

# The New Stories/New Cultures After-School Enrichment Program: A Direct Cultural Intervention

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*This article describes the organization, curriculum, and outcomes for New Stories/New Cultures, an activity-based program for after-school enrichment in five schools in the low-income neighborhood near a major American university. The program encourages students (70% Hispanic-American, 30% African-American) to experience themselves as producers of culture, not just as consumers. Its methods include (a) creative team use of video equipment and other expressive media and (b) lessons about media literacy (i.e., making critical choices about images and activities depicted in popular culture and commercials). Outcome measures with the cohort of fifth and sixth graders support the program's occupation-based philosophy. They show that students are more likely to experience themselves as building skills when engaged in activities that are both challenging and enjoyable. The students reported greatest engagement and enjoyment in activities that were creative, team-based, and involving media production. These same activities were correlated with increased self-esteem. The term direct cultural intervention is used to describe the application of occupational principles and critical perspectives to provide a population with conceptual tools and skills for interpreting and successfully navigating the social world.*

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It is as important for children today to understand how media works as it was a hundred years ago for children of farmers to understand the weather. (Florence Clark, February 2, 2001, comment on the screening of the New Stories/New Cultures video documentary at the University of Southern California)

**T**he need for high-quality after-school programs for children in kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) is becoming a priority on the national agenda. According to The David and Lucile Packard Foundation (1999), 39 million children between 5 and 14 years of age live in the United States, yet these children have no organized system of supervision. Under the Clinton administration, \$200 million in federal grants were made available to school districts in 1999 alone to establish after-school programs under the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative. The rationale for such programming derives from the following social, economic, and political realities:

- Public schools meet for only 6 hours per day, 180 days per year, leaving 185 days and many hours for leisure and nonschool activities.
- Three out of four mothers with school-age children are employed, and two-thirds of them work

full time. Their children need supervision after school lets out.

- During the afternoon hours, rates of juvenile crime triple, and many unsupervised youngsters experiment with tobacco, alcohol, drugs, and sex (The David and Lucile Packard Foundation, 1999, p. 2).

To a striking degree, the after-school problem is an occupational problem. Children need meaningful things to do with their time after school: They need occupations that are engaging and enjoyable, that allow them to build useful skills for their present and future lives, and that divert their attention from harmful unsupervised activities (cf., U.S. Department of Education, 2000). Polls taken in 1998 and 1999 show that most voters want more organized activities for children and teens after school and are willing to pay additional taxes to increase the availability of after-school programs (Mott Foundation, 2000; The David and Lucile Packard Foundation, 1999). After-school programming is an area of service and potential social impact in which occupation-minded practitioners can play a role. A holistic approach to *doing* has deep historical roots in the occupational therapy profession. Occupational therapists and occupational scientists can bring to after-school programming an understanding of life span development; training in skills analysis and teaching; and the broadest possible appreciation of the aesthetically, emotionally, and socially rewarding aspects of everyday activities.

### The New Stories/New Cultures Program

New Stories/New Cultures is an after-school enrichment program founded on occupational science and occupational therapy principles. It has been operating for 2 years in a cluster of schools in the immediate neighborhood of the University of Southern California (USC), located in South Central Los Angeles. *The aim of the New Stories/New Cultures program is to encourage K-12 students to experience themselves as producers of culture, not just as consumers.* An interdisciplinary staff teaches them (a) the creative use of video equipment and other media and (b) media literacy as it relates to making critical choices about images and activities depicted in television, film, print, popular music, commercials, and the Internet. The curriculum applies narrative theory, cultural anthropology, and occupational science to team-based activities involving creative dramatics, films, television, and video. It also draws on the growing movement to promote media literacy among children and teens (Center for Media Literacy, 2001 [see also Brunner & Talley, 1999; Conover, 1996; Summers, 1997]).

With support from the university's self-funded community development agency, the USC Good Neighbors Program, New Stories/New Cultures operates at five schools, offering a 12-week session in the fall and spring<sup>1</sup>. Classes are held after school twice a week and are 1½ hr long. Two hundred fifth-grade and sixth-grade students are served, with 20 students at each site during a given session.

The teaching staff includes

- licensed occupational therapists and unpaid occupational therapy master's student interns gaining university credit for supervised occupational therapy practice;
- doctoral students in occupational science, anthropology, sociology, and English/cinema;
- community health promoters; undergraduate and graduate student volunteers;
- paid student workers from the occupational therapy, anthropology, education, cinema, journalism, psychology, and other fields; and
- volunteers and paid staff members from the community, including parents and local persons attending other institutions of higher education in Los Angeles.

