

PREGNANT PRODUCTIONS A VYGOTSKY-INSPIRED APPROACH TO TEENS AND TEEN PREGNANCY

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CREATING ENVIRONMENTS OF POSSIBILITY: A CULTURAL- PERFORMATORY PROGRAM TO PROMOTE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

James and Jamal are fifteen-year-old African American teenagers who recently performed a duet of monologues before an adult audience.

Act I, Scene 1

"Hi! My name is James and I'm from Flatbush, I've been there you know. I'm from *Brooklyn*, man. You know, playing the shorties—it's fun man. I went to this party one night and all the shorties were passing me by. The shorties were good man, all kinds of girls. I met this one girl, man, she was something, nice body, hair in braids; ooh she was cool! We were getting it on and all and then she asked me to walk her to the bus stop. Well, you know what happened man; *we got it on*. It was cool and everything, and I said I'd call her. I didn't know if I would but the whole thing was PHAT!"

Then, she calls me up a few weeks later, you know what I mean, and *tells me she's pregnant!* No way man. I mean No Way! She is sweating me and no way. I mean, I want to be responsible and maybe I should be a one woman man, but I'm a PLAYER. Yeah man, I'm a player. I like playing the shorties. I don't know what to do. I just don't know. There's a way I care and there's a way I don't care at all."

Scene 2

"Hey man, my name is Jamal and I'm from HARLEM, and James, he's my man! We went to this party a few days ago and it was cool. We met these shorties and James, well, he's a player and he *got it on*; you know what I mean? So he walked this shorty to the bus stop and they were gone a long time. Now she says she's pregnant. Sometimes my man doesn't think about the consequences of what he's doin', about safe sex and all, you know, if you're gonna be a player. Man, I think he needs to take responsibility for what's gone down. He says he doesn't care. He needs to make a decision about what kind of man he wants to be. Whatever he decides, I'm behind him because *he's my man*; you know what I mean? I think he needs to do the right thing. I'll stand by his side whatever he does. That's what I think; what do you think?"

James and Jamal are members of an innovative teen pregnancy prevention program called Pregnant Productions, currently in Harlem. It is structured and functions as a cultural production company where adolescents create and produce cultural events for the community based on issues of sexuality and teen pregnancy. The theoretical premise of Pregnant Productions was inspired by Lev Vygotsky's theories of human development. It is one of the few but increasing number of Vygotskian programs in the United States. James and Jamal's monologues are from a cultural event they participated in creating and producing.

James performed a character who wonders whether he is going to be a "player" and date many girls or whether he is going to be a "one woman man." The youth of Pregnant Productions collectively developed this scenario by improvisationally directing James during rehearsals to perform as a character who is conflicted over whether he was going to care about anybody's life, including his own. His was a demanding performance; its development took weeks.

At the time of this performance, James was dating and having sex with a number of different young women. He is handsome and charismatic, and many of the girls in the programs were attracted to him. James did not like to admit that he enjoyed the attention. During the rehearsals, James was very reluctant to perform his character saying, "I don't want to do this . . . I don't want to say I had sex with this girl . . . who is now telling me she is afraid that she is pregnant . . . and hell I don't even like her anyway . . . and now she is becoming a real pain and I don't really care about her . . . no, no, we ain't having this . . . I don't want to say those things because it will make me look bad."

WHAT ARE ZONES OF PROXIMAL DEVELOPMENT?

Pregnant Productions meets weekly. The two directors (the program coordinator and the social worker) organize twenty-five at-risk teenagers between the ages of twelve and eighteen to produce cultural events addressing the social, economic, and emotional issues of teen pregnancy. The purpose of the weekly rehearsals is to produce six public performances throughout the year. The activity of producing these events provides the structure wherein the youth collectively participate in creating what Lev Vygotsky (1978) calls zones of proximal development (ZPD) and what we call social environments. Vygotsky's discovery of ZPDs is the identification of psychological processes (e.g., thinking, speaking, remembering,

and problem solving) as produced through participation in and internalization of social-cultural-historical forms of activity (i.e., social behavior). The ZPD is the difference between what one can do with others and what one can do by oneself (Vygotsky, 1978, 1987). In the activity of creating social environments, youth can developmentally address the complexity of emotional/social issues that impact on them.

