Children and Young People’s Participation in Disaster Risk Reduction

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Preface

Cultures of Disaster Resilience Among Children and Young People (CUIDAR) was, and to some extent remains, an alliance of young people, researchers, teachers, firefighters, civil protection workers, schools, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), mayors and local and regional government officials. Funded by the European Commission, we consulted and co-researched with a total of 552 children and young people from Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain and the UK, with the ultimate aim of creating a child-centred disaster risk management framework for Europe and beyond.

Our first act as a team of would-be collaborators was to devise a project name or acronym: CUIDAR means to *take care* in Spanish, Catalan and Portuguese, and is picked out in our name like this: **CU**ltures of **Dis**aster **R**esilience among children and young people (with a bit of licence for the out-of-place letter ‘i’). When thinking up the acronym, we came to realise how words can matter. Etymologically, *cuidar* comes, perhaps surprisingly, from the Latin *cogitare*, which means reflection, deliberation, act of thinking, pay attention to. The acronym perfectly encapsulates our aim to *care about* what usually goes unnoticed in disaster management, to pay attention to those groups frequently neglected or marginalised in these situations, and to articulate, connect and signify other lived worlds that matter.

So working with the *cuidar*/take care concept, the next activity was to ask groups of children and young people if they would like to be involved, starting in Portugal with the design of a logo to express ‘disaster’. Children aged 10–12 in Loures, Sintra and Cascais made many lively drawings in workshops where they also talked about emergencies, risk and disaster, and from that very early stage, we chose (with great difficulty) four, out of the many images given to us, to have designed into our CUIDAR logo, which you can see on the front and back covers of this book (see Figures 0.1a and 0.1b).

As a collaboration between the major charity Save the Children, academic institutions, schools, youth centres and others, CUIDAR has been a large and diverse project. Researchers and practitioners among us include human geographers, sociologists, social psychologists, special educators, emergency planners, firefighters, architects and filmmakers. We came together with the aim of making an intervention in what we observed to be a strong cultural setting (disaster risk management) where only adults were held to have expertise, a setting where formal, explicit technical knowledge seemed to take precedence over everyday
Figure 0.1a: Drawings produced by Ricardo (11 years old, Sintra, Portugal)

Figure 0.1b: Drawings produced by Diana (10 years old, Loures, Portugal) in an early workshop
experience. We hope that this book will be read in that spirit – as an intervention to develop different ways of thinking about the value of local, lived experience, about the civic roles of children and how these can be recognised within the complex field of disaster risk management. We only hope we can do justice here to the 552 children and young people and the many adult practitioners and decision-makers who took part.

Note

1 Interest in our approach then spread to Fukushima, Japan, where some of our methods have been used in public health and education (see Chapter 5).