Revista Interamericana de Educación para la Democracia
RIED IJED
Interamerican Journal of Education for Democracy

Mapping Agency Through Aesthetic Production: : Producing and Enabling Youth as Civic Subjects

Vol 1, No. 1
September, 2007

Document available in:
www.ried-ijed.org

Mapping Agency Through Aesthetic Production: Producing and enabling youth as civic subjects

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Abstract

This paper reports on a recently completed research study that sought to trace or map the ways in which youth develop or enhance their civic agency as an outcome of their engagement with two different forms of aesthetic production. Using digital cameras and computer software or popular theatre technique, the participating youth explored issues of social concern to themselves and the community. By focusing on the ways the youth used, altered or 'took up' particular cultural tools (Wertsch, 1991, 19978) this study considers how the affordances and constraints of aesthetic knowledge production shapes the development of civic subjects and subjectivities.

Mapping Agency Through Aesthetic Production: Producing and Enabling Youth as Civic Subjects

Citizenship education has become a focus of rich inquiry in recent years as scholars and educators seek to overcome what have been described as the deficiencies of "assimilationist' forms of citizenship (Abowitz & Harnish, 2006). They trace in particular the role of cultural (Rosaldo, 1994; Lister, 2007; Stevenson, 2003 a, 2003b) and critical (Dillabough & Arnot, 2000; Kincheloe, 2001; Schwoch, Reilly & White, 1992) forms of citizenship as models which have sought to address these concerns. Largely in an effort to more accurately reflect and represent the multicultural complexity of contemporary society, Canadian educational scholars such as Hebert (2002), Osborne (1996; 2000), Sears (1994; 1996) and Sears and Perry (2000) have sought to transform the ways in which citizenship education is conceived of and practiced in Canadian schools. In the US, Rosaldo and Flores (1997) have explored the dynamics of oppression among Latinos in their development of citizen identities. Other critical educators such as Giroux (1991) and Westheimer and Kahne (2004) have written at length about the need for youth to engage in practices that develop a capacity for achieving socially just outcomes in society. Similarly, Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) describe a pedagogy of critical multiculturalism designed in part, to end social inequality.

Indeed much citizenship education scholarship has sought to explore how teachers can best prepare youth for their roles in creating an inclusive and pluralistic democratic society (for example, Allen, 1999; Ayers, 2004; Edelsky, 1999; Gutmann & Thompson, 1996; Haig Brown, 2002; Pike & Selby, 2000). The promotion of critical thinking or inquiry based approaches, particularly strategies that use current events and controversial issues to explore ways of achieving political consensus, have been advanced as appropriate practices that support this effort (Hahn, 1998; Sears & Perry, 2000). Deliberative

models of democratic reasoning (Englund, 2000; Gutmann & Thompson, 1996) are also endorsed as a central means of preparing youth for public debate and decision making in the democratic sphere. Such pedagogical practices are understood as a means of realizing the "inclusionary potential" (Lister, 2007, p. 49) of citizenship. As Kennelly (2006) has noted, such approaches are central to contemporary citizenship educators, emphasizing the preparation of a civic subject who will have the skills and knowledge to dialogically engage in pluralistic, public spaces.

In this article I take a different approach, by replacing a focus on teachers' efforts to prepare youth for their role as citizens—a focus on teaching for citizenship—to a focus on how the process of learning in civic spaces—the development of youth civic subjectivities and civic agency—can inform our practices as educators and researchers. Using a sociocultural theoretical framework, I will argue that a focus on aesthetic civic practices, that is, those activities and performances in which youth actively engage in processes of civic sense-making, provides evidence of how arts based methods of inquiry—specifically photography and participatory theatre—promote the production of authentic forms of civic knowledge and agency, while simultaneously constructing civic subjectivities. This will involve tracing the particular affordances or characteristics that these sociocultural tools (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991; Wertsch, del Río & Alvarez, 1995) have, and how this informs our understandings of civic subjects and agency. The primary concern therefore shifts from re-producing civic subjects who have knowledge of democratic processes, and exercise their potential for creating a more equitable society (i.e. becoming willful agents of change), to one in which social and cultural contexts, including educational spaces and educational tools, act to shape, influence or restrict how the civic subject is formed. This approach also allows us to consider how it is that everyday activities—the day to day practices and routines of human subjects—might be considered as sites of civic activity, and how particular social, cultural and historical locations may enable (or constrain) the development of agency, while emphasizing the multiplicity of civic sites and practices and the many ways in which civic subjects can enact their civic intentions. In the final section of the article I conclude by considering how a focus on developing civic subjectivities could enrich the ways in which we approach civic or citizenship education in schools and communities.

