

every classroom"? Isn't everything that's ever been written now available on CD-ROM? Aren't we all on our way to an E-mail address? Perhaps.

But the acquisition of information and the complex skills required to manipulate it successfully — which is, if not *the* national pastime, at least one of those sports which is very big business in America — is not at all the same as genuine (that is, developmental) learning. Indeed, in contemporary society the activity of learning has been systematically overtaken and replaced by the behavior of accumulating and manipulating information — so much so that we have come to think that knowing (having) things, and the skill of using what we already know to generate more and more things, are the whole point, and proof, of learning.

That is, learning is largely defined in terms of knowing — the means-to-an-end accumulation of quantifiable information and skills that can easily be tested, measured, and exchanged for something of societal value: a grade, a high school diploma or a college degree, a professional certification, a driver's license. Lev Vygotsky contrasted this societal tool-for-result, instrumentalist behavior of acquiring information and skills with what he called "the only learning worthy of the name": learning that leads development, a tool-*and*-result historical creative activity which only human beings do.

The point is not that the acquisition of information, and the skills to manipulate it, are "bad." Like the societal behavior that results in having money, with which it is closely connected, having such knowledge and know-how can be quite useful. As you go about your daily life, it's convenient to have acquired all sorts of information (hot water comes from the left-hand tap; an eight-ounce glass won't hold a pint of orange juice; when the big hand is on the 3 and the little hand is on

TWO KINDS OF LEARNING

To notice that neither philosophizing nor performing are national pastimes is likely to strike most people as an unremarkable observation. Now that I've called your attention to this fact of societal life, you may be thinking: *Yes, and so what?*

After all, as I pointed out in Section I, in our culture philosophizing is largely identified with that obscure, not very popular, dead or near-dead academic subject called Philosophy. Abstract, irrelevant and useless, Philosophy is generally regarded as the exclusive possession of professional philosophers, not an ordinary life activity. Not surprisingly, given what Philosophy is, few people are able — or inclined — to philosophize. The same is true of performing; although considerably more popular, it too is carried out in our culture mostly by professionals — in this case, professional actors.

But to say that *learning* is similarly unpopular and exclusive may seem to be, on the face of it, absurd. Aren't we living in the Age of Information? Doesn't the Information Superhighway originate here? Hasn't the American Dream been transformed from "a chicken in every pot" to "a computer in

the 8, it's time to leave for work; how much change you need for the bus; what the symbols "Third Avenue" on a street sign signify) and skills (ironing a silk shirt; programming the VCR; balancing your checkbook; reading a newspaper to find out how your team is doing in the playoffs or how the stock market is behaving)...and that's even before you arrive at your job, where you need to have a million other facts as well as skills at your command. So yes — having information and skills, like having money, makes good societal sense.

What *is* problematic, in my opinion, is not the acquisition of information and skills, but identifying that tool-for-result, necessary societal behavior with the equally necessary tool-and-result historical performatory activity of learning that leads development. For acquiring information and skills, while it contributes to the stability and continuity of everyday life, is by virtue of that very fact both limited and limiting; it has little to do with development. As we acquire more information and skills, we don't thereby become someone new; we simply assimilate these new possessions into the societal categories and structures of knowing that are already there. In doing so we may enhance ourselves in our societal location, but not in our historical one. The acquisition of information and skills doesn't necessarily lead to qualitative transformation, or growth. It is an alternative to, not a substitute for, learning that leads development.

Todd and his wife Barbara, for example, both in their early thirties, are very accomplished "knowers." A specialist in international business law, Todd works in the overseas investment department of a major bank; Barbara is the vice president of an executive search firm. They're so good at (overidentified with) knowing that they have no idea how to learn developmentally, which requires doing what you don't know how to do.

Picture this scene. Todd and Barbara, who've been married for less than a year, are in bed together. In the last several months they've had sexual intercourse once or twice; most times Todd has been unable to have an erection. Tonight is another one of those nights.