An important feature of New Stories/New Cultures is its partnership with the award-winning community health promoter program of the Esperanza Community Housing Corporation, an independent social service agency in the neighborhood of USC. The community health promoters (*promotoras*) are bilingual neighborhood residents who are generally first-generation immigrants to the United States from Mexico, Guatemala, and El Salvador.

As parents and health workers from the Hispanic sector of the community New Stories/New Cultures serves, the *promotoras* express particular enthusiasm for the program's approach to their children's socialization into American society. How children spend their time and the effects of media in terms of violence and other behaviors affecting the well-being of the community are issues they, like other Americans, find important (Healy, 1998; Leeds, 2001). Thus, like other programs in which occupation is used to promote the health of well elderly persons (Clark et al., 1997) and at-risk youth (Snyder, Clark, Masunaka-Noriega, & Young, 1988), New Stories/New Cultures aims to promote positive social and developmental outcomes with well children.

### Direct Cultural Interventions as an Outgrowth of Occupational Therapy and Occupational Science

The New Stories/New Cultures program is not about simply keeping students busy and off the streets. Rather, it is designed to give students access to conceptual tools and skills that they can use to interpret and successfully navigate the social world.

<sup>1</sup>The university agency's partnership with the neighborhood has attracted media attention and is helping to recruit high-caliber students oriented toward both academics and service (cf., McNamara, 1999). Commitment to community service was cited as the reason why USC was ranked as College of the Year 2000 by *Time Magazine/The Princeton Review* (Hornblower, 2000). Supplemental support for New Stories/New Cultures has come from the USC Rossier School of Education's Center for Urban Education. The program has received in-kind contributions of personnel and supplies from the USC Department of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy as part of the private practice plan.

### *Use of Occupational Principles*

Fundamental occupational principles that guide the occupational therapy profession are used to translate the New Stories/New Cultures mission into engaging, developmentally appropriate activities. This occupational approach comes from the same Progressive Era roots as the kindergarten and progressive education movements (Dewey, 1900/1990b, 1915/1990a; Montessori, 1912/1964). Two familiar principles of the occupational approach used to teach skills in the New Stories/New Cultures program are *task analysis* (breaking down an activity into more easily manageable components to facilitate performance) and *gradualism* (arranging the sequence of tasks from simple to increasingly difficult). Concern with *engagement* in activity is another principle to which our teachers pay close attention as they try to discern and elicit their students' interests and motivations. The scholarly discipline of occupational science, founded more recently, contributes the principle of *orchestration*, the overall patterning and rhythm of activities used to maintain peak interest and engagement of the students within and between sessions.

The mission of occupational science is to investigate the form, function, and meaning of human occupation (Zemke & Clark, 1996). *Occupations* are defined as culturally relevant, purposeful activities that give shape, meaning, and value to individuals' experiences through daily routines over the life span (Clark et al., 1991; Yerxa et al., 1990). New Stories/New Cultures emphasizes the cultural dimension. Watching television and watching films are known to be some of the main free-time occupations of school-age Americans (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984; Farnworth, 1998a, 1998b), and these occupations are the most significant contributors to *kids' culture* (Kinder, 1999; Rauzi, 1998).

According to a landmark 30-year study of children's time use by researchers at the University of Michigan, in 1981 and 1998, the average American child 3 to 12 years of age spent about a quarter of his or her free time watching television (Healy, 1998). Television watching in 1998 was the second most time-consuming activity of the child's week (about 13 hr), surpassed only by time spent in school (about 29.5 hr). The Kaiser Family Foundation (1999) reported that children spend an average of 38 hr a week—nearly 5 hr a day—consuming media outside of school, including television, video games, listening to music, and surfing the Internet.

Rauzi (1998) reported that people 12 to 20 years of age make up a disproportionately large sector of film audiences; they comprise 16% of the population but buy 26% of movie tickets. The two fastest growing segments of the Internet population are children and teens (The Children's Partnership, 2000a, p. 11). Presently, more children 12 years of age and under go online (13.2 million) than those 13 to 18 years of age (12.5 million) (The Children's

Partnership, 2000b, p. 1). The Internet poses special challenges with regard to equal access to the technology, relevant content, and representation for low-income and underserved Americans, a disparity that has been dubbed the Digital Divide (Schön, 1997; The Children's Partnership, 2000a; U.S. Department of Commerce, 1999).