One of the purposes of these public performances is to create a community dialogue *led by the youths* on the topic of teen pregnancy. The themes of teenage sexuality and pregnancy are not in any way important for their public performance to be an effective developmental activity; any theme would do. The themes of teen sexuality are helpful in the public performances. Through these public performances, the teens produce new social environments where they lead a dialogue with adults about their views and emotions about sexuality in a social context where they won't be dismissed. The teens of Pregnant Productions create a new "zone of proximal development" with the community. This reorganizes their social location from perceived victims or problems to actual leaders in the community.

With the support of the directors, the cast did a lot of work with James supporting and directing his performance. They let him know that through his performance he would be providing leadership to those who see his performance and are grappling with similar issues. If James feels as if he doesn't care, *he can perform not caring*. He is repeatedly reminded that this would be a giving activity. He would be performing for the community what actually goes on for many teens, and the cast and the community can build a new social environment with it.

WHO WAS LEV VYGOTSKY?

Building new social environments is fundamental to a Vygotskian approach to human development. The investigations of Lev Vygotsky, a renowned

Russian development psychologist, in the 1920s and 1930s, led to a methodological breakthrough in the *conceptualization of human development*. His theories provide insight into the process by which human beings have the capacity for continuous qualitative change-development. Vygotsky died young, in 1933, and his work was repressed by the Stalin government. In the past decade, his theories have been translated and have become internationally popular. Vygotsky recognized in early childhood play a distinguishing characteristic of human beings: that humans create and can transform the totality of their social environments, producing human development. He distinguished his conception of human development from the traditional Piagetian concept of fixed stages of development by focusing on social activity (Vygotsky, 1978, 1987, 1993). Vygotsky identified developmental activity (the activity that promotes development) as the activity of creating new social environments; which he described as having the dialectic character of being simultaneously the tool and the result. Participating in creating new social environments is a collective activity where people can create the possibility of breaking out of predetermined social roles (Newman, 1994).

One of the directors tells James that although oftentimes a person cannot control how he or she feels, he or she can make a conscious decision on *what to do*. James was directed to perform his conflict: to perform not being sure whether he wanted to be a young African American man who cares about African American women or someone who just doesn't care. James was supported to *perform feeling many different ways* about how he would like to be during the course of a day. This support allowed James to stretch beyond himself without denying who he is (a youth with emotional conflicts about caring).

James requested that someone join him in his monologue who would support him. So a friend got up and improvised, saying, "Hi. I'm Jamal, and James is my man. Let me tell you about what

James said; I believe in safe-sex; I am somebody who cares a lot about people, and sometimes James doesn't care, but that's okay, 'cause he is still my man, and I am there for my man, and I'm going to help him get through this." Using performance, Jamal creatively expressed his support and caring for both the collective performance and his friend James, without siding with James's feelings of not caring.

CREATING POSSIBILITIES BY BREAKING OUT OF PREDETERMINED ROLES

The rehearsals and production of this monologue supported James and the others in *the activity of creating new social environments*. The purpose of these new social environments is to support the youths in breaking out of their predetermined roles. Ordinarily, James would not have asked for help. That's not cool. Ordinarily, Jamal would have had to pick a side-support his friend, or support the others. We describe these environments as *activity* where they can perform on and about emotional issues of their lifetimes. The themes the youths choose to perform *do not* necessarily need to be from their direct experience for the activity to be developmental. The themes they choose are what they're interested in performing, which is empowering and increases their collective participation while minimizing coercion.

