Afterschool: Growth! (The *All Stars* Way)

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All Stars Project

This chapter shares a model of afterschool development created by the not-for-profit All Stars Project. Central to the model are self-conscious and collective acts of performing and pretending that help youth living in high poverty, urban areas grow as learners and builders of their lives and their communities.

> Everything is a performance . . . not to say that it's not real. It's very much real, but that's the aspect the *All Stars* brings to it, that in order to make it real, in order to make some of your dreams real, you have to perform, and as you perform, you start to realize, "I don't know, I can do this." (Jasmine Morrison, 32, *All Stars Project* Alumna)

> What if all the kids currently failing in school pretended to be good learners? What if all the adults—teachers, administrators, parents—played along and pretended that the kids were school achievers, heading for college? . . . We believe that if such a national "performance" were created, the education crisis in America would be over. (Newman & Fulani, 2011, p. 1)

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In this chapter, I share a model of afterschool development created by the not-for-profit *All Stars Project*. Central to this model are self-conscious and collective acts of performing and pretending (Newman & Fulani, 2011) in order to help youth living in high-poverty urban areas grow as learners and builders of their lives and their communities. The discussion draws on program accounts and interviews with *All Stars Project* participants and program leaders, as well as on the theoretical and conceptual investigations that *All Stars* founders and partners have made hand in hand with their on-the-ground work.

The chapter begins with a section that provides a brief history of the *All Stars Project*, along with my role with the organization over the past three decades. The second section describes the foundations of our approach. The third section provides snapshots from *All Stars Project* program performances, including what some of the participants say. The final section concludes with one vision for extending afterschool growth in low-income communities.

A HISTORY OF THE *ALL STARS PROJECT*: AN INSIDER'S VIEW

I have been an intimate participant in the building of the *All Stars Project* almost since it began 31 years ago. I have worked closely with its two cofounders—developmental psychologist and activist Lenora Fulani, and philosopher, therapist and activist, the late Fred Newman—as well as with Lois Holzman, a developmental psychologist and activist researcher who has also played a significant role in developing the concepts that shape and have been shaped by the *All Stars Project*. I came to the *All Stars Project*, to youth development, and to afterschool via an unconventional path. I was educated in theoretical linguistics at Columbia University in the 1980s and fully intended to pursue an academic career. As I was completing my doctoral dissertation, I met Holzman, with whom I shared a passion for investigating language and exploring the subjective issues of learning and teaching. Holzman introduced me to Newman, Fulani, and to the broad and diverse community they were working with and leading. The commitment to and close partnership with people living in poverty, the deeply humanistic vision, and the day-to-day pragmatism that I saw profoundly inspired me. I was also impressed with the exploration of new intellectual frontiers that Newman and Holzman were doing together: not only the new (to me) and intriguing concepts and methodologies they were discussing (e.g., their postmodern takes on Marx, Vygotsky, and Wittgenstein), but also their insistence that reconsidering fundamental assumptions about language, human development, and learning was critically relevant to day-to-day practice (and vice versa). I decided that if I wanted

to take my shot at changing the world, this was the place to do it, and I joined them and our partners in the community to work to create new social and educational alternatives. Building the *All Stars Project* has taken me far beyond academe and linguistics. I have worked in multiple capacities: as a volunteer and as a member of the full-time staff, helping to produce and staff program activities; educating and supervising volunteers; and fundraising. In each of these roles, it has been a challenging, fascinating, and gratifying journey.

As an *All Stars Project* senior staff veteran, I am leading a new area of our work. We have seen that engaging urban youth with the opportunity to perform and pretend *outside of school* quickly and strikingly gives them what they need to become active in building their lives and communities in a multiplicity of ways for example, by becoming enthusiastic about trying new things, responding positively to being challenged, taking risks to grow, navigating personal and institutional roadblocks, and becoming better learners in school and out. Moreover, we have become convinced that these performance-based practices, and the alternative and new outside-of-school and other-than-school learning environments that support them, offer the most promising conceptual and practical direction for rebuilding our public education system. We are, therefore, giving energy to supporting and developing the afterschool community through "Afterschool: Growth!"—an ongoing series of conferences and social media activities that foster conversations between afterschool innovators and frontline practitioners across the country. In addition, we are establishing a university partnership initiative with the working title, *Institute for Afterschool Development*, to deepen research into the use of afterschool as an environment for growth and development, performance (and play and pretending), and the ways performance can generate new and more effective ways to impact poverty and its consequences in urban communities.