The Research Study

This article draws upon a recently completed study in which youth in two different sites in a northern British Columbia (Canada) urban environment were actively engaged with two different aesthetic approaches—participatory theatre and digital photography. Such approaches are considered aesthetic methods of inquiry, as well as sociocultural tools with the potential for enhancing civic commitment and agency. By sociocultural tools I mean those social instruments we use when we are engaged in activity. Cultural tools are therefore resources and artifacts used by subjects in everyday life, and they mediate or shape processes of meaning making, including the ways in which we create and enact our civic selves. Specifically, cultural tools include spoken discourses, practices or conventions, objects, iconic images, and social symbols. As such, cultural tools have particular features or affordances that enable and constrain the ways in which subjects and tool act and interact.

While human subjects may have many different subjectivities or subject positions from which they perform and interact with others, this study was particularly interested in how civic subjectivities were formed and enacted. When making reference to civic subjectivities, I am referring to a specific kind of subject position, one that reflects social, political and cultural beliefs about the world, and in particular, beliefs and understandings of how matters of **equity** or **inclusion** are to be pursued, maintained and achieved. Such subjectivities are constructed through

social relations; that is, they emerge from how we are positioned and position ourselves in relation to others through discourse, including social and cultural norms and conventions (Davies, 2000, p. 22). Attempting to understand how civic subjectivities emerge from and within discourses was an important strand of this research study.

As the above description highlights, it is the play between agent and object, agent and cultural tool, and his/her own subjectivities and experiences, as well as the historical, social and cultural discourses available, which act together to create a field within which agency is enacted. This conception challenges views of agency as situated within, and governed by ,the individual agent's will, and replaces it with a more socially and culturally complex model of how agents' acts are mediated within a field (Knappett, 2002). This field has multiple layers, both horizontal and vertical, with a range of discourses, patterns of power, and historical, social and cultural contexts. It is situated among personal subjectivities and subject positions, with a range of potential civic tools or practices available as resources, including conventional uses and misuses that enable (and constrain) agentive activity. The play and interplay of resources emphasizes the range of possible responses, affording the potential for new or redirected efforts towards social action.

Two important corollaries need to be explicated in this conception of mediated action and agency: the first is that cultural tools are themselves products of social and cultural production, and as such they bear particular meanings, uses, and sedimented histories that shape the ways that human subjects may access or use these sense-making resources (Daniels, 2001; Latour, 2002; McDonald, Le, Higgins & Podomore, 2005). The use of cultural tools is always situated, and agents "take up" tools from where they lie (Davies, 2000). Sociocultural tools are also transformed and/or altered through engagement in social activity; they are always laden and layered with cultural knowledge and power, while simultaneously transmitting the same. The second point helps to clarify my earlier discussion of affordances; that is, what might be made possible is a function of the multiple and potentially competing ways that such tools might be used or understood. With many competing social and cultural resources always in play, mediational artifacts can both enable and constrain human action or agency (McDonald, Le, Higgins & Podmore, 2005; Roth, Tobin, Elmesky, Carambo, McKnight and Beers, 2004; Wertsch, 1991, 1998; Wertsch, del Rio & Alvarez, 1995).

The Youth Participants

One group of youth attended an alternative education class[1] in a publicly funded high school—Northern High[2] -situated in a working class neighbourhood. The second group was made up of youth from many different social locations throughout the city, and were members of a youth theatre company called "Street Spirits."[3] In both sites a mix of gender, social class, race and ethnicity were present, although a majority of youth was of white, mixed European background. Aboriginal youth were represented in both settings, making up approximately 15 % of participants. At both sites, most youth could be characterized as "at risk" or "marginalized": for example, at both sites several youth were actively engaged in drug use (methamphetamines and marijuana), while others were in various stages of recovery. Alcohol was commonly consumed by most (80 % or more) of these youth, usually described as weekend "partying." Approximately 60% of these participants would be described as poor, the remainder working class. Some of the youth at Northern High were learning disabled and demonstrated problems with basic reading and numeracy tasks. Six of the youth at Street Spirits were high school dropouts, most living on their own or in foster care. At Northern High, the youth described their homes as "in the hood," understood in Big Town[4] to be the center of poverty and crime in this urban community. About

half of the youth at Street Spirits Theatre also lived in this particular urban neighbourhood.