New Stories/New Cultures is informed by occupational science in focusing on media-related activities that are among the most relevant and valued occupations of children and teens in the United States. Further, occupational science informs the way the New Stories/New Cultures staff members pay attention to the way time is structured in and out of the classroom to create specific kinds of experiences. Lessons emphasize the influence of popular media on what people do, what they buy, and how they create a particular lifestyle and "look." New Stories/New Cultures thus makes practical links between media and the lives of students, their families, and community.

### *Direct Cultural Intervention Defined*

We suggest the term *direct cultural intervention* to describe the New Stories/New Cultures approach. *A direct cultural intervention can be defined as the introduction of activities and critical perspectives that members of a group or social category can use to examine their place in society and, consequently, their engagement in everyday occupations.* In the case of New Stories/New Cultures, the direct cultural intervention targets groups characterized by race and ethnicity (African-American, Mexican-American, etc.), age (late childhood, early adolescent), and class (urban working class).

*Cultures* may be seen as the product of what people do with their time and the meanings they attach to those activities. However, the New Stories/New Cultures program does not rely primarily on the familiar conceptualization of culture as a coherent pattern of tradition passed from generation to generation. Geertz (1973), for example, defined culture as "a transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols...by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life" (p. 89). Rather, the curriculum relies on a definition of *culture as composed of sets of competing discourses and practices within social fields characterized by the unequal distribution of power* (Dirks, Eley, & Ortner, 1994). In other words, cultures involve conflicting ways of thinking about and doing things, even when on the surface a group or category of people seems to show a high degree of consensus and conformity.

Anthropologist Sherry Ortner (1994) explained this newer definition of culture in words that occupational therapists perhaps can especially relate to:

The emphasis has shifted from what culture allows and enables people to see, feel, and do, to what it restricts and inhibits them from seeing, feeling, and doing. Further, although it is agreed that culture powerfully constitutes the reality that actors live in, this reality is looked upon with

critical eyes: why this one and not some other? *And what sorts of alternatives are people being dis-abled from seeing [italics added]?* (p. 396)

Ortner's approach is particularly useful in understanding complex societies, like our own, that are characterized by a great deal of diversity, including inequalities in the distribution of power on the basis of economic and racial stratification.

Some precedents for the concept of direct cultural interventions in occupational therapy and occupational science exist. Conquergood (1988), a scholar in communication and performance studies, helped frustrated public health officials to make effective interventions in the hygienic practices of a displaced Hmong population in a refugee camp by creating a traditional-style festival and procession in which a mythic matriarchal figure broadcast the innovative message. Similarly, occupational therapist Algado (n.d.) focused directly on spirituality and well-being with a displaced Mayan community in a Guatemalan refugee camp.

### Popular Commercial Media and Culture Addressed Through Activities in the New Stories/New Cultures Curriculum

Contemporary cultures are highly "mediated," that is, conditioned by images and messages conveyed through popular media that have the commercial purpose of selling products and services for corporate profit (Grossberg, Nelson, & Treichler, 1992; Kinder, 1999). By targeting increasingly narrow "market segments" in the American population, marketing analyses and advertising techniques actually help produce cultural distinctions on the basis of age, gender, and race that are related to consumption of products ranging from clothing and food to videos and recorded music (Frank, 1997; Kinder, 1999).

Students in New Stories/New Cultures learn to recognize and analyze the narrative structures, hidden advertising approaches, and graphic techniques used to promote consumerism. The relevance of such lessons is striking when it is understood that 90% of students in the neighborhood schools come from low-income families and qualify for federally subsidized lunches. Yet many of the students have little understanding of the relationship between the commercials and the programs they see on television—it is all entertainment to them. New Stories/New Cultures teaches students about the high level of finance at stake for networks and their sponsors who depend on viewers buying the products that are advertised on their favorite shows. New Stories/New Cultures also informs students that the stories and images of people on television are created by writers who often have little first-hand experience of the groups they portray. Most often, writers rely on the stereotypic characterizations and plot formulas that have sold products successfully in the past.