Their *performance* is not an attempt to act out their biographies as some kind of psychodrama. There is no attempt to explore anyone's inner experience or to relive past experiences. *Performance* is the conscious activity of producing how we are in the world. We have no theoretical commitment to the concept of truth. We do not attempt to discover what actually happened to them when younger, for example. *In performance, we respond to the activity of the statement being said*, not its truth or falsity. Our commitment is to knowledge, which is socially arrived at and, in life, changes and renews itself with each moment of interaction (Hoffman,

1993). What is important is the activity of collectively building a supportive social environment, moment to moment, where people can exercise their capacity for continuous emotional development. We agree with Gergen and Kaye's (1993) urging for a therapeutic approach that is not based on truth. We believe that what is therapeutic is supporting human development. We believe that the activity of creating new social environments to perform best promotes human development.

DIALECTICS: THE UNITY OF LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Pregnant Productions is the activity of participants creating the social environment necessary to perform experiences on and about their lifetimes in a genre they create. Here they care about what they are collectively doing together (producing their cultural event) and about each other. The production of the cultural event is a developmental activity to the degree that it is simultaneously both the tool and the result, the unity of learning and the development (Newman and Holzman, 1993).

In a society and culture where often it is not "cool" or common to care about others, the members of Pregnant Productions created a social environment where they could creatively care by *performing caring* (i.e., giving direction and support to James) and collectively building something meaningful together. They created new ways of *being* for themselves. In the activity of this Vygotsky inspired methodology, the youths learn that they can create a social environment (a cultural performance) that allows them to learn and develop (a tool and a result).

DEVELOPING YOUTHS AS LEADERS

Pregnant Productions' organizing concept, a cultural production company, maximizes Vygotsky's concept of human development as the activity of

creating ZPDs. Pregnant Productions' weekly rehearsals for productions include organizing the community. Building an audience is part of producing public performances. For example, Pregnant Productions is currently funded through a grant by the Urban League and hosted by the Minisink Community Center in Harlem, which provides a dance studio as space. Pregnant Productions produces after-school cultural events at the Minisink Community Center. The teens invite the members of the community center, advisory board members, local community agencies, parents, and classmates to attend. Inviting people to their event enhances their collective responsibility and caring for what they produce. It is a significant activity of building a new ZPD with the community. They also travel to other neighborhood centers to produce after-school events.

At the conclusion of their cultural performance, a dialogue takes place between the cast and the audience. This portion of their public performance creates a new social environment (ZPD) and an important dimension of Pregnant Productions: a community dialogue with the possibility for community development.

At one such discussion, the monologues between James and Jamal emerged as the focal point between the adults and the teenage performers. The adults were noticeably impacted by the frankness and conflictedness of the monologues. They asked pointed and direct questions about sex: "Are you having sex?" "Do you use condoms?" "What do you do when you don't have a condom?" The youths confidently and openly responded. They received applause and praise. At times their frankness was unsettling to some: "If I have the opportunity but I don't have a condom, I'm still going to get busy [have sex]."

The youths created through their performance and production a new social context—a new social location where they could provide leadership to the adult community on critical and complex topics. This is not to say that the youths have the

answers, but they did create a new context where meaningful dialogue was possible. They were able to effectively tell the adults that many but not all of them were having sex, that condoms need to be readily available, and that more open discussions were needed. These youths transformed their social location through the activity of creating the context for and leading this community dialogue, dialectically transforming themselves.

WHY YOUTH MUST PROVIDE LEADERSHIP

Adults, particularly parents and teachers, too often assume that they know what goes on with teenagers merely because they were once teenagers themselves. This is an error that has adolescents rejecting parental advice. Contemporary society and culture is changing very rapidly. Today, children are more worldwide than their parents. Youngsters of nine and ten are likely to understand how fast things are changing better than adults who perceive the rate of change as if it were twenty-five years ago. This is not to put down caring adults but to point out that our rapidly changing world demands a new approach to learning and development. Adults get stuck in their roles as parents and teachers, restricting the kind of dialogue and intimacy they can have with adolescents. The topic of sex is one example.