There were a number of youth involved in the project; 13 at the first site and 14 at the second. The age range in site one was 16 to 19; the age range in the second site was from 14 to 22. In both cases, the teacher at Northern High and the theatre director at Street Spirits Theatre promoted youth involvement in civic action. At Northern High the most frequent manifestation of concern for civic action was through classroom debate and discussion of local political and civic issues. Their teacher was a self identified "critical pedagogue" (Giroux, 2001), who professed a philosophy of empowering youth through political action. At Street Spirits Theatre Company, the Artistic Director was a health care professional trained in participatory theatre methods, particularly Theatre of the Oppressed (Boal, 1985, 1993, 1995, 1998), who promoted social action theatre as a tool for social, economic and political transformation for marginalized and/or drug involved youth. These sites were therefore specific discursive communities in which youth were understood as potentially active and engaged citizens. As both a school and non school site were explored in this study, each also offered the potential to consider how different social locations might support or enhance civic agency.

Methods and Methodology

One of my central research questions concerned the range and nature of sociocultural tools available to youth in the two different sites of this study, and how these tools might be implicated in civically informed action. Participant observation, interviews and focus groups were used to gather data. Throughout this ten month study, I took ethnographic field notes that sought to document how different cultural objects, discourses or practices were used as tools for civic meaning making, and were either accessed or produced through action. Interviews and focus groups were taped and transcribed; at Northern High, student presentations were taped and photographed, while at Street Spirits theatre detailed notes were made following each performance, and rehearsal and one performance was video taped. In addition, a researcher notebook was kept, and self reflective notes used to make sense of how particular cultural tools afforded agency. Some segments of this self reflective and ethnographic work were shared with research participants, and the data was re-worked into collaboratively created texts. Finally, discourse analysis (Gee, 1999) was used a means of evaluating how particular processes and products might illustrate a civic orientation or commitment.

Research processes at Northern High. At Northern High, the participating youth were engaged in a range of activities leading up to the culminating project, the creation of a personal photo essay. I began by leading a series of focus groups as a forum for discussing matters of social concern to the participating youth. Over the course of ten weeks, we explored a range of issues, including family violence and violence against girls and women; aboriginal youth as police targets; drug and alcohol abuse; homosexuality; pollution and ir quality; the smoking pit policy[5]; missing aboriginal women; the teachers' strike[6] and class size; the sexualization and sexual exploitation of youth; and teen pregnancy. The second set of activities were focused on exploring the semiotics of image, and how particular meanings could be conveyed through visual signs, including colour, symbols, spacing, directionality, and other visual conventions. In general, this critical media study involved consideration of the semiotics of signs: that is, the way in which texts (written and visual) can be produced and read in multiple ways, and how such characterizations often reflect social and cultural norms. The role of the photographer as a social critic was discussed and explored with a local youth photographer, a former student of Northern High who had gone on to post secondary studies. In this way, the goal of taking civic action through photography was reinforced. Finally, the youth were asked to consider how they might use the digital camera to explore an issue of social concern to them and present their

understandings visually to their peers. The photo essay production process continued for approximately two months, and included such activities as field work, editing and modifying photos on software in the computer lab, accessing additional graphics on the internet, and using presentation software such as PowerPoint® for their final presentations. Three of the final projects took the form of poster boards, and seven were digital.

Research processes at Street Spirits. In the case of Street Spirits Theatre, the researcher took on the role of participant, and joined the company for a period of 12 months. During this time, the youth were asked to visit six different community locations to develop and perform a play in response to the needs and/or interests of the sponsoring group. This process was modeled after Boal's (1985, 1993, 1995, 1998) Theatre of the Oppressed, a method of participatory theatre based in Freirian goals of emancipation through the development of local literacies. Boal's method sought to provide a forum for Brazilian communities to actively engage in a theatrical process that expressed local social or political problems while creating knowledge that empowered people to act.

For Street Spirits Theatre Company, a somewhat modified process based on the Theatre of the Oppressed was developed; the first stage involved conducting a workshop with interested community members to explore the social or political concern, and introducing them to the processes of social action theatre. An important detail is the focus on embodying or enacting the issues of concern: this is not a verbal forum for discussion, but rather a setting in which the body is used to enact understandings. Usually about five youth actors lead this workshop, supported by the Artistic Director, engaging in movement and theatrical techniques such as body sculpting, visualization, mimicry and games. This is followed by the development of a play that sets out to characterize the problem, which in turn is developed into short scenes so that there can be a place for "community interventions" to occur. The final stage is the public performance: the play is performed once, as developed by the actors, and then re-staged with someone serving as "joker" to give instructions to the audience about how to stop the action and then take the place of an actor on the stage. Typically, the first performance lasts about 10 minutes; however, the complete process often takes as long as two hours, as community participants begin to intervene and explore alternative ways of responding to the dialogue and action of the play.