The evening started out alright: Barbara picked Todd up after work, they got something to eat and then went to a movie they'd both been wanting to see. But Todd couldn't help worrying about what would happen later — now it *is* happening, again. *Impotent!* The word flashes through his mind, over and over, like a blinking neon sign. Barbara tries to arouse him, but after a while Todd tells her to stop. "It's not happening," he says apologetically. "I think I'm just wiped." He kisses her on the forehead and turns away. "How about going to sleep?" The last thing he wants to do is to talk about "the problem" with her.

But Barbara wants to talk. She's sure there must be some explanation — and a solution. The other night she had asked him if he was seeing someone else. No! Todd had told her angrily. Was he having second thoughts about the marriage? No! he'd said again, hoping she'd leave him alone. Tonight she's urging him to see a doctor, someone who specializes in "these things." Todd tells her she's being ridiculous — he just had a complete physical exam. Still, he wonders if maybe there might be something wrong with him physically. What else could it be? The truth is that Todd doesn't know what's going on, or why.

Nor does he know what Barbara means when she says that they could have sex "another way," but he hasn't told her that he doesn't know and has no intention of doing so. He *can't* ask her. He can't ask anyone. Besides, what is there to know? He's a grown man, he's had other relationships. Of

course he knows! As Todd sees it, there *is* no "other way." There's what you do beforehand ("foreplay" in his high school health and hygiene textbook; the kids called it "fooling around"). But that's not the same thing as sex...

Meanwhile, Barbara has begun to talk about Todd's mother, who killed herself when Todd was six years old. Barbara's analysis: Todd is taking out his anger at his mother on her. Todd interrupts her. "It's three in the morning. I'm sorry you're disappointed. We can talk about it another time if you want to. But I've got to get some sleep now."

Hurt and resentful, Barbara gets out of bed and storms into the living room, where Todd can hear her crying. He's disgusted with himself, furious with Barbara, and unbearably lonely. Like many people in our culture who feel compelled to play "the knowing game" in their bedrooms, Todd sees himself as a loser.

Since information/skill-getting is a matter of adding more of the same to what we already have, and since knowing often brings with it substantial societal rewards, you might expect that it would be easy to do. Not at all. For in the almost complete absence of developmental learning, many people in our culture find acquiring new information and skills a terribly painful experience; tedious, coercive, and humiliating. Moreover, it's often unsuccessful. Remember what it was like to "learn" geometry in school? French? History?

The awful mix of boredom and anxiety which so many people associate with school (and with after-school lessons that were no less agonizing for being "extracurricular") is characteristic of tool-for-result learning, even for adults who have made a self-conscious decision to acquire certain socially valued information and skills. Whether you're a first-

year law student at a prestigious university, a woman whose husband is teaching you to drive, an accountant studying to become certified, or a father-to-be enrolled in a natural child-birth course, you are likely to experience some form of the emotional dis-ease which often accompanies learning that is overdetermined by the dominant acquisitional learning model.

This is the model that prevails in our public schools, largely defining what learning is in our culture. Some children manage to acquire the information and skills they're required to know (at least for long enough to pass a test) but many, many never do.

Picture this scene. Eight-year-old Keith, a third grader, is listening to his teacher as she reviews what the class is supposed to know about multiplication. She has explained it all before, but Keith still doesn't quite know what the multiplication table is (although he is aware that he is supposed to know). Obediently, he writes his name on the test paper and looks at the first problem: *Six children are coming to Gloria's birthday party. If each child gets three brownies, how many should Gloria's granpa bake?* Keith thinks: "Okay. That makes seven kids. Seven times one is seven, seven times two is 14, seven times three is..." Now what? He can't remember what Mrs. Davis told him yesterday. He has no idea how to go about this thing. Nor, for that matter (and not surprisingly), does he have much interest in doing so. He's about to glance over at Petey's desk for a clue, but Mrs. Davis is looking his way; the last thing he needs is for her to accuse him of cheating. Keith feels stupid, frustrated, ashamed, and angry. Wishing he could somehow disappear, he imagines himself playing basketball with his 14-year-old cousin Tony. For a moment, Keith is pleasantly caught up in remembering what Tony, an up-and-coming forward on his junior high school team, said last

Saturday afternoon when he taught Keith how to dribble the ball: "Hey, Mr. K! You're catching up to me!" Suddenly, Mrs. Davis is scolding Keith for daydreaming again; no doubt a conference with his parents is on the agenda.