Now a well-established not-for-profit, the *All Stars Project* was created as a grassroots laboratory of sorts, bringing together people and worlds that often are not thought of as going together: notably, the most advanced ideas and innovative practices and ordinary people in high-poverty communities. The *All Stars Project* began in the streets of New York City's East New York, Harlem, and South Bronx communities. Our first programs—more community-organizing activities than formal programs—were designed with and in response to what people in the communities wanted and said that they needed. Moreover, there was no large foundation or government grant underwriting our efforts. Here too, the *All Stars Project* was experimental. We made use of '60s-style grassroots fundraising activities—standing on street corners on New York City's Midtown, Upper East, and West Sides and knocking on doors in middle class and affluent neighborhoods

in Manhattan, Brooklyn, and nearby suburbs—to create a new kind of private sector, independent funding base of support for new social innovations that could challenge and take the place of traditional solutions that were failing.

When I started working with the *All Stars Project* in 1983, just two years after it received official not-for-profit status, our activist community (that included educators, visual and theater artists, social workers and physicians, and grassroots and neighborhood leaders) was only a year or two into producing the community talent shows that would grow into our flagship program, the *All Stars Talent Show Network*, and our revenues were barely in the five figures. Currently, the *All Stars Project* reaches 10,000 young people a year in four cities in the United States: New York City, Newark, Chicago, and the San Francisco Bay Area. We have three highly developed and successful programs that make up the core of our afterschool development model. We have articulated and begun propagating a set of fundamental principles and replicable practices nationally and internationally. The organization has 50 full- and part-time staff, and the budget is $8 million. Importantly, that funding continues to come entirely from the private sector: from thousands of middle class and affluent individuals, reached by initial and continuing grassroots activity, and, as we have grown, also from the business community and forward-looking foundations.

There is a relationship between the way in which the *All Stars Project* was created and what has come to be the heart of what we do: play, perform, and pretend. Many of us who are longtime *All Stars* believe that the "build it ourselves" feature of our organization's history, which carries on to this day, has played an important role in creating the conditions for discovering that performing and pretending can transform the lives of youth in inner cities.

FOUNDATIONS OF THE *ALL STARS PROJECT* APPROACH

One characterization of the *All Stars Project* is that we use diverse, socially informed performing and pretending in order to engage youth who are typically from low-income, Black, Latino, and immigrant families with two priority developmental issues: (1) to help them become more worldly and cosmopolitan, i.e., to perform their way from the margins into the mainstream of American society; and (2) to have them experience, over and over, their capacity to grow, i.e., to foster an active understanding *that* they can create endless performances for navigating life's complex mix of scripted (institutional) and unscripted (non-institutional) situations. Our programs are entirely voluntary. Young people are reached through multiple methods of grassroots outreach: door-to-door

in housing projects; flyers in neighborhoods, subways, and outside of schools; and presentations at schools and churches. There is also significant neighborhood word-of-mouth.

When young people come to an *All Stars Project* program, they are "engaged in the creation of ensemble performances in which they are taken seriously and given the chance to perform as community citizens" (Newman & Fulani, 2011, p. 4). We—and this includes not only staff but many middle class and affluent adults, often business professionals and performing artists who are also volunteers—"place substantial emphasis on communicating a clear set of expectations, giving them the support to meet those expectations, and pretending/performing along with them that they are capable of performing at a significantly higher level (socially, emotionally and intellectually) than they have up to that point" (Newman & Fulani, 2011, p. 4).

All Stars Project programs intervene on the impact that these young people's life circumstances have on their development, defined socioculturally (vs. genetically) as the capacity to see possibilities and to act on them. Growing up in poverty more often than not creates hopelessness, narrowed and ghettoized options for identities, and, not infrequently, anger. These in turn have negative consequences on so many aspects of young people's lives, including their learning. In focusing on development, the *All Stars Project* rejects the more popular notion that there is an achievement gap for urban youth that all efforts must be focused on closing. We argue instead that what must be addressed is the "development gap." In their 2009 essay, Kurlander and Fulani point out a logical and scientific problem with the former:

> The two groups [being compared]—poor kids of color and white middle-class kids—are so different from one another in their life experience, their relationship to learning and their expectations for themselves, that it makes no sense to compare them. . . . Thus comparisons based on test scores that yield the construct of an achievement gap are the educational equivalent of a "false positive" in medicine—where an illness has been incorrectly diagnosed and is therefore being incorrectly treated. (p. 2)

Identifying the problem as an achievement gap obscures the overall inequity and differences between children who are growing up in conditions of poverty and those who are growing up in an affluent environment. We have to take in the big picture, not only because it forces us to deal with the seriousness of the problem, but also because it opens up more possibilities for doing something about it.

