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‘Shaking the Movers’
A Rights-Respecting Model for Youth Participation in the Planning of Public Environments

Virginia Caputo

Context
Shaking the Movers (STM) is a youth-led, youth-driven participation model that is unique in three ways: (1) with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (see Callout Box 1.1) at the core of its design, the STM model educates children and young people about their rights; (2) it offers a unique opportunity to exercise the right to engage in civil and political processes; and (3) the model activates Article 12 of the UNCRC by ensuring that children’s and young people’s views on matters that affect their lives will be listened to, heard, and acted upon by those who make decisions on their behalf. For design professionals, STM offers an inclusive, rights-respecting and accountable method for engaging young people in planning and designing public environments.

Key/Target Participants
Created in 2007 by the Landon Pearson Centre for the Study of Childhood and Children’s Rights (LPC) at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada, workshops using the STM model are held across Canada each year. Up to 40 young people between the ages of 8 and 17 years attend each workshop. Each workshop is ideally affiliated with a local partner organization or university that has a children’s rights-related program. With a university partner, senior students organize STM workshops as part of their coursework. An instructor guides students throughout the semester to develop rights-based activities (ice-breakers, art and music-based activities) and materials relevant to an STM theme. The students act as the STM workshop facilitators and note-takers and one student is hired to capture the ideas and priorities presented by the STM participants in a summary report. With a local partner organization, youth are recruited through their networks. The LPC circulates the summary reports to their Child Rights Academic Network (CRAN) whose members are children’s rights professionals in academe, government, policy, advocacy, and research. CRAN meets annually to discuss and respond to the youth reports; STM participants can join the meeting virtually.

Adult involvement in the STM workshops is limited to supportive and resource roles. They provide the infrastructure for the workshops including arranging accessibility and other accommodations, facilitator training, photography, catering, and hotel and travel arrangements if needed. A local adult organizer(s) is on site for the duration of the workshop but they do not enter the workshop space except for an initial welcome.
Funding

Funding for STM workshops comes from a combination of sources depending on the nature of the workshop. Local universities often provide ‘in kind’ support (meeting space, technology, supplies) and Canadian federal and provincial government departments connected to workshop themes (e.g., Ministries of Health, Environment, Justice, and Immigration) have offered financial support in the past. Operational budgets vary depending on the number of participants, amount of in-kind support, and travel costs. Budgets can range from $5,000–$25,000.

Model/Process

Each STM workshop focuses on an Article of the UNCRC or a related theme that can be linked with public space design. The model emphasizes a transparent process and inclusive design that is sensitive to risk and accountable to children. Participation is voluntary and respectful (Lansdown, 2014; see also Bishop & Corkery, 2018). The workshops follow the UNCRC’s guiding principles including best interests and non-discrimination in realizing children’s right to provision for optimal growth (health care, education, economic security, and play), to protection (from abuse, exploitation, and neglect) and to participate in decisions that affect their lives.

The first step in organizing an STM workshop is to identify one or two local young people who have organizational and facilitation experience to lead overall planning. They work with youth facilitators who are students in a class or recruited through an organization’s networks. There are usually 10–15 facilitators for 40 participants. The lead facilitators develop information sheets on the theme along with a set of preliminary questions that can be used for discussion at the workshop. These info sheets are used at facilitator planning meetings throughout the semester; facilitators meet several times (either in person or virtually) in the months leading up to the STM workshop as well as the day before the workshop begins.

STM workshops can be designed as 1-day or 2-day events. In either format, the morning begins with a territorial acknowledgment and welcome by an Indigenous elder to show respect and recognize the traditional land upon which the workshop is taking place. The lead youth facilitators introduce and review the UNCRC and provide an overview of the workshop format. This introduction is followed by a discussion of ‘safe space.’ Workshop participants and facilitators work collaboratively to decide on parameters for ensuring a safe and inclusive space that is respectful and cognizant of everyone’s rights. Participants are then assembled into smaller groups that are each assigned two youth facilitators and a note-taker. Each smaller group undertakes a set of activities designed to explore a facet of the broader workshop theme (see Figures 20.1 and 20.2).