Frequently, as the teens prepare for public performances, the issue of censorship arises. The older youths often want to perform scenes with street language and expressions common to their youth culture which some adults think is vulgar, or they'll want a dance routine that may be viewed as too sexually suggestive. "Let's be real," they say. Although sensitivity to representatives of funding sources is an important consideration (and the youths understand this), we think censorship is coercive. It is contradictory to tell youths they need to breakout of their roles and then continue the authoritarian practice of determining their roles. This is anti-developmental.

PERFORMANCE REINITIATES DEVELOPMENT

Pregnant Productions is a cultural-performatory approach to the complex issue of teen pregnancy. It is designed to reinitiate emotional development with teenagers. Development often is impeded by the internalization of and identification with predetermined social roles: "Oh no, I couldn't do that; that's not me." In contrast to traditional psychological approaches, Pregnant Productions provides an *activity-theoretic* framework to the critical question "How do we promote human development in the context of social decay?" We use *performance* as an activity to break free of roles and identity. Traditional psychology has taught that development is a private matter that happens to individuated selves; that it is an internal process, that all people pass through fixed stages of development, that a strong sense of identity is key to mental health, and that our learning is a function of how developed we already are. This traditional stagist theory of human development is being challenged by activity theorists inspired by Vygotsky.

WHO CREATED PREGNANT PRODUCTIONS?

For nearly twenty years, the Eastside Institute and the International Center for Human Development have been dedicated to the practice and advancement of new methodological approaches to psychology and human development. The Eastside Institute has created an independent institution (a professional environment outside the constraints of traditionally funded institutions) where Vygotsky's investigations have informed our work. In turn, we developed and advanced Vygotsky's theories. We practice a Vygotsky-inspired approach, which we call social therapy, in a number of therapeutic-, cultural-, educational-, and community-based settings. Pregnant Productions is our contribution to the social issue of teen pregnancy.

Pregnant Productions is neither educational nor psychological in methodology. Rather, it is a cultural-performative approach to human development. It teaches building new kinds of social environments that promote *learning and development*. To us, for civilization to advance, humans need to be able to create new social environments and new forms of life. We need to create human development.

THE STRUCTURE FOR PREGNANT PRODUCTIONS

The organizing task for the youths of Pregnant Productions is to figure out how and what they want to produce and give to the community. This provides the structure for building a creative social environment that is at once beyond what they know how do (in advance of their development) and a cultural orientation that they can easily relate to (as a goal within their reach). Do they want to produce a comedy, a variety show, a musical, or a drama? What content do they want to put in their show that will teach the community about who they are as young people (their interests, their conflicts, the issues they're grappling with)? These are decisions they must make in creating their cultural production.

Creating these cultural events is a giving activity that has the potential to simultaneously transform their relationship to their community and thus who they are. In the activity of producing these events; they experience the history of their decisions and decision making. A comment, a joke, or an experience can be developed and transformed into a scene for the final production. This activity promotes the youths as *decision makers*—as people who can, through their decisions, create something meaningful. Learning the social and emotional skills of performance creates the *possibility* that as decision makers they can break free from overly determined social roles and create their own lives.

ACTIVITY THEORY: DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY'S NEW TRADITION

This cultural performative approach is on the cutting edge of contemporary culturally oriented cognitive, educational, and developmental psychology known as *activity theory*. Pregnant Productions was created in response to a request by funding agencies (the South Bronx Teen Pregnancy Network and A Better Bronx for Youth) that were frustrated with existing preventive programs that had limited impact on their youths and community.

Youth programs most often attempt to respond to issues of teen pregnancy with traditional educational and/or psychological programs. Traditional educational programs want adolescents to make what adults believe are "better" decisions (e.g., to not have sex or at least to use a condom and not get pregnant). Their underlying theoretical perspective suggests that if youths were better educated about the trials and tribulations of teen parenthood, abortions, and sexually transmitted diseases, they would make better decisions (e.g., not get pregnant). The complex social and institutional arrangements that produce high teenage unemployment, poor literacy rates, and an ever increasing permanent underclass locate many educational programs (despite best intentions) as authoritarian and coercive.