Further, Kurlander and Fulani (2009) point out flaws in the historic view that education is the singular pathway out of poverty and into the middle class. We have to reconsider one of the basic assumptions of schooling: that the classroom offers the potential to put all children on a level playing field. They argue:

> While it continues to be the case that individuals can and sometimes do succeed through education, for the mass of poor kids of color, public education, as it is currently construed and constructed, is failing. These kids are not simply failing to learn. They are failing to become learners. This is a problem of catastrophic proportions, one that requires a different description. . . . Unless and until we accept and understand that, educators and policymakers will focus on the achievement gap to no avail. (p. 3)

The starting point for the *All Stars Project* is, thus, the need for a new "story of learning" that takes into account, rather than overlooks, issues of human development and the subjective experience of learning, in particular at the intersection of poverty and education.

In many ways and for many years, it has seemed that the *All Stars Project* has been a "lone voice" in promoting the idea that the educational priority should be giving urban young people ways to develop. At the same time, the *All Stars Project* has also called upon well-known research findings and scholarly investigations to help make this case. Four empirical and conceptual investigations, in particular, form a common core of resources that offer grounding for the distinctive threads of "*All Stars Project* theory," including the need to question basic and long-held assumptions about education, learning and development, and the possibilities opened up if we "turn" toward play, pretend, and performance.

The first resource is the 20-year study of the educational progress of 800 Baltimore school children conducted by Johns Hopkins sociologists Karl Alexander, Doris Entwistle, and Linda Olson (Alexander et al., 2007) that included a comparison of summer learning patterns with school-year learning, revealing a "summer set back" effect. Over time, two-thirds of the achievement gap between children from better-off families and those who were poor could be traced to the differential in their summertime outside-of-school activities (Alexander et al., 2007). The key factor identified in "summer set back" was "family privilege" as manifested in life experiences, for example, going to museums, taking lessons of various sorts, and getting involved in organized sports. Moreover, Alexander et al. pointed out that this is not reducible to any kind of checklist of activities that are educational in the traditional sense. Viewed through the

"developmental lens" we have been discussing here, in particular the relevance of differences in life experiences and their impact on the process of "becoming a learner," what middle-class and affluent children had in the summer was more opportunity to be in the world. Overall, "the more privileged of America's youth have had a host of developmental, cultural experiences which leave them to varying degrees and in varying ways open to learning" (Newman & Fulani, 2011, p. 5). Less privileged children have not been helped to grow in this way (see Heath, this volume).

A second resource for this approach derives from the work of K. Anthony Appiah, a cultural theorist and philosopher interested in political and moral issues, who also can be said to attend to the "development issue." He is deeply concerned, for example, about the destructive effects of identity politics as African Americans and other identity-defined interest groups have competed with each other for social policy and, in particular, some of the ways in which identity becomes categorical, rigid, and defining. Appiah (1997) developed and advocates for what he calls "the cosmopolitan patriot," the individual who is a citizen of his or her particular country and at the same time a citizen of the world. For Appiah, the idea that one can have more than one cultural identity is an important one, because it means that where one happens to have been born, one's ethnic identity, and one's racial or religious ancestry, do not define in a fixed way who one is as a person. One's identity can be created and recreated.

In a similar way, the *All Stars Project* approach to developing inner city youth rests on the recognition that insofar as identity comes to be construed in a narrow way, little growth is possible. In concurring with and expanding on Appiah, Fulani (2007) argued,

> Narrow identities give rise to narrow views of the world and even create a tendency to view oneself as a victim of one's life circumstances. . . . A central All Stars practice is to give young people the opportunity to participate in more cosmopolitan environments. . . . In organizing and creating these experiences . . . young people choose to . . . become active creators of their lives. (p. 4)

Appiah's contribution also weaves in another feature of relevance: play. In his work with Amy Gutmann, they recommend that we engage in "identity play," for example, that we step back from our identities, see that they are not always so important and not all of who we are. They describe this as "the imaginative work of constructing collective identities" (Appiah & Gutmann, 1996, p. 105). Here, they are hinting at a different and more performatory formulation for human social life, including moving from a life that is fundamentally about who you are to a life where we are not

so narrowly defined. Rather, by virtue of our human capacity to play, perform, and pretend, we can be simultaneously "who we are" and "who we are not," a formulation coined by Newman and Holzman (1993) and elaborated later.

