children with no GUIC exposure
Total	122	

undertake a guided walk in Ferreirasdorp, so that the children there could make their recommendations directly.

These GUIC sites represent processes of participatory action-research with the goal of designing programmes and places that set communities on paths of progressive self-improvement. In addition to the benefits to the communities themselves, how do these processes affect the children involved? Despite many claims made, there has been almost no systematic research to answer this question. The remainder of this article reports on a multi-method effort to explore the effect of these activities on the children of Canaansland and Ferreirasdorp. Because research of this kind is so new, the work that follows should be regarded as an exploratory initiative to determine measures that might most effectively assess this type of engagement.

## Participants

The impact assessment procedures discussed in this article were carried out in January and February 1999, almost a year after young participants in Ferreirasdorp had undertaken an evaluation of their urban setting, and about 18 months after young participants at Canaansland had done so. Four of the original 25 participants from Ferreirasdorp had relocated, leaving 21 participants; 82 school fellows were available as a control group (see Table 1). Only 15 of the original 23 participants at Canaansland were involved in the full GUIC process until its completion, and after relocation, only 10 children from this group were available for the impact assessment study. They were compared with nine children from the larger settlement of Thula Mntwana who had had no previous exposure to GUIC.

English was the medium of communication in Ferreirasdorp. English and isiZulu were the two main languages used in Canaansland and Thula Mntwana; occasionally children asked for clarification in SeSotho.

## Methods

Sharon Stephens noted that the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) addresses children's right to participation in two senses: their possibilities for engagement in the social life and physical world that surrounds them, and their opportunities to have a voice in more formal processes of democratic decision-making (Stephens, 1994). GUIC explores both dimensions. Through multiple methods of research, it seeks to understand how children use and value their localities, and through advocacy, it seeks to create formal channels through which children can be heard. Because it does this within the framework of the CRC, it was important for the project evaluation in Johannesburg to respond to different dimensions of this guiding legislation.

Stephens observed that the CRC is a document that assumes the universality of a free-standing, individual child who is to be protected and socialized into a culture according to liberal democratic principles (Stephens, 1995). The so-called 'participation articles' of the CRC (Articles 12–15), in particular, assume socialization into 'democratic principles of tolerance for diverse views and freedom of self-expression' (Stephens, 1995: 38). She noted that, as a consequence, critics have accused the Convention of cultural authoritarianism that subsumes all children into 'predominantly Western notions of normal childhood and child development' (Stephens, 1995: 36). Because of this, she was interested in the drafting and process of ratification of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, an instrument of the Organization of African Unity that came into force in November 2000. This takes into consideration both children's rights and children's responsibilities and was as influential in guiding the implementation of GUIC in South Africa as the CRC. Although Stephens advocated the culturally sensitive application of both these instruments ('the African child', after all, is as abstract an entity as 'the child'), she defended the need for legally binding principles, noting that the proliferation of new risks to children and their environments in late capitalism had brought a corresponding need for rights that can be protected by law.

The paradox of Articles 12 and 13 of the CRC<sup>1</sup> is that they simultaneously view children as objects of rights and as creative subjects. Children are objects in the sense that the adults who drafted, adopted and are implementing this legislation have predetermined that children should have opportunities to exercise these particular rights, for predetermined reasons. To the extent that children creatively appropriate these rights, however, they become agents in imagining and reshaping the conditions of their lives. Another reason why it is critical to consider both adults' and children's expectations of participation is that any implementation of children's ideas – particularly in complex, contested urban spaces like Johannesburg – requires that adults and children work together to bring about change.

For these reasons, the exploratory evaluation of GUIC in Canaansland and Ferreirasdorp combined different methodological approaches. On one

hand, it examined common adult claims regarding aspects of autonomous development that processes like GUIC should encourage: self-esteem, an internal locus of control (the belief that gains are dependent upon one's own actions) and self-efficacy (the belief that one can achieve the goals one sets oneself). To measure these benefits, standard psychometric measures were used: the Culture-Free Scale of Self-Esteem (Battle, 1981), the Nowicki–Strickland Locus of Control Scale (Nowicki and Strickland, 1973) and measures of self-efficacy that were especially created for this study.