Following these small group discussions, a second set of activities focuses on how to put ideas into practice. For example, the 2018 STM participants discussed climate change and how to enact social change either at an individual or collective level. An example of a design-based action topic might focus on children’s rights to play in outdoor public spaces or young people’s experiences of their city more broadly. Activities could explore how and when young people use outdoor spaces, what public space means to them, what enables and restricts their use of particular spaces, how young people perceive the relational and gendered aspects of these spaces, and what challenges they may have encountered with particular spaces. Participants discuss issues with peers and make recommendations with design professionals in mind. One feature that differentiates these interactions from other youth engagement models and youth/adult collaborations is that young people lead discussions and decide on priority issues rather than being directed by adults.

A third set of activities enables young people to reflect on their participation in the STM workshop by considering the personal significance of a rights-respecting approach and identifying take-away messages. While the content does not differ between the 1- and 2-day workshops, both formats end with a closing activity that enables participants to mark the time they have spent...
Figure 20.1  STM 2015 ‘Birds Symbolize Freedom’: an art project to explore the sexual exploitation of children.

Source: Artwork facilitated by Kat Thorsen.

Figure 20.2  STM 2012 Children and young people address their right to mental and physical health.

Source: Photo Credit: Sherry Prenevost.
together. They can be asked in advance to bring an item that reflects who they are for a ‘show and tell’ activity or to bring a small item for a ‘gift exchange’ with other participants. In previous workshops, participants brought items such as a small soccer ball, a bundle of sage, a Metis sash, a hockey jersey, a family photo, a teddy bear, a lifeguard whistle, and a necklace from a Mayan grandmother. At the end of the STM workshop, facilitators gather written feedback from participants and share their own reflections of the workshop.

**Shaking the Movers and the Right to Play**

In 2013, the STM workshops focused on the right to play, leisure, and artistic expression (UNCRC Article 31).\(^4\) Two key issues emerged: (1) adults as allies, and (2) access and accessibility. When discussing which factors interfered with their right to play, young people identified barriers such as poverty, geographic isolation, or dysfunction within their families. However, it was their strong sense that their right to play would be enhanced if they had adult allies who supported their self-advocacy efforts to overcome these barriers that was especially significant. For designing and planning public environments, youth–adult alliances that are structured using a rights-respecting approach can enable children and young people to speak authentically and offer information to design professionals that might not otherwise be discoverable. For instance, the STM 2013 participants shared their experiences of play that were connected to issues of violence, bullying, and marginalization (see Figure 20.3). With regard to access and accessibility, they felt strongly that the right to play was for all children and young people. They recounted stories of fear of particular spaces, lack of resources, motivation, time constraints, and drugs and alcohol. They also noted that, at times, what impeded their ability to access play opportunities was adult fears of risk in outdoor environments and parental control. Understanding and addressing some of these concerns can enhance design processes and position young people as allies with professionals in the design process.

**Key Learnings**

The 2013 STM workshops offered insights into how to align play and design with the lived experiences and values articulated by young people as rights holders. The model usefully unpacked key design ideas and concepts such as what makes public spaces meaningful and valuable, and what facilitates and impedes young people’s use of public spaces.
Another key learning arising from implementing the STM model over the past 11 years is how important it is to hear, value, and respond to what children and young people have to say when making decisions on their behalf. For design professionals, the STM model offers a way to enhance design decision making because young people lead the ‘movers’ (design professionals) in making youth-informed, meaningful decisions that are reflective of their rights from the outset of the design process.

Notes
1 The Landon Pearson Centre has built the infrastructure for STM workshops with a central coordinator who assists with recruitment and coordination. However, each workshop is locally organized. To read STM reports, visit: www.carleton.ca/landonpearsoncentre/shakingthemovers.
2 For more on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, see www.unicef.org/crc/index_30177.html.
3 The ‘right to play’ STM 2013 workshop facilitators worked with participants to develop a set of questions: (1) Why is the right to play important? (2) What are barriers to the right to play? (3) Who has the right to play? (4) What can you do to advocate in your community?
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References