The New Stories/New Cultures curriculum focuses on the social processes by which discourses (i.e., narratives, sto-

ries) are produced and the daily life practices that these stories tend to promote (see Table 1 for sample curriculum). Students are taught the basic structure of stories (setting and problem, conflict, resolution) and how to recognize, analyze, and create stories in different genres (e.g., romance, horror, adventure, comedy). They use a variety of expressive media such as oral narration with and without props, illustrated storyboards, stop-action animation, creative dramatics, simulated television talk shows, and video production. They gain practice in recognizing, role-playing, and criticizing the stereotyping of characters' appearances and actions. They create commercials for ordinary and even worthless products as a way of gaining insight into media techniques used to manipulate audiences. They also create "anti-commercials" that are similar to public service announcements to combat smoking and drug use. Each session begins with a series of theater games drawn from the emancipatory theater work of Boal (1985, 1992, 1995) and Schutzman and Cohen-Cruz (1994) (see also Conquergood, 1988). These improvisational exercises promote whole-body expression, the formation of new dyads and groups within the cohort, and an environment that can be trusted for revealing and making discoveries about emotions. All the while, the students are taught to use video equipment to produce and document this work.

In the fall of 1999, for example, students from the predominantly Hispanic-American families (mainly from Mexico, Guatemala, and El Salvador) at one New Stories/New Cultures elementary school site produced the following work that they recorded on video during the 12-week session:

- A talk show about violence on television, including a student actor playing the role of a television producer of violent images
- Anti-smoking and anti-alcohol commercials that the students scripted and enacted
- Commercials that demonstrate advertising techniques, such as exaggerating the attributes of the item for sale (e.g., a pair of children's scissors or adhesive tape) and using famous people to endorse products
- Scenarios about stereotypes, such as a store detective's intimidating response to a poor person who browses merchandise
- A romantic genre story about dating and marriage that was scripted, enacted, and produced in several scenes
- A horror genre story based on the Mexican and Central American folk tale "La Llorona" (The Weeping Woman)
- A crime genre story that the students wrote and enacted about the daughters in a poor family who turn to selling drugs in order to pay for an operation for their sick mother (the wealthy Mafia character who supplies the drugs is tellingly named "Mr. de la Ghetto").<sup>2</sup>

**Table 1**  
**Outline of the New Stories/New Cultures After-School Curriculum**

Session	Topic	Discussion Content	Sample Activities
Week 1	Frames	What's in? What's out? Who chooses?	Stop-action animation, flip books, making two-sided animated characters on sticks or strings
Week 2	Point of view	Spatial, temporal, and attitudinal; being an author; being a director	Hands-on use of camera angles to frame images and create impressions (of power, weakness, etc.)
Week 3	Stories	Narrative structure: setting, complication, resolution, point or message. What kinds of actions happen?	Simple three-frame storyboards, sequenced storytelling in groups, use of dramatic formulas
Week 4	Style	Different genres; affective elements, such as music, lighting, and pacing of editing, that create feelings and moods	Making movies—scripting and acting in stories using illustrated characters, puppets, and props
Week 5	Character	Simple versus complex characters (e.g., heroes, stereotypes). What does the character do? How does he or she spend time?	Making movies—scripting and acting in stories, role-playing scenarios
Week 6	Message	Implicit and explicit messages; commercial and noncommercial media; deciding to accept or reject messages.	Talk shows, making commercials and anti-commercials, blind taste tests of brand name and brand X products
Week 7	Memory and tradition	How media, oral traditions, and writing produce cultural patterns over time	Oral storytelling, proverbs, folk tales, home photos, and alternative media
Week 8	The critic	Activity-based review and reflection; making conscious choices to agree or disagree with media-based messages	Performance for community (teachers, families)

Note. Presented for purposes of illustration as an 8-week session.

### Evaluation and Outcomes

Although the New Stories/New Cultures staff members rely strongly on qualitative data to assess the impact of the program, an objective has been to establish and attain measurable goals for student learning. The results follow from a paper-and-pencil questionnaire given to students at the close of the Fall 1999 session to assess the following domains:

- Self-perception of change in areas of learning and behavior related to program content
- Self-esteem
- Relationship between components of the program and greater self-esteem
- Preferences among the kinds of activities offered
- Enjoyment of the program
- Sense of overall learning in the program
- Endorsement of the program

### Self-Perception of Change in Areas Related to the New Stories/New Cultures Core Content

Students were asked to agree or disagree with 22 survey items to express their degree of comfort and skill in specific areas of learning and behavior related to the New Stories/New Cultures curriculum. A 5-point scale was used to indicate degree of agreement or disagreement, with higher scores indicating positive change. These items were then ranked from greatest to least degree of reported impact (see Table 2). Sixty-nine students (42 girls, 25 boys)

responded to the in-class survey. The areas where students reported the greatest positive change corresponded directly to New Stories/New Cultures core goals.