Third, and most recently, the *All Stars Project* has been able to draw support from the growing number of researchers and practitioners who emphasize the importance of creativity for education. Sir Ken Robinson, for example, has famously discussed the long-term social and economic consequences of educating people out of their creative capacities (Robinson, 2001). Robinson and others generally do not explicitly discuss the special impact of this on youth living in low-income communities, but they have sounded the alarm in a way that urges us to take seriously the possibility that our youth in inner cities cannot become good learners without us investing in their development.

Fourth, social therapeutics, a psychology of becoming developed by Newman and Holzman over the course of 40 years of organizing and joint intellectual work, has had a direct influence on the *All Stars Project* development and performance approach. Newman was the architect and social engineer of numerous political, cultural, therapeutic, and educational projects, including the *All Stars*. Newman and Holzman's writings are also extensive and wide ranging, including psychology and other social sciences, education, philosophy, postmodernism, and activity theory. Always centrally relevant was Newman's work as a practicing therapist and his commitment to helping people with their emotional problems without relying on what he took to be philosophically and scientifically problematic notions (e.g., the notion of "the inner self"; see Holzman, 2011; Newman, 1999).

In the context of social therapeutics, performance is a transformative, developmental activity. It is a mundane human activity that gives expression to an essential human characteristic, our capacity to be who we are and who we are not at the same time (Holzman, 2009; Newman & Holzman, 1993, 1997; Performance Therapy, 1997). It is the activity that allows human beings to develop beyond instinctual and socially patterned behavior (Holzman, in press). In developing social therapeutics, Newman and Holzman were influenced by the early writings of Marx, the later writings of Wittgenstein, with the work of the early Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky playing an especially inspirational role in their discovery of the necessary relationship between performance and development.

In his studies of the process of young children's learning and development, Vygotsky (1978) rejected Piaget's notion of development as a fundamentally individual process, asserting instead that it is both social and individual:

> Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first on the social level and later, on the individual level; *first, between* people (*interpsychological*) and then *inside* the child (*intrapsychological*). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher mental functions originate as actual relations between human individuals. (p. 57, emphasis in original)

From this perspective, it is the total social environment surrounding the child—including other people, such as caregivers, educators, and peers, and the social speech used for communication and engagement in social practices—that creates a *zone of proximal development* where the child can do with others what he or she does not yet know how to do alone (see Daniels, this volume). Newman and Holzman drew inspiration from Vygotsky's understanding of how young children develop into speakers of a language, or languages, and from the importance he gave to play in enabling children to perform ahead of their current level of development. In these ideas, Newman and Holzman saw a glimpse of what the process of human development looks like.

In discussing children's play, Vygotsky (1978) noticed ". . . a child is always above his average age, above his daily behavior. In play, it is as though he were a head taller" (p. 102). For Newman and Holzman (1993), Vygotsky's description of play as "a head taller" seemed the perfect metaphor for filling out (completing) Vygotsky's own observations about the social interactions involved in language learning. They linked what they described as creative imitation with performance, and performance with a dialectic of both being and becoming:

> Imitation is a critically important developmental activity because it is the chief means by which in early childhood human beings are related to as other than and in advance of who they are. Mothers, fathers and other adults relate to infants and babies as capable of far more than they could possibly do—they relate to them as speakers, feelers and thinkers. In the case of language that is imitated, for example, adults relate to young children not as parrots, but as speakers. (p. 151)

Parents and caregivers improvise with their infants in advance of the baby's current level of development. One way to understand this is that the adults relate to babies as "becoming" participants in everyday social practices. Paying particular attention to the role of language in interactions, Newman and Fulani (2011) noted that

> Children learn to speak by interacting with adults—typically their parents—who "pretend" that the child is speaking when he/she is actually babbling (goo goo, gag ga, etc.). In that ongoing social exchange, conversations which are imaginary (the baby is only babbling, not speaking) eventually become real as the child becomes a speaker (the thing that the adult pretended he or she was). . . . Development is . . . an act of pretending that becomes reality. (p. 4)

This Vygotskian-inspired picture not only clarified the learning process of early childhood, but also illuminated what it might look like to continue development throughout the life course. Just as important, the picture clarified the use of "relating to as a head taller" and performance in a conscious effort to reinitiate development that has been limited by our over-institutionalized lives and, in the case of many marginalized youth, by racism, discrimination, and poverty.

