

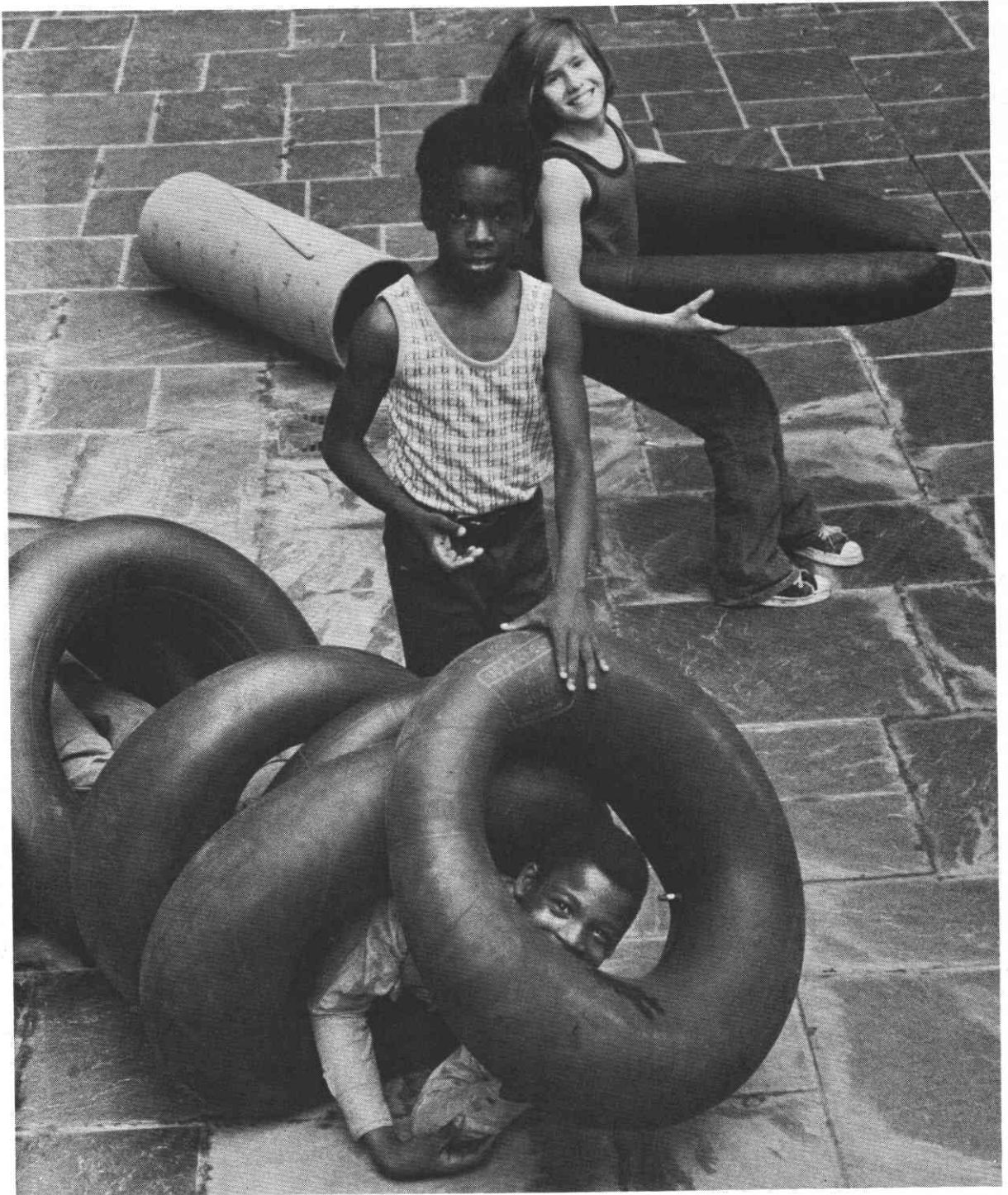


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"Is it likely that children in the United States know more about nature in distant lands than they do about the natural features in their own cities, neighborhoods, and backyards" - Florence C. Ladd

Comments on "Place and Human Development" by Paul Shepard and Yi-Fu Tuan's "Experience and Appreciation"

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PAUL SHEPARD presents a dazzling array of profound ideas about the nature of the relationship between early developmental stages and places experienced in a variety of cultures. Shepard's analysis is related to the schema presented in Spivack's (1973) paper, in which he identifies some basic requirements of the human species and the environmental conditions necessary to meet those requirements. Spivack lists human requirements such as eating, mating, and sleeping, along with the essential environmental forms for the activities. These analyses by Shepard and Spivack serve to remind us that Erikson's (1968) stages in the life cycle and the conflicts and crises associated with each stage have not been considered in an environmental context. A merger of these three compatible schemes might include the following:

1. The stages and associated age ranges of the human life cycle.
2. Relevant social and emotional developmental tasks.
3. The natural environments and the built environments needed at each stage to support the performance of those tasks.