In addition to these quantitative measures, which sought to evaluate universalized expectations regarding the benefits of participation for children, open-ended, qualitative information was also gathered through group discussions with the children who had taken part in the GUIC process. The discussions were not formal focus groups: eight thematic points were identified by researchers from the GUIC project, but participants were free to diverge from these themes. Using open-ended questionnaires, supplementary input was obtained from the children's parents. Since a number of the adults at Canaansland were illiterate, fieldworkers posed the questions verbally to the parents there and recorded their responses in writing. Since the parents of children from Ferreirasdorp were literate, they were not interviewed personally. Their questionnaires were distributed through the junior school and returned there for collection. Through these qualitative measures, the study sought to understand how parents believed that GUIC affected their children, as well as children's own experiences regarding the project's meaning and value. The set of different measures is listed in Table 2.

To adapt the psychometric instruments for the few children who did not use English as their mother tongue, the questions were translated from English into isiZulu and then back-translated, mindful of the requirements imposed by a constantly changing dialect. When it was not possible to make direct translations, where certain concepts were either not available or were differently applied in the two languages, the closest colloquial equivalent was decided on in consultation with the workers assisting with the translation. For each of the psychometric measurements, one of the two fieldworkers posed the questions to the group of children and ensured that the children understood the question and recorded their answers at the correct position on the answer sheet. Their answers were transferred to a database for scoring, calculating total raw scores and creating standardized scores for further analysis. For each instrument an item analysis and an estimation of the reliability of the measure was obtained for the total group of children. All quantitative data were analysed using the Statistica software package.

The measures of self-efficacy deserve special attention. One of the most frequently claimed benefits of children's participation is an increased belief in ability to achieve desired goals, described in terms of self-confidence, a sense of competence, or self-efficacy. The concept of self-efficacy, however, demands that this construct must be understood within a particular,

**Table 2** Methods of evaluation used

<i>Type</i>	<i>Method</i>	<i>Description</i>
<b>Psychometric measures</b>	Culture-Free Scale of Self-Esteem	Developed by James Battle (1981) was used. A few items of the original scale were omitted and a few new items more relevant to the present study were added. In the end, there were 39 items to the scale, covering four areas of the children's lives: 7 social, 8 environmental and 24 personal issues.
	Nowicki-Strickland (1973) Locus of Control Scale	This scale was previously used successfully with South African children (Richter, 1989; Richter and van der Walt, 1996), and was based on that developed by Rotter (1966). A few minor colloquial adaptations from the original presentation were made.
	Measures of self-efficacy	A Likert-type scale of 42 items was developed, which tapped six areas of concern relevant to the programme: social issues and issues related to peer groups, school, independence, personal achievement and the environment. Children responded to each item twice: first in terms of the degree to which they considered it an ideal area of behaviour, and second in terms of the degree to which they personally matched this behaviour.
<b>Qualitative measures</b>	Group discussions	Project children took part in discussions about eight themes related to the project, as well as other project issues that they wished to bring up.
	Parent questionnaires	Depending on their literacy, the parents of children in the project responded to verbal or written questions about how GUIC affected their children.

*Note:* For details about the construction of the research instruments and a comprehensive report of results, see Griesel and Swart-Kruger (1999).

appropriate context (Bandura, 1997). Therefore one of the goals of this study was to create a measure that would be relevant to participatory processes of environmental change such as GUIC. For this purpose, a questionnaire with 42 items was created, based on discussions with the programme director and the fieldworkers who worked most closely with the children in Canaansland and Ferreirasdorp.

The questionnaire was applied twice: once by asking what a child perceived to be ideal areas of behaviour (measured on a Likert-type scale in five gradations from 'definitely not important' to 'very important'), and thereafter with respect to the extent to which a child believed that he or she personally met this ideal (measured in five gradations from 'always disagree' to 'always agree'). A visual aid was used to explain to the children differences in magnitude from the lowest to the highest ratings on the scale. An adjusted self-efficacy score was calculated for each item, which weighted the self-descriptive estimates in terms of the idealized estimates. If a child viewed a particular attribute as being maximally important and also fully personally met that criterion, the self-efficacy score was maximal. The reverse was also true: if a child viewed an attribute as being maximally important and personally only met that criterion minimally, then the self-efficacy score was adjusted downwards to a minimum. For each of the six areas of concern outlined in Table 2, the adjusted efficacy scores for the items under each heading were summed, and the total scores for each area were then transformed to T-scores based on the performance of the total group.