Newman and Holzman's (1993) Vygotskian-inspired investigation of social therapeutics and children's learning yielded an additional discovery, the self-reflexivity or "that-ness" of the developmental learning process: "when people are related to as capable of doing what they do not know how to do, they discover not only how to do what they do not know how to do, but equally important, that they can do it" (Holzman & Newman, 1987, p. 116). They argued that "learning that" should be recognized and attended to as a meta-aspect of learning, much like "learning how to learn," a concept widely adopted by educational theory in the 1970s. They hypothesized that "it may well account for how it is that learning in the first few years of life is so rapidly and qualitatively transformative" and that this is another critical experience in performing (Holzman, 2009, p. 47).

ALL STARS PROJECT PERFORMANCES

> The point of the All Stars program is helping people to understand that we all do endless kinds of performances. You perform with your family in this way. When you're hanging out on the corner, you perform that way. When you're going down to Merrill Lynch, that's another performance. We're all capable of doing endless kinds of performances, different kinds of performances. To me, that's the central point of the program; that's what development is. . . . Development means learning that you're not locked into one performance for everything we do, but that we all have the capacity to do different performances in different situations. (Fred Newman, East Side Institute for Short Term Psychotherapy [ESI], 2002)

In this section, I offer three examples of the *All Stars Project's* socially informed performance activity: the first two from the *All Stars Project*'s flagship program, the *All Stars Talent Show Network* (ASTSN), and the third from a new *All Stars Project* initiative, *Operation Conversation: Cops and Kids.* Each example provides just a snapshot of what becomes possible as a result of engagement with *All Stars.*

ASTSN, our first program, started in a church basement in the South Bronx, and involves inner-city young people, ages 5 to 25, in producing hip-hop talent shows in their neighborhoods. The program cycles through different neighborhoods throughout the year, and each cycle consists of an open audition, in which everyone who auditions "makes it"; a mandatory performance workshop; and the talent show, where they perform for an audience of family members, friends, and neighbors, often numbering in the many hundreds. The young people are also the producers of the talent shows from start to finish. They recruit performers through community outreach, follow-up phone calls, and mailings. They load and set up equipment, run the lights and sound, manage the box office and stage, and emcee. ASTSN staff and volunteers give the young people the support they need to perform these roles.

Over the last 30 years, there have been more than 300 ASTSN talent show events in New York City, and we estimate that more than 50,000 young people have participated over that time. The talent show network has become part of the life of the communities in which the program activities take place. In the mid-1990s, ASTSN program directors added "the alumni rule," requiring returning talent show participants to organize at least one "first-timer" per audition, thereby giving young people a structured way to give back and to build the program even as they benefited personally. This has helped to produce a large and informal community network of ASTSN managers—young people, typically in their teens to early 20s, who organize and "manage" groups of performers—that promote the program and further spread ASTSN performance and development practices.

As noted above, each talent show cycle consists of an open audition, a performance workshop and the talent show. The performance workshop plays a special role in helping young people experiment with extending performance into their day-to-day lives. As noted by Pamela A. Lewis, the *All Stars Project's* Vice President of Youth Programs, who has led the ASTSN hands on for more than 20 years:

> Good afternoon and welcome to the All Stars Talent Show Workshop for our Carnarsie Show. If you get anything out of the All Stars, I want you to be self-conscious in your life that everything

> you do is a performance. Walking down the street is a performance. How you interact with your mother. You can decide if you want to be reactive. If you want to talk. You can decide if you want to hit somebody because you happen to be mad at them, or if you want to go somewhere and write a poem and then come back and talk about it later. You can make a decision how you're going to interact and carry out your life. (ESI, 2002)

Young people come to the ASTSN because it gives them the chance to do something they love to do: to sing or dance or rap. In a more traditional talent show program, the focus of a performance workshop might be on improving those singing, dancing, and rapping skills. However, in the ASTSN, young people's attention is drawn to the activity of performing itself: the "that-ness" of performing. Lewis tells young people that the point of the workshop is to help them discover that they can create performances and make use of that to create new forms of self-expression and self-realization. In other words, if you can perform onstage, you can perform in life.