The adults in his life are convinced there's something wrong with Keith. The teacher and the school psychologist use terms like "attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder" and "learning disabled" to explain what the problem is. Keith's parents are disturbed by the suggestion that he be put on medication, but they don't know what else to do. Keith isn't a "bad" child. His I.Q. tests show he's "normal." So why won't he *learn*? How will he get through school? How will he get into college? And without a college degree, what kind of future can he hope to have?

That Keith is merely an inexperienced mathematician (in the way that very young children are inexperienced speakers) who is quite capable of developing as a mathematician (in the way that young children develop as speakers) has simply never occurred to anyone. The prevailing information/skill-based approach to teaching children requires that they be related to almost exclusively as having a relatively fixed identity (a child is either a good knower or a bad knower), so there's little room in it for relating to them as who they can become. And that's true regardless of *what* label is applied to them, whether it's "gifted," "developmentally delayed," "learning disabled," or anything else. So school, ironically, is not a place where children are likely to develop as learners. (It's a good thing children don't learn to speak in school, some people have said — otherwise they might never learn how!)

Some of us come out of school knowing more, some less. The best knowers, those who have acquired the most information and who can show what they know to the teacher on a

test or in a report, earn the top grades. Eventually, they will get into the most prestigious colleges, from which they will someday graduate to the highest-paying jobs. Few people in our culture, whether they've been identified as good or bad at knowing, know how to do learning that leads development — the learning that very young children do long before they ever get to school and even before they have any idea that there are such things as learning and knowing.

The dominant model of learning, which valorizes knowing/showing that you have information and skills at the expense of learning that leads development, doesn't only dominate officially designated educational settings. At the office or the cocktail party, in the bedroom or the bowling alley, the prizes also go to those who have — or appear to have — all the answers; asking for help is out of the question. Sadly, the anxiety and humiliation that Keith experiences in the classroom do not get left behind there; for many adults, like Todd and Barbara, the emotional pain produced by having to know (and knowing to have) is woven into the fabric of everyday life.

Baby talk

The acquisition of information and skills is supposed to go on inside the head of the individual knower. This is what makes "cheating" reprehensible in traditional educational settings. This is how it is that once children begin to internalize the dominant model (it happens quite early), they become passionately concerned to do things by themselves and for themselves — which in our culture is valued very highly indeed.

This is why so many adults are exceedingly reluctant to ask other people for help in circumstances when doing it on their own — whether the "it" is choosing a new suit, dealing

with a migraine headache, giving a dinner party, looking for a job, or starting a love affair — is precisely what intensifies the difficulty, pain, anxiety, or anguish they experience. People who conduct their lives in this way may “live and learn” in the sense that they have more information or skills than they did before, but the process through which they come to know what they know is non-developmental — to a large extent by virtue of being so thoroughly individuated.

By contrast, learning that leads development is profoundly social. It takes place in what Vygotsky called a *zone of proximal development* (“zpd” for short). Although it may sound like a place (an end zone, a tropical zone, a no-parking zone), the zpd is actually a particular kind of complex social activity that human beings (and, so far as we know, only human beings) do/create together: building the zpd. They do this not as a means to an end, which is how we do all sorts of other things — putting up a tent at a campsite, going to work, getting a haircut, bringing the cat to the vet, reading the instructions that came with the new vacuum cleaner, making reservations at a restaurant, studying a driver’s manual, following a recipe, taking vitamins. Unlike such tool-for-result societal behavior, the historical activity of building the zpd is a tool *and* a result; the doing of it is both the condition for and the purpose of continuing to do it. In other words, what matters in the zpd is the process of production itself rather than what might or might not be produced by it (a conversation, an orgasm, laughter, a trophy, a paycheck, or anything else).