## Results

### *Group discussions*

In group discussions, children from both Canaansland and Ferreirasdorp spoke of how they believed that the GUIC process had affected their lives, and what they had learned from taking part.

Because the presentation by Canaansland children on the shortcomings in their urban environment had been favourably received by officials, they believed that the improvements they had recommended would be implemented. Instead, 6 months after their presentation and a year before the impact assessment was undertaken, all residents were relocated to a peri-urban area (Swart-Kruger, 2000). Their responses in group discussions showed that they conflated the positive outcomes expected from the urban workshop two years previously with recent improvements in their new setting – although some of these were introduced by GUIC and others by the regional Department of Housing and Land Affairs:

Everything we asked for in Braamfontein . . . we got it; now we are happy.

At both sites, the children said that their ability to communicate with each other had been enhanced by the GUIC process:

Kids here listen to each other, respect and share ideas. (Canaansland)

[It] taught us how to communicate with each other. (Ferreirasdorp)

They also felt that the process was not only fun, but helpful for gaining greater awareness about their surroundings.

Every single thing they taught us here is important. (Canaansland)

Growing Up in Cities helps us to know how to do directions. (Canaansland)

[It] helped us to learn about our areas. (Ferreirasdorp)

We enjoyed being asked questions, playing games, drawing, and talking about our environment. (Ferreirasdorp)

The Canaansland children were critical of the fact that the water at both the city and the new site was not potable, but commented favourably on the fact that disgusting environmental conditions in their city camp – such as stagnant water, foul smoke, mud, the stench of faeces, and dirt in general – which had provoked hostile reactions to them from passers-by, no longer permeated their lives. They reported that they had learned that

... to improve the environment in cities is to keep it tidy.

The children from Ferreirasdorp were more explicit about what they had learned concerning the environment:

The project taught us how to care for our environment and keep it clean.

It taught us that people can help you change your life and change the environment in which you live.

They also claimed to have become more assertive about environmental issues:

It taught us that as children we have the right to give our opinions to improve our environment.

It taught me that the children of South Africa can make a difference.

Trapped as they are in the central business district of the inner-city, the children of Ferreirasdorp were keen that rowdy local bars that disrupted the evening prayer hour should be replaced with parks and a swimming pool. Poignantly, they wished that it were less dangerous for children to ride bicycles and visit the movies, and that it were possible to feel safe at night. They expressed the hope that

... what we have learned here is passed on to others.

### *Parents' questionnaires*

Parents were generally positive about their children's involvement in the GUIC programme. Some described the benefit of the programme in terms of the learning opportunities it afforded, while others said that they had seen a

general improvement in their children's behaviour and attitude:

They have become more mature and independent; they somehow feel proud of being heard.

He has become aware, independent, and respects his surroundings and his neighbours.

Parents especially thought that the project had been beneficial in motivating their children to learn more about the environment and to take care of it.

Taking part in this project has motivated her. She is very eager to learn about the things around her.

She now tells her friends about it, and makes them aware of the problems surrounding their environment, and how all of them should work together to make it a pleasant one.

They also noticed that their children showed increased caring in a concrete way:

She makes an effort to help in the environment in any way she can.

Before, she used to sometimes litter but now she picks up litter and throws it in the rubbish bin.

She talks about things that would make a difference for the betterment of the environment.

Some parents felt that children should take part in decision-making on environmental issues:

Children should be involved to some extent in decisions about their environment so that the environment can become a better and safe place for them.

In all, more than half of the parents identified specific areas in which their children had found benefit from the GUIC programme.

### *Self-esteem*

Detailed information about the reliability of responses, the distribution of scores and the results of the statistical comparisons for each of the psychometric instruments are reported elsewhere (Griesel and Swart-Kruger, 1999). Because of the small numbers of children involved, it was not deemed desirable to rely on the statistical testing of results, but rather on analyses of variance. Post-hoc Scheffe comparisons were carried out to determine whether any statistically significant differences between groups were suggested.