Having been instructed to bring an original poem to the workshop, participants are split into groups with young people they do not know and read their poems to one another. Guided by a "skit director," usually an older teen and volunteer member of the production team who has been trained for this role, they combine their poems into a skit, and then perform their skits on stage in front of all the other groups. What follows is an excerpt of this process for one group, made up of five young people—ranging in age from 7 years old to late teens, all female except for a 19- or 20-year-old male rapper—and two young adult female skit directors (ESI, 2002). The group gathered outside the high school building to develop their skit, and started by taking turns sharing their poems.

SNAPSHOT 1: THE DREAMING SKIT

> Brianna: Love is the answer to all things, and my prayers have been answered. You waited for me to say that it was OK and you would be OK.
>
> Jamel: Make time to lose time . . . still looking for someone to light your glamour cigarette.
>
> Tiffany: Like a thief in the night, you stole my heart and for a precious moment I felt as free as a bird and as loved as a newborn baby.
>
> Jasmine: I guess until I get tired of living sadly, I'll keep on making excuses to be unhappy.

The group then moves on to creating and rehearsing a skit.

> E'Lisa: So we need to create a skit, like a two minute skit, so any ideas

of what we need to do the skit on? How can we go about doing it? First we have to . . .

Lorena: We need a setting. We need a scene . . . You have any ideas? (Responding to a suggestion) . . . Waking up smoking a cigarette?

E'Lisa: OK. How 'bout he fall asleep smoking a cigarette and then the rest of this play is his dream.

Lorena: And we'll all do a line from our poem, a good line . . . about feelings, things that you're dreaming about while you're smoking a cigarette . . . You know, so everyone can come out . . . Does anyone object to this idea or does everyone like it?

Participant: It's cool . . .

E'Lisa (putting Jamel "center stage"): OK. You're going to do your part. You should be in a chair so it seems like you are sleeping. (she then says to the rest of the performers) We're going to be in the wings . . . and we just need to know who's going to go first . . . so it can flow properly.

The rehearsal begins with Jamel standing with his cigarette. He kicks off the skit with the first line and the other workshop participants come "center stage" and say theirs, often adding some kind of theatrical gesture that they take to represent a thought in a dream.

Flick my ashes everywhere . . .
What will be today and what will be tomorrow?
Want to live my life like this.
I would like to be able to do many things.

A short time later the group is on stage, performing the skit in front of hundreds of youth. With Jamel now seated center stage, asleep, cigarette in hand, participants walk to the mic one by one.

Jasmine: See you smilin' but you're not happy.

Tiffany: Too many affected . . .

Brianna: I give more life to her because there is no other who can take the place of my dear mother.

E'Lisa: What you are in life, you are to me in spirit.

LaShanda: Irresistible thoughts, but times, I feel hard.

Lorena: When the sun sets, I dream.

And finally, Jamel, awake, brings the skit to a close: "All these thoughts, but hey, that's my life." The audience wildly cheers the performers.

This example might bewilder readers who do educational theater in the sense that the *All Stars* skit has no plot and no character, and it does not involve young people deciding what they want to say or express, either individually or collectively, about their lives or the world. Here the task is

not a "what," or what they have to say, but a "that," or that they are creating and performing an activity. The young people's task is to bring something to the table and create with it. Their individual poems, the material they are working with, are neither glorified nor devalued, but become a tool to help the young people have the experience of being successful in investing what they have in creating something new.

The skit activity also helps young people to participate in creating an environment in which not only they, but everyone, can perform and grow. Young people do not have this experience often. Certainly, it is not commonly organized in school. Here, everyone is focused on the group's performance, and in this way (and like the babbling baby) is able to take more risks to perform ahead of themselves. This is one of a number of impacts that young people make note of in their comments:

> I like how they got the workshops going because it gives everybody a time to get to know each other . . . you know through the day of that show, when that person get off stage . . . you know you gonna make your friends . . . you know that was good, you did your thing. (Al-Tarik, 2002)

> It helps us put on a better performance for the day of the show, like for the audience, we won't be as nervous because we all know each other. (Michelle, 2002)

> The fact that you like, composing it with people you don't know, makes it better because like, you don't know them, they don't know you . . . so you feel like everybody's in the same situation . . . (Darnell, 2002)

> I gotta know you as a person in order to perform wit' you, so I'm not really feelin' that but, in a sense, I am feelin' that . . . that get me accustomed to start from . . . feelin' that . . . (Antoine, 2002)

