

Prevention as Education in the Age of Virtual Production

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Based on a filmed interview with Margaret Palmer, Community Education Manager and Kate Ramlow Meyer, Prevention Specialist

In order for primary prevention to sustain itself in the REEL Talk | Act Out program, the atmosphere must be a place where young people feel safe to express themselves. The environment should also be able to accommodate as many diverse learning styles as possible and offer opportunities for youth to continue to make films in a tiered system where they can become directors, mentors, or peer educators/advocates. The students' conceptual shift away from negative social norms should be accompanied by something other than a realization – they should be activated to point where they experience transcendence; social creativity. As filmmakers, students must see the scene/event from outside of it, as an object, a whole and not partially, from the inside. This is crucial to making an effective film and also indicates the quality of understanding of sexual violence prevention material.

In the Social Ecological Model, our program contains the four levels for prevention as parts of a [feedback loop](#). The individual and relationship parts are contained in the Aesthetic Drama half of the feedback loop and the Social Drama half contains the community and social aspects. The Aesthetic Drama addresses the awareness of cultural and social consciousness part of youth development. It also houses the theatrical component of performance which is the cultural exploration of ritual. We use the aesthetic half to help us discuss diverse learning and creative programming as a staging ground for life. Ritual here is a form of [cultural production](#) that promotes discipline and consistency as well as skill building. Social and self-reflection through aesthetics or dramatization are possible because [cultural performance](#) comes about in alignment with self-efficacy.

Performance is an integral part of the program in all its various definitions and is contained in both halves of the feedback loop. Performance in the sense of 'doing' enhances learning for kinesthetic learners, for example. Youth with kinesthetic intelligence learn better when they are moving and taking in information physically rather than hearing or reading about it. This process is also advantageous for spatial learners especially for students whose roles are director, cameraperson and even production manager. Many of REEL Talk | Act Out at-risk students who are "visual-spatial" learners are able to imagine the film world as a whole. They think in pictures and are able to encompass a problem in their minds without taking incremental steps to arrive at the solution.

We often see films being rewritten by different people and the director changing more than once within the span of one movie project. As a result, students become comfortable with leadership exchange. This corresponds with more empowering trends in managerial culture like "Constructive Clusters" which encourages the development of cultural norms that are self-actualizing and achievement-focused and encourages members to interact with others in the team. "Using the problem based model of creating multimedia projects not only increases teamwork but there is something intrinsically motivating about it because our youth are creating and editing pieces of products that are going to be shown to their own peers. So they hold themselves to almost a higher standard ..." says Margaret Palmer.

“I think there is a certain amount of virtual manipulation (handling or guidance of the virtualizing process) that happens with concepts because they take the storyboarding and then to the smart board, they can manipulate their experiences or their story line and then they can film and then re-edit it.” Margaret Palmer adds, “So they are really able to learn the concepts and manipulate them...” We think our students are motivated to take our class again and enroll in mentoring programs because they are comfortable with the virtual process where potential solutions can’t readily be determined. This is where prevention is tied to education and social ecology tied to technology and social media. Each sector of the ecological model offers its own opportunities for virtualization. For our film students, virtualization is where creative inquiry occurs. This is where the action is because interpretation, production of symbols, modes of influence and meaning are readdressed and negotiated at each successive sector of the ecological model.

We assure the students that their work is important and that it has a place in the public sphere. Through social media or screening programs, members will see how their film is received and mark a point in their process where their process stops momentarily. This is also true for their influence as mentors and their work in affiliated projects. When the students can see it come back to them, they begin to see their style (the form it takes) as the delivery system too. They learn about their audience giving them an informed anticipation of what forms have the most reach and how style can inhibit or extend that reach. This is where the social half of the feedback loop begins. Competencies acquired through engagement in the staging quarter of the Aesthetic Drama become critical on Social Drama of the loop, which now shifts from efficacy to efficiency.

When students see their films in a context outside of where they filmed it, they are able to re-consume it, re-imagine it, which offers another opportunity for “virtual manipulation” to happen. When they come back to work in violence prevention film projects they are again virtualizing the problem in films as mentors and facilitators. They are helping younger students take on the bullying problem with their own “studios” like, Back in Five Productions, Peanut Pictures, and Question Mark Productions.

Since we emphasize sexual violence prevention as a societal problem, the students do not reflect the issue on themselves as individuals. The beauty of performance and the filmmaking process is that it is not about identity construction or maintenance. It is about projection, which represents a developmental move into civic engagement. They are using aesthetics (how things look) as a tool for persuasion, making a compelling arrangement of filmed ‘events’ into a world.

Externalization is a learning tool, a developmental asset and speaks to the idea that sexual violence, as an offense, is not located in or limited to a self - a victim - it is available as something external, which can be dismantled and undone. It is a societal issue. This anticipates the move to the community, to the Social Drama.

The top quarter of the Social Drama diagram represents social action in the (real) world. We take this to include all actions in civic life including cultural performance of their films and their effects. The feedback loop speaks to the social, to creative inquiry and to the work we do with at-risk students in a very specific way that was illustrated by one of our youngest members. A facilitator asked a student to try out different styles that might be outside his comfort zone. He didn’t know what that meant. He said that his style basically defined him. She intervened, telling him he should “take a risk.” The feedback loop shows how we are asked to do the same – To make risk spread socially, to everybody – hopefully making others less *at-risk* because they are us and sexual violence is our “problematic complex.”