On the Culture-Free Scale of Self-Esteem the reliability of the questionnaire as a whole was not very high. To estimate the extent to which the various items converge when a characteristic is measured, Cronbach's alpha is commonly used. Perfect convergence is indicated by an alpha value of 1. The Scale of Self-Esteem resulted in a standardized Cronbach's alpha of .55. The children's responses on social items, the environment and personal self-esteem were summed to give raw scores from 7, 8 and 24 items respectively.

The distribution of scores of the total group for each of these measures was reasonably normal. The scales could not easily be compared with each other because of the different numbers of items, so a standard metric had to be found. The raw subscale scores and the total raw score from the three subscales together were each converted to T-scores ( $M = 50$ ;  $SD = 10$ ) for the total group; and the relative T-scores for the four groups on the three subscales were then compared. Measured by these means, the Canaansland children had slightly lower self-esteem in terms of social issues but they, and their control group (the squatter group), had higher self-esteem than the inner-city apartment children, based on personal issues. The Thula Mntwana children who had not been exposed to the GUIC programme were slightly more satisfied with themselves in terms of their environment and on the full-scale measure. The groups did not otherwise differ from each other, and none of the comparisons between groups approached statistical significance.

### *Locus of control*

The central characteristic of 'locus of control' is the degree of perceived internally located control over the world and its relation to the subject. For the Nowicki-Strickland Locus of Control Scale, the internal reliability in the total sample was not very high (standardized Cronbach's alpha of .56). After confirming that the distribution of raw scores across the total group was reasonably normal, the raw scores were converted to T-scores. The Canaansland group showed the lowest mean internal locus of control score, followed by the group from Ferreirasdorp which had also been exposed to the GUIC programme. The small group of rural squatter camp children had the highest mean internal locus of control score. However, these differences were very small and not statistically significant on an analysis of variance.

### *Measures of self-efficacy*

As described earlier, adjusted self-efficacy scores were calculated based first on how important a child considered an item to be, and second in terms of its perceived applicability to him- or herself. When Cronbach's alpha was calculated across the items, a standardized correlation of .84 was obtained for the 'importance' version, .81 for the 'applicability' version and .81 for the adjusted scoring. These results suggest that the questionnaire was tapping a wide selection of aspects relating to a single construct (self-efficacy?) in a way that was internally reliable. The distribution of the summed scores for the 'importance' version was somewhat skewed to the right suggesting that the majority of children regarded the items to be 'important'. But the distribution of the 'applicability' scores appeared reasonably normal – as did the distribution of the resulting adjusted raw scores. A common metric (T-scores) was adopted to allow comparison of these scores with each other and with other measures in the study. Then the four groups were compared on the summed adjusted scores expressed as T-scores (Table 3).

**Table 3** Summary table of mean T-scores on total ('adjusted') self-efficacy

<i>Group</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Canaansland	51.90	9.80
Thula Mntwana	65.09	13.87
Ferreirasdorp	46.98	9.07
Ferreirasdorp controls	48.86	8.38
All groups	50.00	10.00

**Table 4** Scheffe test of four groups on adjusted total self-efficacy T-scores

<i>Group</i>	<i>Group 1</i> ( <i>M</i> = 51.09)	<i>Group 2</i> ( <i>M</i> = 65.09)	<i>Group 3</i> ( <i>M</i> = 46.99)	<i>Group 4</i> ( <i>M</i> = 48.86)
Canaansland	–	.02194*	.58315	.80079
Thula Mntwana	.02194*	–	.00005*	.00003*
Ferreirasdorp	.58315	.00005*	–	.87572*
Ferreirasdorp controls	.80079	.00003*	.87572	–

\* $p < .05$ .

Taken together, the four groups differed from each other on this measure. A one-way analysis of variance of the four groups suggested a statistically significant group effect ( $F = 9.61$ , *d.f.* = 3,  $p = .0001$ ). There were also statistically significant differences among the groups, comparing one against each other in turn, using the post-hoc Scheffe test (Table 4).

Children in the control group at Thula Mntwana tended to consider themselves more efficacious than the other three groups. Though the one-way analysis of variance and post-hoc Scheffe test support this observation, it is important to remember that the small number of children in the Thula Mntwana control group may encourage an artefactual statistical significance in the group comparisons.