Another characteristic feature of the zpd is that the people who participate in building it are at various levels of development, ability, or experience. To use Vygotskian language, the zpd is a joint activity in which people who are more experienced support those who are less experienced to do what they

don’t know how to do. In the zpd, where learning is social, “cheating” — or, more accurately, “completing” — is what it’s all about.

The classic example of such a joint activity is the zpd of early childhood in which babies learn to speak by participating with more experienced speakers in an “ensemble performance” of speaking.

Meet Jennie, who at the age of 10 months hasn’t been around very long and is therefore inexperienced in speaking — as she is in just about everything else. Right now she’s sitting in her high chair with nothing on the tray in front of her but some crumbs from the cookie she’s just eaten. “Ku...Ku,” says Jennie. She does so (as far as anyone can tell) not knowing precisely what she means by it, that she means anything at all by it, or even what meaning means. Jennie doesn’t know much at all. She’s simply making noises, like the grownups do. (The grownups, of course, see themselves as doing something quite different from simply making noises.)

Mommy, a more experienced speaker (just as Keith’s cousin Tony is a more experienced basketball player) plays a “language game” with her: “Cookie? You want another cookie, Jen?”

Together, these two human beings — one a speaker with 27 years of experience, the other brand new to the world — are engaged in the joint activity of speaking. Jennie is performing speaking by imitating Mommy, thereby “going beyond” what she could possibly do “on her own.” And Mommy, as Vygotsky put it, is relating to Jennie as being “a head taller than she is” by having a conversation with her child before Jennie is capable of saying something like: “I want another cookie. Please stop washing those dishes for just a minute and give me one — and if it’s not too much trouble, could you

make it chocolate chip this time?" That is, the experienced speaker is *completing* ("cheating") for the inexperienced speaker by accepting whatever Jennie does and taking it further. It is by participating in this social process with Mommy and others that Jennie is learning, *in advance of her development*, to speak. If she were only allowed to do what she already knows how to do, if Mommy and other people refused to talk to her until she got it right, it is unlikely that Jennie would ever learn to speak at all.

Now meet Justin, two years old. At a family gathering, Justin's Daddy asks the little boy to say his ABC's for everyone. Justin responds with a rousing rendition of the alphabet song, starting off with a thumping "A, B, C..." He stops for a moment, unsure of what to do next. "D, E..." Daddy sings in a soft voice. Justin joins him, finishing in a triumphant burst of "YXWZ!" Grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins all laugh and clap appreciatively.

And here's three-year-old Bobby, running into the living room to show his big sister his latest work of art — a sheet of paper covered with orange, green and purple scribbles. When Bobby tells her that it's a picture of her, 11-year-old Lauren is delighted. "Thank you!" she exclaims, giving the little artist a hug. "It's beautiful! And you even gave me a hat to match my roller blades, didn't you? I'm going to hang this up on my wall right now!"

What matters in each of these scenes is the *activity* — speaking, saying the alphabet, drawing — and not whether Jennie, Justin and Bobby are doing it the right way. They aren't corrected, criticized or punished when they get something "wrong" — Mommy doesn't tell Jennie she left out a verb when she asked for a cookie; Daddy doesn't insist that Justin recite the alphabet five times because he forgot what

comes after "c" and jumbled the last few letters; Lauren doesn't take away Bobby's crayons because the picture he drew doesn't look like it's supposed to. Jennie, Justin and Bobby aren't required to know the rules of grammar or perspective before they're allowed to speak or draw. No...Mommy, Daddy and Lauren are doing what adults and older children often do with very young children — supporting them to do what they don't know how to do, and building on (completing) whatever they do. This is the remarkable social environment/activity in which human beings learn to talk, to walk, to dress, and to do all sorts of other things that make it possible for us to participate competently and knowledgeably in societal life. In other words, non-adaptive historical performatory activity — doing things that we don't know how to do, things that we couldn't possibly know how to do — is, ironically, what we have to do (in the first place) in order to become adapted to society.