> Everybody get a chance to know each other . . . you got more courage. (Randy, 2002)

> Other talent shows, you audition and then you have the show . . . but when you go home between that . . . you feel kind of scared and you don't know what to do . . . and the workshop part is much better because, so you can . . . um . . . so they warm you up. (Elena, 2002)

In the workshop, ASTSN staff mix the young people together; for example, they are of varying ages and belong to the different "acts" that will be "competing" against one another in the show. It is therefore striking

that the experience of "knowing each other" is so important, valued, and valuable to the participants, e.g., giving them "courage." Moreover, it is interesting that this is accomplished in a nontraditional way; the young people are getting to know one another not by exchanging details of their lives, but by creating with and alongside one another.

Newman and Fulani (2011) noted this—an appreciation of the other—as one of the important and sophisticated development skills promoted through ASTSN performances. In *Let's Pretend*, they discuss the tremendous energy the ASTSN gives to organizing how the audience performs (Newman & Fulani, 2011). At the auditions, there is a "congratulations chorus" made up of young people who lead the audience—the other young people auditioning and parents—in saying to every performer, "Congratulations! You made it!" At the talent shows, the emcees, also young people, tell the audience, which is often made up of hundreds of young people and families, that every act is a winner. They direct the audience to applaud loudly and expressively for each performance. Newman and Fulani (2011) characterized this as the audience members, young and old, having a collective experience of appreciation. Further, they discussed how this sophisticated development skill is connected in complex and critically important ways to learning and becoming part of the larger, mainstream culture. Appreciation is closely connected to the ability to actively engage with others in self-expressive ways. "If young people are expected to appreciate learning, for example, they must first of all be helped to appreciate" (Newman & Fulani, 2011, p. 6). Finally, they point out that appreciation is essentially performatory:

> It is highly subjective, in that we might all have varied objects that we appreciate. Yet appreciation itself takes a common form in the culture. And here's what's important. Appreciation is fundamentally performatory. Like pain, it is individualistically experienced by the person in pain, yet it is commonly performed. We learn to express our pain in fairly common ways even though all of our pains are different. The same can be done with appreciation. And mastering that performatory ability is but a part of our ability to perform, indeed be, in a common culture. (Newman & Fulani, 2011, p. 6)

They go on to point out how prevalent it is to think that young people need to "be appreciated" in order to succeed in school and in life, but that in fact "being appreciative" is of even greater value when the fundamental issue is being/becoming part of the larger culture. Moreover, and echoing Vygotsky's concept of cultural development as appearing first on the social level, ensemble or collective performance is the critical tool for accomplishing this.

Recently, the *All Stars Project* has launched several new initiatives that extend afterschool development to adults and that make use of the *All Stars* approach to address specific problems such as tensions between youth and the officers who police their communities. The latter, *Operation Conversation: Cops and Kids*, was created by Fulani and Newman in 2006 in the wake of the shooting of a young Black man named Sean Bell by police officers outside a nightclub in Jamaica, Queens. Their goal was to change the culture of mistrust between "kids" and "cops" and to effect this transformation by using the same method of play and performance used in the talent shows to help them see each other and relate to each other in new ways. Since it started, Fulani has led 68 workshops involving 900 youth and 700 officers at Police Athletic Leagues, churches, housing projects, and community centers in all five boroughs of New York City. In September 2011, the NYPD adopted the program and made it an official part of the training of New York City police officers.

In *Operation Conversation*, Fulani (2012) uses performance and improvisation to break down the wall separating the respective experiences and perceptions of young people and police officers who walk the same streets, but who, in profound ways, also live in very different worlds.

> The kids walk around every day in fear of, on the one hand, being shot by the kids from the next block, and on the other hand, ending up in jail or worse because they've gotten into some escalating situation with a police officer. They feel trapped, and they see the cops as a hostile occupying force and view them as the enemy. For their part, the cops are in the community to fight crime, to intervene on violence and to protect lives, and they see the kids as disrespectful, angry and potentially violent. Both sides are mistrustful and suspicious of each other. (p. 4)

Indeed, at the beginning of the workshop, the tension between the cops and the kids is palpable. For the first hour, Fulani leads groups of 20—10 cops and 10 kids—in playing theater games and in improvising. She does not lead roleplaying in the traditional sense. Instead of asking cops and kids to play each other, she asks them to play a family that is deciding on a new pet, but cannot come to an agreement. In the next scene, another group plays the pets, and in the final scene the group plays a TV crew interviewing the family and their new pet in the park. "It's amazing how quickly everyone is smiling and laughing. I have found that even the most sullen kids and the most reserved police officers become hams in two minutes" (Fulani, 2012, p. 4).