The Power of the Arts for Social Transformation

As Simons and Hicks (2006) have argued, the creative arts encompass different ways of knowing and understanding, and therefore provide an accessible means of entry into learning among otherwise disadvantaged adult learners (p 80). Indeed, a number of adult educators (Butterwick & Selman, 2003; Clover, 2006a, 2006b; Lawrence, 2005) have argued that the arts provides a powerful vehicle for giving voice to marginalized adult groups. There has also been some work among critical scholars using arts based methods of inquiry among marginalized youth; indeed, both theatre and photography have been used as means through which to empower otherwise marginalized youth. For example, the well documented Photo Voice studies (Booth & Booth, 2003; Goodhart et al, 2006; Wang, Morel-Samuels, Hutchison, Bell & Restronk, 2004; Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001) provide youth with a camera so that they can capture and then report on their own experiences as a means of influencing policy makers (interestingly, these studies have not taken place in schools but in community-based locations. de Castell & Jenson (2004) have also used video as a way of engaging queer and questioning youth in participatory research around a need for housing in Vancouver, BC, Canada.

In a similar vein, participatory theatre has also been used by researchers working with marginalized youth as a means of providing "voice" to otherwise unrecognized youth subjects (see for example

Dalrymple, 2006; Kennelly, 2006; O'Connor, O'Connor & Welsh-Morris, 2006; Sanders, 2004). These authors make a case for the power of theatrical processes for transformational learning and social change.

As this brief summary illustrates, there have been a considerable number of studies that trace the links between arts based methods and their capacity for empowering otherwise voiceless human subjects, including youth. Yet is the relationship between method and empowerment as simple or linear as this suggests? The nature of the study completed for this article posits that a sociocultural frame will allow for a more detailed inquiry into the nature of these links, providing educators and scholars with a more complex characterization of these processes. In what follows, I attempt to carefully map out the processes of civic knowledge production among the participating youth who used the specific aesthetic tools of digital photography and participatory theatre. I trace the affordances and limitations of the tool in order to consider how agency is constructed. However, before doing so a more detailed look at sociocultural theory and the implications for citizenship education is needed.

Sociocultural Theory

A Focus on Mediated Action

Sociocultural theory claims that the proper focus of investigation is human action (Wertsch, del Río & Alvarez, 1995, p. 10). Action may be internal or external, and a function of individual or group behaviour. The theory's conceptual goal is to "explore the relationships between human action… and the cultural, institutional, and historical situations in which this action occurs" (italics added, p. 11). Such a focus on the situated nature of action replaces a teleological approach (that is, a view in which the human subject initiates action in his/her interest) with one in which action is always a product of socially and culturally situated meaning. Understanding such action, moreover, involves tracing the dynamic tensions between the actor/agent and his/her situated location (p. 14).

In addressing this tension, sociocultural theory shifts the focus from one of how the subject initiates and controls action, to one about how the action also shapes and affects the human subject. In doing so, it becomes possible to consider how the human subject him/herself is a product of such action, drawing attention to how we "become" subjects[7], as we engage with a range of social, cultural and historic contexts in our activity. Indeed, by mapping actions, including how particular resources are drawn upon in particular settings and how these are used to produce and generate meaning, it becomes possible to trace the relationships between action and subjectivity.

Applying a Sociocultural Framework to Citizenship Education

This article argues that a sociocultural lens is a particularly useful approach for scholars interested in formulating a potentially different way of theorizing about civic engagement, and for considering what practices might promote the development of civically committed subjects. While a complete discussion of sociocultural theory's application to the field of citizenship education is beyond the scope of this article, there are two central features that help differentiate this research approach from others in the field of citizenship education. I will detail each in turn.

First, sociocultural theory permits moving from a study of the individual actor as the central figure and fully informed agent of democratic activity to one that considers how social, cultural, and historical contexts mediate (Wertsch, 1998) the actions of civic agents. Theories of mediated activity and action (McDonald, Le, Higgins & Podmore, 2005; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991, 1998; Wertsch, del Rio & Alvarez , 1995) introduce greater complexity into how we might characterize and

trace agency: rather than the action of an empowered, reasoning agent, agency can be re-conceptualized as a product of activity, and one that is socially and culturally shaped and constrained. Understanding how social, historical and cultural discourses or practices mediate agency is therefore a central theme of this article, and one that will be described in greater detail in subsequent sections.