The greater irony, the tragic irony, is that once the socially necessary task of adaptation is accomplished, the developmental process tends to get more and more closed down. That is, the historical performatory activity of learning leading to development which makes societal adaptation possible is abandoned, making further growth impossible; the family, the school, and the other institutions "freeze" us in our societal places — our new-found identities — so that we're unable to move or to change in ways that are coherent with how the world is changing.

Identity (as in "fixed identity") is especially problematic at the present moment, when the world is changing with such extreme rapidity. Identity — the adaptation to how things are right now — becomes a form of maladaptation when it is divorced from development, given the abruptness with which

things are constantly becoming very different from how they were five years ago, last year, yesterday. This is how it happens that these days, children in our culture very often know more about our world than grownups do — which can be a source of tremendous conflict between children and their parents and teachers, grownups whose identity is often centered on the societal illusion that they are the ones who know best.

One of the things that children know which grownups don't — or don't want to acknowledge — is that much of the information and many of the skills which their parents and teachers have acquired are outmoded or irrelevant. (Think of all the things you were required to know when you were a youngster, such as the "facts" of world geography and "good penmanship," which have gone the way of the dodo bird.) So children, not surprisingly, are less than eager to have them. Consequently, it's very difficult for these grownups who are overdetermined by the role of knower and the rules of knowing to teach children what they know that *is* of value. And it's virtually impossible for such grownups to learn from children; their identity as knowers doesn't allow them to do so.

Grownups (and older children) can learn as babies do

Todd came into social therapy with me soon after Barbara left him. In the first session we did together, he told me that he didn't "believe in" therapy. He was there, he said, because a friend whose opinion he respected had urged him to come and — since he knew he was "in pretty bad shape" — he had decided to see if I had any answers for him. "I feel like a jerk a million times over," he told me. "I couldn't get it up and I didn't know what to do about it. Then my wife left me...I can't seem to handle that, either."

A few months ago Todd joined a social therapy group. He

finds himself in a zone of proximal emotional development where he is supported to go beyond himself: a man virtually imprisoned in his identity as a Man Who Knows What He's Doing. In the social therapy group, Todd participates with other people in a creative activity to which knowing is irrelevant. Not having to know, he is free to imitate the members of the group who are emotionally more experienced and skilled than he is and to be completed by them. He isn't required to know how to do what they are all doing together before he can participate. And neither he nor anyone else is supposed to come up with an explanation or an analysis of what his "problem" is if he doesn't do it the right way. Like the other members of the group, he simply does what he can do and the group (including Todd) makes something with whatever that is.

In the bedroom, an almost exclusively societal zone where the preservation of identity/dignity/secrets requires people to behave according to the rules and roles that they came in with, Todd is compelled to do only what he already knows how to do: to cover up his humiliation and his pain with anger. Here in the historical "zped" Todd can perform as who he isn't; in doing so he is learning to be giving. (Todd recently suggested to Barbara that she come into social therapy — "no strings attached." She told him that she wasn't interested; she already knows, she said, what there is to know about being giving.)

Now watch Keith and his friends on the basketball court, where they are participating in a zpd that includes Keith's cousin Tony. Keith and the younger boys study every move that Tony makes; they notice how he stands, where his arms are when he dribbles the ball, the placement of each finger. They imitate him as closely as they can. At eight, most of them are considerably less mature than 14-year-old Tony is; their hands are smaller than his; they don't have the same muscular

strength or eye-hand coordination. And they're all a lot less experienced at playing basketball. But Tony relates to them as basketball players, which is what makes it possible for them to learn in advance of their development.

Keith *wants* to be as good as Tony. He practices for hours, days, months on end; he rarely feels discouraged; he takes everything that Tony tells him about his game with utmost seriousness. "Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder?" On the basketball court, Keith is capable of intense concentration for extended periods of time. "Learning disabled?" Here in the "zpbd" ("b" is for basketball), where learning leads development, Keith is a very good learner indeed.

In school, where learning is overidentified with and overdetermined by the acquisition of information and skills, Keith (like millions of other youngsters) just doesn't get it. The school environment becomes increasingly coercive — kids are bribed, bullied, threatened, and intimidated into acquiring information and skills — but they don't learn how to learn; they don't learn developmentally.