In the second hour of the workshop, Fulani leads the group in a discussion.

Performing together and becoming a group that does things together has a discernible impact on what is possible in the discussion. The tension between the young people and the police officers is no longer overwhelming, and the cops and kids relate to each other, often for the first time, not as enemies, but as fellow human beings (Fulani, 2012). Sometimes, the interactions go way beyond that, as illustrated in the following two examples.

> I remember a Dominican cop from Upper Manhattan's Washington Heights neighborhood and a Dominican kid from Mott Haven in the Bronx finding a way to talk together about the fact that both of their fathers abandoned their families when they were little kids . . . and actually shared the pain and shame of that with each other and with the group.
>
> One police officer talked about how he calls his mother every morning before he goes to work to tell her that he loves her in case he doesn't make it home alive that night. That prompted a young man from the community to share that he, for the same reason, never picks a fight with his mom when he leaves the house. (p. 5)

In these examples, the young men and the police officers end up discovering—and sharing—subjective experiences that come with the often violent and frightening worlds in which they live or work. In actuality, many police officers grew up in the same or similar communities as the young people. And while that may not be apparent at the start, after an hour of performing together, they are able to have conversations that allow them to meaningfully express those commonalities. Even when they come from different class or racial backgrounds, the performing together experience allows them to listen to each other in a way that is not so determined by what they would normally assume about one another.

Finally, Fulani lines all the police officers up on one side, and all the kids on the other. First the kids go down the receiving line, shaking hands with the officers and thanking them for coming. Next, the officers go down the line of kids and shake their hands and thank them for coming. Then two officers and two kids thank each other on behalf of the group, and Fulani ends the workshop.

The program is continuing based on very positive feedback from young people and police officers. The police officers often speak about how the experience "breaks down barriers." Young people report that the workshop makes them more comfortable with police and helps them have a "much better dialogue with them, which makes for a better community" (Toulson, 2012, p. 1). Performing together has taught both that there are more choices and possibilities for relating.

A VISION FOR AFTERSCHOOL GROWTH

In this chapter, I discussed development as a key and consequential priority for youth who are marginalized by society in ways that many adults living outside of New York City, and often those within it, cannot imagine. What separates their affluent counterparts are differences in the developmental opportunities and experiences available outside of school that, among many effects, help them to become successful learners: young people who are open to learning and able to make the most of their school environments. This development gap can be effectively closed if we make use of young people's capacity and love for performance. Significant growth is possible if we create developmental afterschool programs.

When the *All Stars Project* was founded 31 years ago, it was a time when many reformers were going into the school systems, and they were more narrowly focused on learning. Newman and Fulani led fellow activists, myself among them, in going a different route: into the community. There was much suffering, pain, and anger in young people's lives, but there was also the opportunity to help young people to build and to create with what they had, good or bad. Our strategy was to build stages for them—environments for performing—and when we did, they had wonderful experiences. They could see themselves participating in their own growth. They better understood what they needed in order to participate and grow. They began to see themselves as contributors to their communities and the larger worlds outside of their communities.

In addition to building the performance-based programs described in this chapter, the *All Stars Project* has also built new kinds of physical stages for our young people. In 2003, we opened a 32,000-square-foot center for performance and development on West 42nd Street, and in 2013 we opened a 9,000-square-foot *All Stars Project* of New Jersey Scott Flamm Center for Afterschool Development in downtown Newark. Both are quite beautiful, but most importantly, they have been designed with performing in mind. More than 70% of both our 42nd Street and Newark spaces are theaters, or spaces that lend themselves to theatrical performance. Our vision for the future is that there should be afterschool development and performance centers in every neighborhood in our inner cities.

This chapter is about afterschool and outside-of-school contexts, and this is where the *All Stars Project* is concentrating our efforts both in our day-to-day work with youth and in our work to strengthen the afterschool field so that it can fulfill what we see as its tremendous potential as a transformative force in the lives of young people and communities. We also see our work as a positive contribution to the broader dialogue on education reform. As suggested by the quote from Newman and Fulani that opens

the chapter, "let's pretend" is a promising and powerful new option for what it is we can do for and with young people in every educational context, in school and out.

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