Psychologically oriented programs usually incorporate pejorative value judgments. They view youths as "troubled," "at risk," or a "problem." Psychologically oriented programs tacitly impose behavioral expectations. They attempt to measure their success with indicators of particular behaviors they have deemed good or bad (i.e., adaptive or maladaptive). These behavioral expectations are undemocratic, coercive, and intrusive. They are part of the institutional arrangements that attempt to overdetermine societal roles. They are, in effect, antidevelopmental.

Pregnant Productions' innovative developmental approach is activity-theoretic. It advances Vygotsky's concept of ZPDs. We understand Vygotsky's use of the term *zone* to mean certain

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kinds of *human activity* (not a particular area) that create new social environments. We identify the activity of *performance* as the activity that best promotes human development. *Performing* requires the simultaneous activity of creating the social environment where one can perform (the tool and the result).

Pregnant Productions recognizes the unlimited human potential to create social environments where human development is possible. Vygotsky noted how traditional theories of learning do not explain how children's imitations of the language they hear differ from the imitations of a parrot. How is it that the child eventually becomes a speaker, whereas the parrot never does? To Vygotsky, what distinguishes the child from the parrot is *activity* (Newman, 1996). To understand human development we need to see that human beings engage in conjoint (not privatized) socio-cultural activity.

Vygotsky viewed human development as a joint social activity (Holzman and Newman, 1993). For example, children learn to speak in a social context (the ZDP) of being related to as a speaker, not an imitator. Parents encourage children to do what they do not yet know how to do—to be *ahead of themselves*. In this way, Vygotsky turned upside down the prevailing wisdom that said what and how much an individual can learn depends on their level of development. Children learn in a way that contributes to their emotional, intellectual, and social development as the social environment supports their active participation in creating their development.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY PERFORMANCE?

Our cultural-performatory approach is a critical contribution to the question of human development at this moment in history when there is a crisis in human development. Contemporary society, characterized by social decay, random violence, and increased poverty, creates profound obstacles for human development. Pregnant Productions'

cultural-performatory approach is radically democratic in that it's all-inclusive and insists that participants assume collective responsibility for what they are doing together; it's noninterpretive. We describe it as a new kind of play—a continuous performance of life.

The program relates to the youths as being capable of unlimited continuous development. With appropriate support, youth can build social environments where they can be the creators of their own lives. Collectively, they can explore and learn about the multitude of life choices open to them. The underlying premise of the program is that youth can go through a developmental transformation of their emotionality in much the way children acquire language (the activity of acquiring language transforms who children are). By virtue of this transformation, they're in a new social location to face important life decisions. They can become *better decision makers*; they can make choices in a developmental way, as people who make decisions in the activity of creating their own lives.

At Pregnant Productions, *performance* is the centerpiece of our program. Our concept of performance is inspired by Vygotsky's observation of child's *play* as characteristic of the social activity that best promotes development. It is distinct from acting. In the activity of play we can see children attempting to perform things they do not know how to do. In child's play, one *performs ahead*, or *in advance of, one's development*. Performance is the developmental dialectic of being and becoming. The improvisational qualities of child's play are maximized through the activity of youths creating, developing and performing their own cultural events.

PERFORMANCE (NOT IDENTITY) PROMOTES DEVELOPMENT

Performance promotes development by engaging and breaking from one's identity. Frequently, people will behave in a particular emotive manner and

kinds of *human activity* (not a particular area) that create new social environments. We identify the activity of *performance* as the activity that best promotes human development. *Performing* requires the simultaneous activity of creating the social environment where one can perform (the tool and the result).

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Performance promotes development by engaging and breaking from one's identity. Frequently, people will behave in a particular emotive manner and

justify their behavior by saying that they cannot change: "This is who I am." William, a young man in the program, was much taller and bigger than his peers. He had an intimidating presence. Merely by sitting he conveyed a don't-mess-with-me attitude. When initially directed to participate, he snarled, "Why I gotta do that?" When asked whether he was aware of his menacing posture, he said, "No man, I'm just chillin'." This is just the way I am." People often identify with their social attitudes and believe they cannot change.