To reiterate the mission of New Stories/New Cultures, its core goals are to encourage children to experience themselves as producers of culture, not just as consumers, by teaching them to use *video equipment* and other media *creatively in team-based activities* and to be media literate (i.e., make critical choices about images and activities depicted in popular culture and *commercials*). Four of the five items

**Table 2**  
**New Stories/New Cultures Student Survey Items by Rank Order**

Rank	Mean Score Across All Sites	Question
1	4.46	I am more comfortable using a video camera
2	4.26	I am more interested in doing activities where I can be creative
3	4.06	I know more about how commercials try to get you to buy something
4	4.05	I am more comfortable looking at the camera
5	4.03	I am more comfortable working with other people as a team
6	3.96	I am more willing to give my opinions
7	3.80	I have better self-esteem
8	3.79	I know more about how TV shows are made
9	3.77	I am less quiet
10	3.68	I am more patient
11	3.67	I speak more confidently
12	3.67	I am more comfortable wearing a costume
13	3.61	I am more comfortable speaking in a voice that can be heard
14	3.58	I am less shy
15	3.56	I am less disruptive
16	3.36	I am more comfortable acting in front of people
17	3.35	I am more comfortable telling a story
18	3.32	I am more comfortable making things up to say or do in front of people
19	3.32	I appear more relaxed in front of the class
20	3.22	I am more comfortable working with people who are not already my friends
21	3.22	I am more comfortable performing in front of people
22	3.16	I am more comfortable making eye contact

<sup>2</sup>A 30-minute video documentary (Frank, 2001) presents the philosophy, organization, and delivery of the program, featuring work produced by students at two sites: one a parochial school and the other a public school. The documentary highlights the teaching approaches of Catherine Crowley, an occupational science doctoral student who is an experienced occupational therapist, and of Charley Scull, a doctoral student in visual anthropology, as they accommodate the curriculum to the contrasting behavioral styles of the students at the two schools.

for which students reported experiencing the most positive impact corresponded with the italicized key words in this mission statement.

Students reported the least amount of positive change on items less closely related to the New Stories/New Cultures program's core goals. Rather, these items highlight common issues of adolescence, particularly self-consciousness about appearance and peer group membership.

Overall, students reported positive changes (rather than negative changes or no changes) as a result of participating in the program. That is to say, even the items in which students reported the least degree of change are still ones that show change in a positive direction.

#### *Relationship Between Participation in the New Stories/New Cultures Program and Greater Self-Esteem*

A set of 10 items on the questionnaire was drawn from the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965). This scale, with its high reliability and validity, is one of the most widely used instruments to assess adolescent self-image (Robinson, Shaver, & Wrightsman, 1991). The self-esteem data were used to explore the correlation between the students' self-esteem and specific areas of learning and behavior in the New Stories/New Cultures program (see Table 3).

Although a baseline sample for comparison is lacking, students enrolled in New Stories/New Cultures tended to report positive self-esteem, with mean scores above the mid-point of 2 on a 4-point scale. Until both pretest and posttest data are available, however, we will not know the extent to which increased self-acceptance and self-esteem may actually be an outcome for students enrolled in New Stories/New Cultures.

A significant correlation was found, however, between scores on the items from the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale related to self-acceptance and seven items on the survey about self-perception of change. That is, an association was found between greater self-acceptance and higher levels of feeling comfortable when engaging in certain activities and situations that are part of the New Stories/New Cultures program. These activities and situations were guided practice in giving opinions, telling a story, making eye contact, speaking in a voice that can be heard, observing on video

**Table 3**  
**New Stories/New Cultures Student Self-Esteem Scores**

Item	<i>M</i> <sup>a</sup>
1. I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others	3.17
2. I feel that I have a number of good qualities	3.34
3. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure	1.93
4. I am able to do things as well as other people	3.19
5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of	1.99
6. I take a positive attitude toward myself	3.21
7. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself	3.13
8. I wish I could have more respect for myself	2.56
9. I certainly feel useless at times	2.30
10. At times I think I am no good at all	2.27

Note. *N* = 69.

<sup>a</sup>Four-point scale.

whether one appears nervous or relaxed when performing or speaking, working with people who are not already friends, and being spontaneous to make things up to say or do in front of others (see Table 4).