Such a scheme for the individual life cycle and for the family life cycle might aid policy makers, planners, and designers in creating physical settings that would serve families and individuals well throughout the life cycle. Shepard attempts to make some essential connections between stages, ages, and environmental requirements in childhood and adolescence.

Tuan, in his beautiful prose and well-chosen poetry, tells his adult readers that we cannot return to childhood, alas. He characterizes the difference between the child's and the adult's expectations, experience, and appreciation; the difference between a child's point of view and an

adult point of view. He implies that we ought not to reach into our childhood experiences in nature and expect to come forth with solutions that fit precisely the requirements of today's children or the children of the future. Our growing up has changed our perspectives on those places and experiences and our interpretation of them. Time and technology have changed our childhood landscapes, too. This is not to say that personal recollections of the meaning of nature in childhood are invalid. Rather, it is to point out that we must learn from children in many cultures and environmental contexts through careful observation and artful questions about where they experience nature and what natural places and experiences mean to them.

Both Shepard and Tuan have reaffirmed the following assumptions, which most of us undoubtedly share:

1. Early environmental experiences in both natural and built environments are of profound significance in determining future environmental requirements and environmental satisfactions.
2. Significant developmental tasks require experience in natural and built environments, and *the quality of environments influences the level at which the tasks can be carried out.*
3. Environmental requirements are relative. They depend on an individual's culture, personal history, and perceptions of the range of environments available.

Shepard and Tuan have implied some very interesting questions for debate and research. For example, is there an optimal balance of natural and built environmental elements? If there is, what is the optimal ratio in early childhood, late childhood, and adolescence? What types of natural settings, are most suitable at each age

level? Which natural settings should be recreated to meet the requirements of a more environmentally aware and more numerous young urban generation? Where are the existing "urban wilds" and pockets of nature that can be developed further? Might they give kids opportunities for exploration and places to play?

Shepard and Tuan raise the question of the meaning of play. What is play? What is play to the city and the city to play? We are led to consider new forms for playgrounds, indeed to think of the city as a playground—the city with its parks, rivers and streams, playing fields, and streets. We are reminded that anonymity, high density, antisocial incidents, and fear have caused parents to withdraw their children from city streets. What can be done to expand the opportunities for experiences in nature for children on their own streets and in their own neighborhoods?

It is likely that children in the United States know more about nature in distant lands than they do about the natural features in their own cities, neighborhoods, and backyards. Television has made vivid and familiar the forests, gazing land, and wildlife of faraway places. "Wild Kingdom" warns us that nature is threatened in East Africa. We should be reminded that in East Harlem, East Orange, and East St. Louis, the few remnants of nature are in grave danger, too. Conservation should begin at home.

Conferees came to Washington with nature, children, and U.S. cities in mind. They came with different agendas, different objectives. Some were interested primarily in environmental education, which should be defined more broadly. It is clear that environmental education must be extended to politicians, planners,

developers, and mortgage bankers—education about the natural environmental requirements of children, especially, and of adults as well, to engage them in the process of protecting and developing natural life in cities. Those who presently control the future of urban environments and urban life should become advocates for urban children and their environmental interests.

Some conferees came with an interest in understanding environmental issues related to urban life and with research questions or proposals in mind. Some came with policy questions that pertain to nature in urban environments. Those conferees would like to know about opportunities for collaboration generated by the U.S. Forest Service, the Department of Agriculture, EPA, and HUD. What policy statements might be expected from these agencies about improving the quality and availability of natural environments in cities?

Some conferees came with action programs in mind. There must be more opportunities for city kids to participate in successful encounters with nature, such as those provided by the Youth Conservation Corps, Outward Bound, Scouting, the AMC, the Sierra Club, and many summer camps. It is not enough to bring more of nature into the city; we must also lead more city kids into nature and what remains of our North American wilderness.

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