Through performance, people can creatively perform who they are not and reinitiate development. If you can *perform* that behavior of you being who you are (like William performing himself being intimidating by just sitting), it is reasonable to assume that the behavior is not somehow naturally and unalterably determined. It is a performance of you being you. William was directed in a variety of scenarios to perform being intimidating and then asked to perform being gentle and considerate and then nerdy and silly. It was then clear to William that being intimidating was a behavioral choice, not who he is. Performance, on and off stage, is a self-defining activity.

If you can perform you doing that particular behavior that you identify as "you being you," you can also perform you doing something else. Just because you are performing does not mean you're being insincere. There is no justification for William saying, "I was only pretending to be nice; It's not really me." Why would pretending to be nice be any less "really you"? An advantage of the cultural-performatory approach over traditional psychological modalities is that it supports people in being less defensive. Performance gives people more access for going beyond the limits of their identities (Newman, 1996).

For the youths, creating and producing cultural events supports the activity of performance by providing a meaningful structure for and a time and date of the public performance. *The activity of performing who they are becoming creatively transforms who they are.* In creating a cultural event, the

members get to perform activities on and about issues and concerns that impact their lives. This is different from, and more demanding than, merely acting in a role.

Performance denotes the creative developmental activity of going beyond yourself to who you are not. When we say the youths perform, we mean they perform *who they are not*—they perform beyond themselves. Performance is not coercively getting someone to be someone else. We are not referring to role-playing. For example, when James was conflicted about performing his character, he was not asked to *act as if he cared* in coercive conformity to the politically correct way to feel. Rather, he was directed to *perform not caring*. We think it's coercive to ask a youth to be someone else. Performance is getting you (who will always remain you) to create you, to go beyond yourself. We do not mean simply taking on another role—that is merely acting or pretending to be someone else. Acting or role-playing requires only memorizing a script; it's imitation by replication, or mimicry. Performance is creating you by going beyond your identity.

PERFORMANCE: CREATIVE IMITATION, NOT ACTING

Performance is creative imitation. It is the *creative activity* of "you not being you." It is taking you, and stretching you, as you go beyond your identity. It is not a logic of either-you-are-this-or-that. Rather, it is a process logic, dialectically speaking; it is helping you be *you and not you simultaneously* (Newman, 1996). Creative imitation is grounded in the activity of child's play. Children's imitation includes internalizing and making use of the examples of others, but it is not simply being exactly like them in a replicative form. Rather, it is using models in the social process of actually creating something new. And what is created new is you (Newman, 1996). Creative imitation makes use of others as models and examples, but it's not simply replicating others.

To creatively imitate and perform is to take what you have, including the examples of others, and to create something new out of it, which is you. People, especially children, see someone do something that impresses them, and they try to imitate their model, but they do it their way, through creative imitation, and not replication.

Performance is demanding because people, even young people are resistant to the idea that they can change, that they can develop. People can develop at any point in life—that is our discovery about development inspired by Vygotsky's activity-theoretic framework (Newman, 1996). Adolescents, just like adults, have already internalized that they are who they are. Once one becomes identified, one does not abandon that identity easily. They say, "This is who I am." Traditional psychology considers the formation of identity positively and views adolescence as a critical time for identity formation. The Vygotskian concept of development does not require identity formation for healthy development. We believe that identity (those predetermined social roles and expectations) restricts development.

Vygotsky recognized the unlimited human potential for continuous development. While daily life situations do not ordinarily support performative activity, people can learn to transform their social environments and perform. For example, if people can learn to stop a scene during a rehearsal and say, "Let's do it again, only differently," they can stop a routine life situation by saying, "Let's try that again, differently." People can use performance to create and direct their lives and relationships. This is the activity-theoretic practice of our Vygotsky-inspired methodology of building and sustaining environments conducive to growth. The task is to grow and develop in whatever social circumstance.