These data suggest that students enrolled in New Stories/New Cultures are getting opportunities to develop greater self-acceptance and self-esteem. The program's occupation-based philosophy further holds that such gains are most likely to happen if the relevant activities are experienced as engaging and enjoyable. The following data, which show which activities the students enjoyed most, support those expectations.

#### *Students' Preferences of Activities Offered*

Students were asked to indicate which among 14 activities associated with New Stories/New Cultures and their regular school work they liked best and liked least. Generally speaking, students preferred activities that were team-based versus solitary, required dynamic movement versus sedentary positioning, and emphasized imaginative performance versus conventional school skills.

More specifically, of all the activities, the overwhelming favorite was video production (movie making). The other top-ranking activities were acting, playing games (i.e., theater games), being on video, and making commercials. These, the most popular activities, happened to be ones that were significantly associated with greater self-acceptance and self-esteem, as previously described.

A further observation can be made. The activities students reported liking best (e.g., making movies, being on video, making commercials, watching self on video) are those in which they also reported experiencing the greatest positive change (e.g., I am more comfortable using a video camera; I know more about how commercials try to get you to buy something; I am more comfortable looking at the camera). This finding supports the underlying philosophy of occupational science and occupational therapy, which would predict that students will have the greatest gain in skills through the activities they find most engaging and enjoyable.

**Table 4**  
**New Stories/New Cultures Program Components Associated With Greater Self-Acceptance**

Survey Items Measuring Self-Perception of Change	Self-Acceptance Aspect of Items From Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale <sup>a</sup>		
	<i>n</i> <sup>b</sup>	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i> <sup>c</sup>
1. I am more willing to give my opinions	69	.260*	.031
6. I am more comfortable telling a story	69	.360**	.002
8. I am more comfortable making eye contact	67	.320**	.008
11. I am more comfortable speaking in a voice that can be heard	69	.316**	.008
12. I appear more relaxed in front of the class	69	.366**	.002
16. I am more comfortable working with people who are not already my friends	67	.272*	.026
18. I am more comfortable making things up to say or do in front of people	68	.277*	.022

<sup>a</sup>Higher = greater self-acceptance. <sup>b</sup>Number of valid student responses. <sup>c</sup>Two-tailed.

\*Correlation is significant at the .05 level (two-tailed). \*\*Correlation is significant at the .01 level (two-tailed).

### *Students' Enjoyment, Learning, and Endorsement of the Program*

Finally, in an overall evaluation of the program, students were highly satisfied with the New Stories/New Cultures program. In terms of enjoyment, 94% said that they liked the classes (6% enjoyed them some, 88% enjoyed them a lot). In terms of learning, 98% believed that they got something out of the program (5% learned a little, 20% learned some, 73% learned a lot).

When asked about endorsing the program, students believed that New Stories/New Cultures is worthwhile for other students to take; 91% would probably recommend it to a friend (24% might recommend it, 67% would definitely recommend it). Finally, students compared the program very favorably with other after-school programs. Ninety-five percent rated New Stories/New Cultures as equal to or better than other programs. Of these, 29% said that the program was about the same as others, and 66% said that it was better than most.

### **Conclusion**

New Stories/New Cultures is an innovative after-school program led by occupational scientists and occupational therapists that serves well children in the low-income urban neighborhood around a major American university. Drawing on the diverse resources of the university and the neighborhood, New Stories/New Cultures focuses on the importance of stories to actions that affect children, families, and the community. The program fosters critical thinking and media literacy. An outcomes survey suggests that placing students in teams that use video technology and other media for creative expression also provides an opportunity for them to build skills related to self-acceptance and self-esteem. This occupational approach to the well-being and development of children can help fulfill an important need for after-school programs, a need that is gaining increased national support and recognition.

We propose the concept of direct cultural intervention to describe the application of occupational science and occupational therapy principles in programs like New Stories/New Cultures. The founders of occupational therapy during the Progressive Era were an interdisciplinary cohort that included such diverse contributors as educators, nurses, craft workers, physicians, and social workers in settlement houses—all working together within a paradigm of occupation (Frank, 1992; Kielhofner & Burke, 1977; Quiroga, 1995). Like them, occupational therapists today may collaborate with anthropologists, creative dramatics instructors, educators, community health promoters, filmmakers, and others, using occupational theories and principles to affect the lives of working class children in the inner city. About a century after its founding, occupational therapy is now a well-established and mature profession. Its members have a unique history and a distinctive

set of concepts and skills that can enable them to initiate and lead after-school programs of the highest quality, sustainability, and credibility. ▲

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