It's in this context of institutionalized failure and coercion that computers have come to be viewed as a solution to the crisis in public education. The neo-Vygotskian psychologist Michael Cole and his colleagues at the Laboratory for Comparative Human Cognition at the University of California in San Diego, for example, are in the forefront of a movement among progressive educators to place computers in public school classrooms throughout the country; they argue that computers can help children — especially those labeled "learning disabled" — to realize their potential to learn.

The implication, of course, is that computers are better at doing this than teachers are. Tragically, that's probably true. There could be no more telling critique, in my view, of the

anti-developmental, and consequently anti-human and inhumane, environment which prevails in all too many of our schools than the fact that *in such an environment* machines are indeed superior to human beings at helping kids to acquire information and skills; machines, for example, typically do not blame, coerce, ridicule, or punish.

I greatly appreciate the computer because this extraordinary human invention is so useful for the information/skill-getting enterprise. It's not simply that computers give us access to much more information, much more quickly, than most of us are capable of getting on our own without them. Of much greater significance, in my opinion, is the fact that computers are highly effective as instructors in the dominant societal paradigm, or model, of information/skill acquisition. Children taught by computers, for example, don't merely acquire information; they internalize the method of means-to-an-end, tool-for-result learning required to be a good knower. In fact, I think there is strong evidence to support the argument made by a growing number of educators during the last 25 years that children — particularly the ever-growing numbers of them who fail to learn from teachers in traditional classroom settings — are best taught this sort of learning by computers.

Unlike those people who would like to rid the world of these marvelous machines because they disapprove of how they are sometimes used, I believe very strongly that everyone should have equal access to computer technology. In my view, there's no more reason to throw out computers on the grounds that they can be misused than there is to stop giving people antibiotics because we believe that the institution of Medicine is organized in such a way so that drugs are sometimes misused.

Wonderful as computers are, however, they can *only*

enhance our ability to acquire information and skills; they don't enable us to do the kind of learning that leads development. Which is not to say that, after all, there really is something wrong with computers. These machines simply are what they are; they're neither more (better) nor less (worse) than that.

The stopping of development: An unnatural disaster

It's at about the time they enter school that most people in our culture stop being supported to do what they don't know how to do. The zpd of early childhood, the historical "theatre" where human beings perform as who we aren't and in doing so continuously create ourselves, is dismantled. It is replaced by that set of societal mirrors I talked about earlier, in which we can only see who we already are: "difficult," "bright," "shy," "stubborn," "slow," "cooperative." According to the accepted wisdom, this array of cognitive and personality characteristics — our developed "identity" — supposedly stays with us all of our lives and largely determines what we're able to learn, know, and do.

There are all sorts of pseudo-scientific explanations for the fact that in our culture many, perhaps most, children stop developing soon after they enter school. Indeed, in my opinion what it *means* to grow up in our society is to stop developing. The playfulness and risk-taking — the babbling and bum-bling — of creative imitation that characterize the very young child's performance in the zpd are considered inappropriate in older children and adolescents; when adults engage in such unknowing activities, it is frequently taken as a sign of immaturity, emotional illness, or mental retardation.

According to traditional Psychology, that human development should grind to a halt is "normal." I call it a disaster. It is not, in my opinion, a natural disaster, but a human-made one

which is terribly damaging to all of us as individuals, as Americans, and as members of the human species.

At home as well as in school, the learning that leads development characteristic of the zpd is all too soon shunted aside in favor of the individuated, behavioristic model of acquiring (and displaying) information and skills called "knowing." By the time Jennie is five, Mommy will tell her to stop being "silly" when the little girl playfully makes up her own words for things. In the first grade, Justin will be reprimanded for copying a word from another child's spelling test. At seven, Bobby will be expected to draw "real" pictures. In a variety of situations, parents and teachers will say to them: "You know better." "Act your age." "You're not a baby any more." "That's only for big boys." "No, you're not old enough." "Don't touch that...you don't know how to use it."