THE ADULT DIRECTORS' ROLE IN PREGNANT PRODUCTIONS

Rehearsing for their cultural events gives shape and structure to teenage play: Children and ado-

lescents enjoy repeating activity so they can improve. The use of cultural tools, such as improvisation and dance, are forms of play. As Vygotsky identified, when children are at play, they simultaneously create the social conditions for their play (the tool and the result). The directors support this activity by presenting activities that can promote their skills, such as directions on how to posture or gesture and to project one's voice. They provide cultural skills such as poetry reading and writing and dance instruction, that are important elements in supporting the youth's continuing participation. The directors' role is to support and direct the teens in conceptualizing and producing the rehearsals and public events.

The methodological pursuit of the directors is to support the cast's activity of performance. Their advanced skills allows them to perform as positive role models on how to collectively work together. They focus on supporting the youth in their activity of assuming and maintaining collective responsibility and care for what is being produced. The directors are a key element in this Vygotskian concept of the *learner/mentor relationship* (Vygotsky, 1978). They actively participate in the building of the social environment. The directors assist in reviewing the rehearsals, from how they began with one idea and creatively developed it into a production. This helps the youths model and creatively imitate the activity of directing and providing leadership.

CREATING SOMETHING MEANINGFUL TOGETHER

Creating a new social environment is goal oriented, even if the goal is just for fun. Performance is not an activity in itself. Rather, performance is the totality of the creative activity—the tool and the result. During rehearsal, the youths, through the activity of creating something that they care about, begin to direct one another and begin to care. They develop collective responsibility for their activity. Ultimately, they do not want to put on a poor show.

PERFORMING TALKING ABOUT SEX AND SEXUALITY

Sex is a subject in which both adults and youth are socialized into bragging about certain kinds of experiences, imagined or not. Sex is highly privatized—most people do not say what they think and feel. They want to avoid being humiliated. Mistakenly, many people believe they are the only ones who have had a certain experience or who feel or think a certain way.

At one rehearsal, the cast performed a series of monologues about their parents telling them about sex. Through their performance, they playfully poked fun at their parents, exposing the difficulty that most parents experience in talking about sex with their teenagers. One youth performed his father, saying, "Son, I have three words for you: Don't do it!" Another performed his father, saying, "Son, don't forget, use protection." "Right Dad, I'll carry a gun."

In creating these scenes, the youths performed on and about issues that are relevant to them while having fun discussing and performing the issues of their lifetimes. Once, a young man raised the topic of sexual harassment of boys by older girls, of being "attacked" in the restroom. This is not something that the boys wanted to be part of any final production. They didn't want others to know that it happened. Most adults have no idea that this goes on. The boys had plenty to say on this issue that would never have come up if the adults were choosing the topics.

CREATING CHOICES AND NEW POSSIBILITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

Common issues for young women are the following: How do you not give in to the pressures of a young man? How do you not cave into the pressure to brag about what you are doing, even when you are not doing anything? How do you keep your self-respect? How do you avoid not setting up other girls? Young women can be very com-

petitive. A good-looking guy comes around, and young women can be hurtful and abusive to one another as they try to get the guy's attention.

The directors help raise the question and the possibility: Can we do this in a way that is not hurtful to one another by creating improvisational scenes? Members were directed to create a variety of responses to scenes they created. The performances support developing emotional skills and the possibility of creating new choices for themselves and others. At rehearsals the girls set up a scene where Vanessa and Tim are hugging in the park. Carol, Tim's girlfriend, sees and confronts them. In their original improvisation, the girls fight over Tim. The director then suggests that they repeat the scene with a different ending. In the second version, the girls identify Tim as a manipulator; they create an alliance, and both dump the two-timing Tim. This cultural-performative approach supports the development of a variety of ways of dealing with a situation—*creating possibilities and choices for development*.