Secondly however, a sociocultural framework permits a way of re-conceptualizing learning by considering how knowledge is produced rather than re-produced. Civic educators have devoted considerable thought to how to best educate their students for future citizenship. Yet as Lave (1996) has noted, much of what we consider to be learning and learning activity has been theorized as primarily a cognitive process; this view of learning divides thought from the world. A sociocultural perspective instead argues that all learning (action) is situated and constrained by its social settings, and is a complex and recursive process of enactment or performance (p. 5-9). Learning is therefore not a process of acquisition but rather a process of construction and transformation; a dynamic process of situated, mediated action. Once such a shift in theorizing is made, terms such as sense-making, meaning making and "becoming" are more accurate reflections of how learning activity and its commensurate effects on identity and subjectivity can be characterized. Using these terms emphasizes how learning (action) is socially and culturally produced in the "doing" of activity, and provides a different template for considering how civic knowledge might be produced.

Of central importance to this study is the link between learning and sense-making, and how the subject is simultaneously produced through this process. In order to consider or study this phenomenon, it is central to examine the processes and products of activity: in particular, activity that results in the production of texts that may illustrate or convey civic understandings. By texts I mean those discursive products which are the outcome of civic activities; these products may be visual, verbal, or embodied. The process by which such products are created, and the artifacts produced, are both important objects of analysis, each providing evidence of how agency is characterized and enacted. At the same time, the affordances—that is, the features or characteristics of particular activities—may also provide evidence of how some processes of knowledge production or meaning making may enhance civic learning and agentive interest.

This latter point is drawn from de Castell, Bryson and Jenson's (2002) notion of productive practices. They hypothesize that some pedagogical approaches have affordances which allow for enhanced agentive potential. A primary feature that must be addressed, they argue, is the authentic nature of the activity—that is, the activity must come from the interests and understandings of the learner/youth subject, and not rely on processes that seeks to reproduce what is already known or understood by others. Applying this finding to the field of citizenship education means that pedagogical practices should build upon the interests and everyday contexts of the youth subject, rather than projecting knowledge of formal roles and structures and encouraging youth subjects to use or re-use these to realize civic goals.

The notion of authenticity feeds into my final point: the sociocultural framework broadens the scope of how we characterize or describe the nature of civic activity. In considering how activity mediates our performance as civic subjects, we need to consider how all action, formal and informal, deliberative or otherwise, shape our civic selves and produce our understandings. This means that research studies should give greater attention to how everyday activities act to shape civic sense-making and develop civic subjectivities, including conceptions and beliefs about agency. Since all activity is socially, culturally and historically situated, the contexts in which these activities occur need to be more fully considered. Attending to the ways in which these contexts mediate our understandings and expressions of civic understanding may generate

important research questions. How do particular contexts, discourses or practices enable or constrain agents and the actions they take? How might such contexts shape the representations youth make of their civic understandings? These are important inquiries for the sociocultural civic scholar, and they are the questions that inform the next section of this article.

Northern High's Alt Kids: Civically Inspired Agents

In the case of the youth at Northern High, the social and cultural context of the school became important to document and explore in order to consider how cultural tools were implicated in the performances of agency among these youth. While the primary research goal was to trace the way in which one particular aesthetic practice (digital photography) shaped beliefs and practices of the youth civic agent, it was also important to note the many ways that a variety of sociocultural tools were "taken up" in a range of sociocultural contexts. The descriptions that follow try to illustrate this multiplicity.

As noted earlier, the youth involved in this project were members of an alternative classroom within a regular high school. The discourse of "alternative," or as the youth in this study called themselves—"Alt" kids—was well understood by the youth enrolled in this class. Officially, the school's discourse marked these youth as students who did not "fit" within the regular school regime: this was often a measure of failing to make sufficient academic progress in the "regular" class, but a student could also be considered as **socially** "unfit" as well. As unfit subjects then, the youth in this classroom were marked by their lack of compliance with the discourses of school success and achievement; yet it was also apparent that the youth marked themselves through their own alternative sub-cultural practices. In this case, the competing discourse situated "Alt" kids as cool, self directed, successful navigators through the hell of high school. As Luke, one of the youth noted, "Being in Alt is better, there is more interaction. You can work independent, come in knowing nobody, come out knowing everybody".

In addition to the discourses of school success and achievement, these youth were situated within (and often outside of) discourses of compliance. Adult control was exercised in a number of ways, including ongoing surveillance of the students as they entered and left the building, but also throughout the school day, through the form of hall passes. One particular discourse traced through the study was that of "success through achievement"; a series of rallies and assemblies were documented to demonstrate how youth subjects were constructed to either fit within or outside of this discourse. Not surprisingly perhaps, the youth in the Alt Ed class were positioned outside of compliance with these school norms of performance. While only briefly outlined here, understanding this context and the nature of the Alt Ed youth sub culture that developed in response to the school discourses of compliance and achievement is an important backdrop for understanding the ways that the camera was used, and afforded agency.