When the adjusted self-efficacy scores were examined in the six descriptive areas (social, peer group, school, independence, personal achievement and environment) much the same pattern emerged as with the total adjusted efficacy score reported earlier. The same caveat applies, however. In the area of social efficacy the Thula Mntwana control differed significantly from the two groups who had followed the GUIC programme and they also rated themselves somewhat more efficacious than the Ferreirasdorp control children did. In regard to school-related items, the post-hoc test indicated that the two squatter settlement groups scored significantly higher than the Ferreirasdorp GUIC group. With respect to personal achievement and estimates of efficacy in the context of the environment, the Thula Mntwana control group rated themselves higher than did the two groups from

Ferreirasdorp but the other groups did not differ significantly from one another. Nor did the groups differ significantly in respect of how efficacious the children rated themselves in the arenas of peer group relations or independence.

## Discussion

The qualitative measures reported here indicate that the children for whom GUIC was run benefited from the programme. This study has highlighted the value of qualitative assessments in revealing the children's growth in skills and awareness, according to the children themselves and their parents.

As in many spheres of life, just the mere fact that one is being singled out for special treatment brings a certain psychological edge. Parents and children were specific about the benefits that they attributed to project participation, and their appraisals conformed to the project's goals for the children in terms of increased awareness of the environment and community needs, better communication skills, and a sense that they could express their opinions and make a positive contribution to their communities. Many children reported that the GUIC programme had sensitized them to the plight of the urban environment, drawn their attention to the place and role of others in their lives, and made them self-confident if not assertive. Most parents and children clearly championed the principle of the need for children to be heard, particularly in respect to plans to upgrade their environment or design new places to live. Therefore, the observations of both children and parents appeared to be directly associated with GUIC, rather than just a 'Hawthorne effect' due to special treatment.

Since these benefits claimed by the children and their parents can be expected to have an impact on psychological functioning, it is disappointing that the psychometric measures did not yield more substantive indicators of change in the children's lives. The contrast between the qualitative and quantitative results of this study invites a number of reflections.

As noted before, self-esteem, self-efficacy and an internal locus of control reflect what Sharon Stephens called the 'international modernist culture' of the CRC (Stephens, 1995: 39), with its emphasis on individual autonomy and achievement. Perhaps these constructs were not appropriate to the Islamic Indian culture of Ferreirasdorp and the African cultures of Canaanland. The study results suggest that the cultural relevance of these measures needs to be carefully considered within each project context.

It can also be argued, however, that these psychological characteristics are likely to be robust and unlikely to be greatly influenced by relatively short-term interventions. After all, they are characteristics that have developed over a considerable period of time, need prolonged positive reinforcement to become characteristic of an individual, and call for catastrophic or long-term influences to change them. This factor also needs careful

consideration in terms of the gains anticipated from any intervention programme.

It is noteworthy that the measure that yielded high reliability figures was the self-efficacy questionnaire, in contrast to the low reliability of the self-esteem and locus of control instruments. As Boyden and Ennew (1997) observe, questionnaires are most useful when they use ideas and words with which respondents are already familiar and build upon information gained from prior qualitative research. Although steps were taken to adapt the pre-existing measures of self-esteem and locus of control, it is possible that these measures still did not adequately relate to the study settings; whereas the self-efficacy questionnaire was specifically designed to fit the context of growing up in an impoverished and deteriorating environment. It is also interesting to note that the distribution of the children's self-efficacy scores was skewed to the right when the children rated the importance of the issues represented by the different items. That is, most children identified clearly that which society prescribes is desirable. This was more true for the Ferreirasdorp than for the Canaansland children. The fact that the children's application of the items to themselves yielded a nearly normal distribution supports the notion that the children understood the aim of the two questionnaires.

A shift in emphasis yielded different assessments of efficacy. In the present instance, it appeared essential to temper the assessment of achievement of the children in various arenas by referring to the extent to which they perceived such achievement as being important. Indirectly, this may reflect socially determined norms for such achievement. However, it may equally relate to the acceptance of such norms by the individuals. This should of course be contrasted with perceptions of the efficacy of the group as such. Instruments for assessing group efficacy, as seen by members of the group, have yet to be researched in relation to the efficacy of individuals in the group. These aspects deserve further research with similar groups.