Performance affords young women the opportunity to explore what kind of woman they want to grow up to be. It exposes them to more than one choice. It helps demonstrate that the decision is theirs to make and is not based merely on feelings or on who others think she is but on what may be most developmental. It is the conscious, continuous activity of deciding how you want to *perform*, every minute of every hour of every day. The performance activity is not just during our rehearsals. It is *the opportunity to perform* every moment of every day instead of behaving in societally determined and conditioned social roles. If they can stop and repeat a scene in a play, why not at school or at home or anywhere?

The directors support the continuous activity of creating developmental environments where new performances can occur. At one rehearsal, the cast was making masks for their costumes. In the corner were two young men who did not want

to make their own masks but wanted to help Victoria make hers. They were obviously flirting and being sexy with each other. The director asked them to join everyone else, that they could flirt and be sexy while being with the entire cast. "You mean you don't want us to stop?" they asked with surprise. "No," the director said. "We don't want to tell you what to do; rather we'd like you to continue to perform being sexy with all of us. We want you to create a new way of being sexy that's social and inclusive, not private." The director facilitated the cast performing a new way of being sexy that was not private, exclusive, competitive, or naughty.

The adults direct and participate in the performance activity and function as models. During one rehearsal, the cast was performing an exercise, a collective story, where each member contributes to the development of a scene. Christopher made a joke about rape within the story line. Beverly said it was not funny. No one else responded. The director intervened by asking, "Did people hear what Beverly said?" When no one responded, the director asked Beverly to repeat her comment, which she did. Then the group continued. As the collective story continued, Christopher, within the context of his character in the collective story, said he wanted to apologize for what he had previously said.

Christopher's improvisation was both very creative and something most adults are not likely to do. There was no coercive attempt by the director for Christopher or others to respond to Beverly in any particular manner. Through the continuation of the performance, a ZPD was created where Christopher could creatively go beyond himself, not by pretending to be someone else but by creatively stretching himself to create a new Christopher; one who would apologize. It was a decent and supportive act toward Beverly and the other young women. The director thanked him for that performance and supported him in recognizing that what he said had an impact on people.

His creative performance was moving, and his response to the young woman, rather than ignoring her, helped transformed the entire cast.

CREATING NEW ENVIRONMENTS, NEW MEANING, AND NEW FORMS OF LIFE

The cultural-performatory approach focuses on how to transform the social environment and provide the conditions for a meaningful discourse. Having meaningful dialogue requires organizing the social environment to have meaningful dialogue. Conversation, as an activity, as a form of human social life, has the potential to be developmental. It is not the content or the rhetoric of a conversation but its form—that existential moment when human beings touch one another—that has the potential to create development. It is through the social activity of conversation that people can collectively and continuously create a variety of things, including their relationships, their decisions, and their lives. If people stay in their socially structured environmental arrangements, they will simply interpret whatever gets said so that it fits into the already existing arrangement and understanding. The assumption that if people say something different people will hear it differently never happens that way. It's in the totality of the activity of conversation—in the language we create—where we create meaning (Bruner, 1993). There has to be a carefully supported restructuring of the social environment to allow people to break out of their roles and develop.

Pregnant Productions focuses on promoting development by allowing youths the opportunity to build something—a cultural production or a ZPD. In collectively organizing the event (doing all the things to make it happen) and in working to accomplish the event (assuming collective responsibility), they perform ahead of themselves (from not having the slightest idea of how to produce an event to participating and experiencing its completion). Collectively, they participate in a process of

planning, communicating, making decisions, and taking responsibility for what they build and how they build it. In performing these activities, they are able to break out of their socially overdetermined behavior. They learn that there are choices and how to make choices, including when and whether to have sex or get pregnant. They learn how to create social environments where they are supported to do what they don't know how to do.

Our performers learn that although individually they may get stuck in a certain way of behaving, they can use their friends, their family, and their classmates in a joint activity and collectively come up with many choices and possibilities. In this alienated and decaying society, they learn the activity of creating new social environments and creating new forms of life—their own lives, including their future.

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