Affordances of the Digital Camera: The Camera as a Power Tool

The digital camera became a "power tool" (de Castell, Bryson and Jenson, 2002, ¶ 38) in the hands of its participants, a means to negotiate within and around the discourses of achievement and compliance: one of the first uses of the camera was as "cover" for students to wander through the school's corridors, public areas and grounds. The camera was used to flaunt and toy with the rules of the school about who was allowed in the hallways, while also affording its participants access to sites that were typically "off limits" to youth in the school. Even taking an "illegal" smoke break could be salvaged through the lens of the camera, as the youth negotiated their (mis) behaviour through the discourse of "school work", holding the camera in exaggerated ways in order to convince their interrogators of its educative purpose, a

reading consistent with the discourse of "doing" school work. An important point to note is the spontaneity of these actions; the deployment of the camera was not a premeditated act nor one that was rationally or cognitively developed through conscious or deliberate thought processes, but rather was the product of tool use in action, the "taking up of the tool where it lies" and the resignification of its social purpose in order to comply with the emergent need for "cover." In this context, the camera became a discursive signifier of permission rather than a practice of rule breaking; it also re-marked the youth in compliance with the norms of school achievement, as they were doing "a school project": the legitimate work of student subjects. By reconfiguring the discourses of achievement and rule following, the camera became a tool that enabled personal agency.

Enabling Resistance

Zoe's[8] photos featured her friends in the school: all of these were taken in the school's lobby, just outside the main office where the administrative and counseling services were housed. Her two friends were either sprawled on the furniture or posed standing close together and gazing directly into the camera. In two pictures they are smiling directly at the photographer; in another they have fixed stares, a look that suggests a mask, hiding their feelings. In another photo the group of friends appears defiant, with hoods of their sweatshirts over their heads and the one finger salute centered in the photo frame. The last shot is interesting, as Zoe exchanges places with one of the two friends and enters the photo on its right side, marking her role as both photographer and subject of the photo. Her raised eyebrows and rolled eyes seem to communicate some level of disapproval, while the other friend remains defiantly posed behind her.

For students in this school, the location of these photos would be clearly recognizable, as the entrance door or office door were visible in the background. The public production of knowledge—in the school corridor—is supplemented by its public display in the classroom. The camera acted as a tool for the expression of defiance or resistance while simultaneously creating a public space for the exploration and production of ideas that would otherwise be forbidden in spoken discourse, an activity made all the more powerful by its location near the school office.

Challenging the Status Quo: Counter Images as Creative Resistance

The youth who participated in this project became very interested in the capacity of the camera to distort, either by capturing examples of counter narratives that existed in the school, or by altering the nature of the image through the manipulation of the photo's compositions. Two images (figure 1 and 2) serve as examples to illustrate these points.

Figure 1 (Sky Hi) is an interesting example: it is a close up of the word "SKY" stenciled on one of the school's cinder block walls with a Chinese character next to it. This image is painted on one of the walls in the upper hallway of the school. When carefully examined, what becomes obvious is the word "HI" scratched into the black paint between the symbol and its written form. The black ink and white background wall creates a binary scheme, almost an ironic scheme in contrasting the solid opaque wall with the ephemeral implications of sky-high.

Figure 1. Sky "HI" photo taken by research participant.

It also evoked other discourses of non compliance and drug use, topics that generated considerable discussion among the participating youth. Many of the photos were an amazing mix of studies in texture and design, each a creative effort to bring together the material and the social world of the school in interesting and unusual ways. Such explorations, as noted earlier, focused on creating discourses of resistance or tracing resistant activities, demonstrating that these non complying students had power and agency despite the school discourses which marked them otherwise.

Figure 2 offers an example of how some youth used colour to conceptually queer or problematize the world in which they lived. In this image, a typical rural scene is transformed by reversing the natural colours of the environment with a white or colourless scheme. As the youth who produced the image suggested, Big Town is a place where "whitewashing" is a frequent practice; an aboriginal youth, Luke, commented on how it might also represent a community that saw itself as a "white place."

Figure 2. The great white north, photo by research participant.

In each of these examples, the creative play of the camera was an affordance that enabled potentially deeper engagement in how messages and image could be used to convey civic intentions. However, the digital technology also had affordances through which images could be altered, enhanced or emphasized: this rhetorical potential allowed for a way of playing with the ways in which knowledge is made public, and how this shapes or informs civic intention or responsibility. These examples help illustrate how the processes of knowledge production are linked to practices of becoming a civic subject.

Photo Essays as a Call to Action.