The direction of the psychometric results raises questions regarding what reasonable expectations should be for participatory processes like GUIC. The children who experienced the intervention appeared slightly more driven by external forces, if the locus of control results can be accepted. On the 'application' measure of self-efficacy, the children exposed to GUIC also seemed slightly less sure of being efficacious than the control groups. Though these results were not strong, they do point to the fact that, although it was initially expected that the children would be more internally driven and feel more efficacious after their engagement with GUIC, the project was very much directed to sensitizing the children to their physical and social environment. Environmental changes based on the project depended on extensive collaboration among the children and between children and adults, rather than individual efforts. Perhaps projects like GUIC should be regarded primarily as experiences in collective efficacy rather than self-

efficacy and internal locus of control. Typically, measures of collective efficacy ask members of a group to appraise the capability of their group as a whole (Bandura, 1997).

It should also be kept in mind that, as a rule, accurate self-appraisal and the accurate appraisal of difficulties increase with age (Bandura, 1997). Perhaps GUIC fostered a more mature sense of self-efficacy in terms of the real challenges of community development, and therefore downward adjusted scores. The exact formulation of the aims of intervention studies clearly needs to converge with their content. In the present case it is not clear whether a more internal locus of control and a stronger sense of self-efficacy were the appropriate outcomes to anticipate.

The timing of the evaluations at the two sites also needs to be taken into consideration. As noted before, in some respects the move of the Canaansland group from their inner-city camp to an informal settlement on the city's edge was confounded with the GUIC programme. Some parents and children identified the GUIC programme – which had encouraged the development of environments in which children could be safer and happier – with the event of being relocated to a more remote but in some ways more acceptable place to live in Thula Mntwana. This impression seemed to have been reinforced by promises made at the mayor's workshop. The focus group remarks of the Canaansland children to a large extent support this observation. At the same time, the children found the ways in which city government works bewildering. They did not understand when the project director explained to them that the Metropolitan Council had to take an official resolution to assist them in the ways approved at the mayor's workshop, and that the resolution would only be discussed much later in the year. Similarly, the children in Ferreirasdorp could not understand why it should take council officials two years to bring up new bylaws for discussion and a vote. It is also important to keep in mind that the children in Ferreirasdorp were tested before the fundraising event run by the Junior Council.

The finding that children from GUIC showed a slightly lower degree of self-efficacy could be due to their conception that while local government and other official agencies had listened to what they had to say, the lack of concrete action by officials frustrated them. Johnson (1996: 7) has noted that both researchers and children feel disappointed when they have believed that their findings will make a difference, and then they do not. Although the causes of the lower scores are not clear, these results reinforce the need for ethical principles of participatory work with children and communities. The articulation of priorities for change needs to be followed by sessions with adults and minors jointly to ensure that what remains to be done, and by whom, is clearly demarcated and that there are no residues of misunderstanding which might have a negative impact on young informants. These results also reinforce the importance of integrating into participatory processes some 'mastery experiences' that can be quickly implemented.

Further work to evaluate participatory programmes with children should allow for proper 'pre' and 'post' assessments and, whenever possible, repeated follow-up measures after increasing intervals of time. Given the time and resources required to initiate GUIC in South Africa, it was not possible in this case to focus on impact assessments until the process was well under way. Ideally, a pre/post design should be integrated into project funding from the start. It would also be desirable to ensure (as far as such factors can be controlled in real life) that the numbers of participants be higher and that the research not be confounded by too many factors such as relocation and sample attrition. Finally, more attention needs to be given to the translation, adaptation and creation of culture-sensitive psychometric instruments for non-western groups.

In summary, the goals of children in Canaansland and Ferreirasdorp, and the changes for the better that the children helped to achieve, may seem small compared to the magnitude of the environmental and social problems facing Johannesburg and many other cities of the world. According to statements by children and parents in the GUIC project, however, taking these steps gave the children a greater awareness of their environment and a greater sense of their rights and abilities to express their views and take action to improve their living conditions. In a world where an increasing proportion of the population lives in urban areas, it will be vitally important that urban residents have such an awareness and knowledge of how to take action. It is out of the activities of citizens in unnumbered communities like Canaansland and Ferreirasdorp around the world, that the foundations for liveable and sustainable cities will be built.

## Notes

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1. Article 12 of the CRC provides for children's opinions to be taken into account in all decisions made on their behalf, in accordance with their age and maturity; Article 13 provides children with the right to freedom of expression.

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