Despite the fact that as very little children they learned all kinds of things by performing what they didn't know how to do, they will soon discover that now what matters most is knowing, and showing that they know, how to do things the right way. In school they will be tested regularly to see whether they know what children of their age ought to know — that is, whether they are at their grade level, above or below it — and they will be diagnosed and treated accordingly.

Throughout their school years, Jennie, Justin and Bobby will be expected to acquire more and more information and skills. But none of what they will get to know is supposed to lead to any qualitative transformation of who they are; indeed, such acquisitional societal learning behavior is completely divorced from the historical activity of development.

Which is why being in school is, for many, many children, such an ungratifying, uninteresting, even excruciating experience. Can the difference between how Keith is on the basket-

ball court and how he is in the classroom be explained by saying that basketball is inherently fascinating and fun while multiplication is inherently dull and difficult? I don't think so. (Indeed, when basketball is taught in school or at summer camp by means of traditional school methods, it is often as difficult and painful for children to learn as math.) In the classroom, a purely societal environment where he's required to acquire information because it is "good" for him, it's no wonder that Keith's attention wanders! If there's a "disorder" here, in my opinion, it's in the coercive, inhumane societal institution of the school — not in the human being who's being coerced and dehumanized by it.

By contrast, the environment in which Keith is learning to play basketball is a bona fide zpd. On the court, Keith experiences the joy which is to be found at the juncture where history and society meet. Performing, he's in the same (historical) league as Magic Johnson, Larry Bird, Air Jordan, and his other heroes; he's also old enough to be able to watch himself performing: an eight-year-old boy who, while far less experienced and skilled than they are, is nevertheless playing the same game that these great athletes play.

Todd has that experience of joyousness in the social therapy group. Performing, he's creating (culture) in history along with every human being who's ever lived or will live; at the same time, he's able to appreciate the remarkable fact of his performance: an ordinary man who is helping to build an extraordinary environment in which people, including himself, can give expression to their fears, their pain, and their passion.

For adults only

The very youngest children aren't yet capable of experiencing joy, nor do they "need" to; they perform in history without

reflecting on the fact that they are doing so, the "meaning" of their performance, or anything else. They simply haven't been in society long enough to be able to perceive themselves performing. That is, they *can't* be self-conscious because they haven't had time to acquire that quintessential societal possession: a full-blown self. In this existential situation of selflessness from which we all start out, we do not require a resolution of the contradiction between the two central facts of post-early childhood human life: the historical fact of our freedom to create everything there is, including our nature, and the societal fact that we are determined by what we create.

At the beginning, unencumbered by the oppressive self-identity that the various societal institutions will soon impose on them, very young children are free to go beyond themselves continuously. From moment to moment, day after day, month after month, they babble, tumble, topple and bumble their way into societal life. How do they sound? How do they look? How do they smell? How are they doing? They don't (can't) know, or care! This marvelous freedom to play without rules is something that children exercise without being aware that they are doing so. For they have no "depth," no notion of who they are; the youngest children perform unself-consciously because there is as yet no self, no image, to be conscious of. The absence of self-consciousness which characterizes early childhood is a precondition for doing the learning that leads development.

What I mean by performing, as very young children do it, is what Vygotsky called *playing*. The games that they play, unlike the games played by older children and adults, aren't governed by rules that the child knows beforehand; rather, the rules emerge (if they emerge at all) in the activity of playing the game. The most important of these games are like the "language games" that Wittgenstein created to show the his-

torical dimension of language as a relational activity that human beings do together. In the language games of early childhood, what matters most is not the content of what is being spoken (what the words already mean or represent) but the social activity of speaking itself — a “form of life.”

As the weeks and months and years go by, Jennie will become a better and better player of language games (as well as all kinds of other societal games) even as she is becoming conscious of herself as such. Gradually, the loosely rule governed meanings of language (its societal uses) will come to take precedence over language as relational activity, so much so that Jennie — like everyone else in our culture — will become more or less oblivious to the historical performatory dimension of language acquisition. In fact, it's highly unlikely that she — any more than most other people — will ever come to be philosophically aware of herself as someone who not only uses the prefabricated meanings that we all receive as part of the process through which we are adapted to the societal *institution* of Language, but who once participated with other human beings in making meaning as part of the social/historical *activity* that language originally is.