The photos that were produced and displayed as a part of the photo essay project itself also served as artifacts through which to consider how civic agency was understood and imagined: civic capacity or effort was evidenced in autobiographical references and narratives, illustrating through image the civic dispositions attributed to an individual or group. For example, Bobby's presentation of his work with a Street Ministry whose work was focused on feeding and housing the homeless, drew attention to how civic intentions could be realized through group effort.

Civic effort was also represented in five other photo essays; their narratives constructed moral tales designed to evoke discourses of civic responsibility. For example, Jade's narrative about teenage binge drinking was designed to fulfill the goal of the photo essay, but as she produced its images, she began to talk about how it could be used as a presentation to her local Indian Band Council and Traditional Chiefs in order to influence their decisions about making investments in recreational infrastructure in her community[9].

Jade's photo essay also provides evidence of how the digital format invited creative and experimental design, but also its potential in developing hybrid visual narratives as policy tools designed to shape and influence decision makers. I use the term hybrid to emphasize how her use of the technology permitted a means of ironically juxtaposing images in order to create binaries to simultaneously influence its viewer, while situating herself as a member of this sub culture or community (See figure 3). By locating and then pasting symbols found on the Internet onto her own

photo images of youth engaged in night time drinking, she created a dual purposed narrative: one as a call to civic action, the other recognizing the important sub cultural practices of some aboriginal youth in the community.

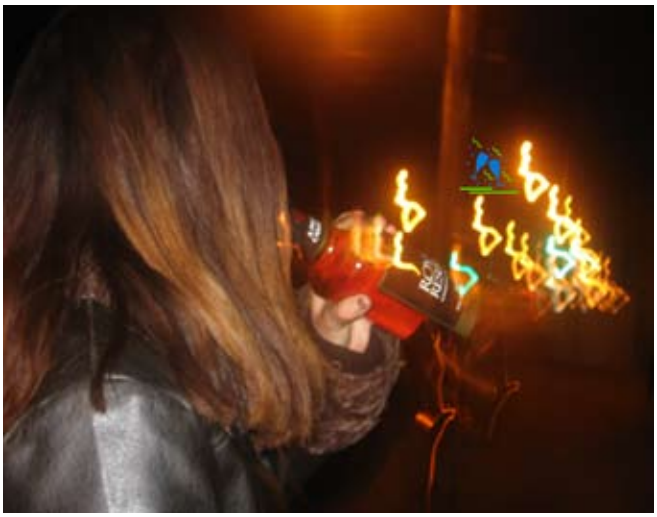

Figure 3. Nighttime drinking, taken by research participant, Jade.

These examples help illustrate how the digital technology also had affordances through which images could be altered, enhanced or emphasized: this rhetorical potential allowed for a way of playing with the ways in which knowledge is made public, and how this shapes or informs civic intention or responsibility. These examples also help illustrate how the processes of knowledge production are linked to practices of becoming a civic subject.

Constraints of the Cultural Tool

As the above discussion has suggested, digital technologies have a range of affordances that support agentive civic activity among youth and therefore could be considered productive pedagogies (de Castell, Bryson & Jenson, 2002) through which authentic civic engagement might be realized. Yet this discussion would be incomplete without identifying some of the ways in which the format and the technology constrained or limited civic agency. In particular, this project put limitations on the form that youth could use to explore matters of social concern, by requiring the use of cameras rather than other means through which to represent civic understandings. Certainly the conventions of photography and how it is used as a means of rhetorical persuasion are not new uses; these techniques and socially understood grammars of visual design were implicitly invoked during the photo essay project.

However, another feature of productive pedagogies (de Castell, Bryson & Jenson, 2002) is that they permit exploration of dominant or normative discourses, so that beliefs and understandings can be critiqued and examined for their social and cultural effects. To some extent, this was a condition met when the camera was used as a power tool for resignifying discourses. The photo project itself, however, was more constraining in that it did not engage directly in questioning traditional discourses of civic agency or civic dispositions, but simply "took them up," reiterating their normative or conventional use as tools of political persuasion. This is not to suggest that the camera should not be used as a tool for exploring civic action, but rather that the intentions of the research, represented in the discourses used in framing the photo essay project, failed to consider non-conforming uses, nor were conscious efforts made to suggest how civic tools such as photography could be used to deconstruct or critique normative conventions. This is a limitation that a future study may be able to more adequately address.

Before leaving the discussion of Northern High, I want to more fully consider how the process of agency may be understood to be a product of situational activity by providing one example of how agency developed as a result of participating in the photo essay project. In the example that follows, I unpack how agency as a field of action might be traced in Tyler's narrative about pollution and the need for civic action.