To have an adult awareness of ourselves as being simultaneously historical makers and societal users of meaning (culture) requires that we be able to philosophize. Yet the societal institutions — including Language itself — are adamantly opposed to our doing so. Like every other societal institution, Language disguises its origins in historical, performatory, relational activity; it presents itself to us instead as a pre-existing, natural phenomenon. It's not a conspiracy — just how things are. As very young children we're unable to perceive the actual developmental process through which we learn language; later on, as adults, we're typically compelled by the societal institu-

tions to forget it. Most of us become increasingly sophisticated users of language while remaining utterly unsophisticated about the fact that what we are doing is engaging in the activity of language — in a form of life.

It is one of the many ironies of human life that the lack of self-consciousness in young children — an absence which makes it not only impossible but unnecessary for them to appreciate themselves as performers — is the very thing that holds adults back from performing. For as we become sufficiently adapted to be able to see ourselves in the societal mirrors, we simultaneously get caught up in the illusory image of ourselves — the self-identity — that appears in them.

That is, the self which is produced in the historical performatory process through which we become adapted to society comes to stand in the way of performance later on. For while there is no self for the very young child to see, adults find it exceedingly difficult to see anything other than themselves. It is the stultifying self-consciousness (the ego-centrism) of adulthood which keeps us from performing in the way that the youngest children do — not because they choose, or desire, to perform; it's simply what they do, given that they're little children.

That very young children have no selves of which to be conscious (“to speak of”) is the precondition for their participation in the various zpd's of early childhood (such as language acquisition), where learning leads development. However, adults in our culture are very definitely “self-possessed.”

But being self-conscious doesn't mean that adults can't engage in learning that leads development. We aren't babies, but we can imitate what very young children do *as who we are* (self-conscious adults) just as they imitate us *as who they are* (unself-conscious little children). Philosophizing — a language game for adults — is what allows us to perform as children do,

given that we aren't children. We're not children, but we can be child-like.

Learning how to philosophize requires that we perform — the *performance of philosophizing* that's like 10-month-old Jennie's performance of speaking and two-year-old Justin's performance of saying the alphabet and three-year-old Bobby's performance of drawing. We're child-like when we're performing. We're child-like when we're philosophizing. We're most child-like when we're performing philosophizing: asking big questions about little things, something that we don't know how to do — or why.

The point here is not that philosophizing is a good thing in and of itself. It's simply that since we, as adults, confront an existential crisis as a consequence of our self-consciousness, it's a good thing that we're able to philosophize — which is the only way I know out of that crisis into history. It is our capacity to philosophize which allows us to comprehend ourselves historically, and thereby to discover the joyousness at the juncture of history and society. Joy (like despair), in my opinion, is something which only adult human beings, who are simultaneously the producers and the product of our collective life, *can* experience. We create/discover it by engaging in the learning-leading-development activity of performing philosophizing.

"Philosophize? I don't know how!" protests the self-conscious adult, unwilling to appear stupid. "Perform? I have no talent!" objects the self-conscious adult, reluctant to look foolish. "Imitate? Go beyond myself? Be who I'm not? That's phony!" frowns the self-conscious adult, clinging to the societal illusion of identity.

But if we're going to philosophize, we'll *have* to do what we don't know how to do. And yes, that's what performance is

— being who we aren't, going beyond ourselves, imitating. Is that phony? Not unless you insist on believing that the images which appear in the societal mirrors are the "real" (and only "real") you.

Such performances are profoundly social; they take place in "theatres" (in this case, zones of proximal philosophical development) — environments that people build together where they are supported to do what they don't know how to do (in this case, to philosophize). Perhaps you *will* look silly doing it, but...so what? You're only looking silly in the societal mirrors. There is no silliness — for we don't *appear* — in history; we're simply there.