Becoming a Civic Subject: Tyler's Investigation into Pollution

Tyler was a relative newcomer to the Alt Ed. Class, and as a result was often on the fringe of conversations in class. Yet the day that pollution in Mill Town[10] became a topic of conversation in a focus group, he became very animated: "That pulp mill's at the end of my street. It's spewing out loads of crap into the air. I mean, when we're driving, we see all this stuff, its just filling the air, and we breathe that too." He went on to share his understanding of the recently released study of the air quality in Mill Town, reciting its facts and relating it to his own asthma and trouble breathing. Several other students joined the conversation; heads nodding and affirmative 'yeahs' murmured throughout his narrative helped show how he was making a new connection with the other Alt youth.

Several weeks later, when decisions were being made about what topics students would pursue for their photo essay, Tyler was quick to assert a claim on doing a visual story on pollution. "I can take pictures by my house… and especially in the morning when you really see it". At another point during this project, Luke organized a field trip so that final shots could be taken: at Tyler's insistence, one stop would be to the grounds surrounding the pulp mill. Once there, he spoke animatedly about the technology of the mill as well as pointing out various locations where pollution was visibly evident, and places that were not necessarily immediately apparent as sources for water pollution. During this stop, the narrative of health and pollution was taken up by several other youth, who shared their own stories about pollution-generated illnesses.

Later, in the lab, Tyler put together his local shots of pollution from various points around the city. It was soon apparent that Tyler was not very familiar with the computers or software; he had trouble saving his data and on at least three occasions he had been required to set up new account passwords, losing his work each time. He persisted in creating the photo essay however, his inquiry a catalyst for learning how to use the technology more effectively. Asking questions and following the example of other students, he soon learned how to imbed photos and text into the software.

In the final stages of the project, each participating youth was asked to share his/her photo essay. During Tyler's presentation, his verbal style seemed reminiscent of the documentary reporter: his tone was brisk, his language precise and emphatic as he matter-of-factly drew on the written text next to each image.

Tyler: The title is world pollution [points to text on screen]. I decided to call it that because we live in Mill Town and it's the third worst place in Canada for air pollution. And that's just the smog, from in the bowl. That's sick. I gotta live in that every day for six hours a day. I think that's pretty sick.

> Image 2: And that's the end of my street. The Mill Town pulp mill.
> Image 3: That's across the river at the other pulp mill.
>
> Image 4: [picture of dead, bloated pig, in discolored water. Tyler does not speak]. {Other student voices: Yuk! Yeww! Where did you get THAT picture?}
>
> Image 5: That's Big Town in the morning, that's like the exhaust, every single day.
>
> Image 6: [picture of garbage, water bottles floating on water; an oil-like film on its surface]. {Other student voices: How can people do that? They should recycle that. Someone has to drink that… gross!}
>
> Image 7: [picture of creek bed, logs in the stream, sides ripped away and exposed dirt, tree

stumps right up to creek bank evident]. {some student murmuring, but indistinguishable}.

As the above transcript demonstrates, Tyler began to speak less as the presentation continued. It was as if the visual images spoke for themselves. When the final four or five images were shown, connecting the pollution of Mill Town with other locations on the globe where pollution was an issue, Tyler became completely silent, leaving the images to expertly frame his story. In fact, the entire room became silent as youth voices were overtaken by the power of the images on the screen.

In this short vignette, the experiences of Kyle are used to demonstrate how civic subjectivities can be mapped through specific social experiences and contexts; it also helps to illustrate how subjects and objects are relationally engaged, each interacting within particular discursive communities, but taking up civic tools in ways that support subjectivities-in-play. For example, the camera itself could be considered a tool for agency, providing a literal lens to the local sources of pollution in the community. Yet the software in the lab could also be considered a civic tool, as it was used by Kyle to construct a more powerful narrative about the effects of pollution on human subjects in communities around the world. The images as well were afforded specific meaning in the context of a narrative that called youth (and others) to action. The affordances of the technology gave Kyle access to new and rich visual displays that supplemented his personal knowledge and experiences, and that enabled him to engage others in a call-to-action. The narrative first situated pollution in Kyle's own experiences, familiar to these students, and then linked image and text to the broader context of pollution outside of the community. Importantly, Kyle's developing expertise provided him with the opportunity to be recognized by his peers, affording him both social and civic spaces from which to act.

This draws attention to my earlier claims about the ways in which agency is a product of multiple planes of activity: in this example, the field is a complex space made up of human subjects interacting within ecological and health discourses, while also tracing the residual effects of Kyle's developing sub-cultural recognition, an essential component which gives effect to his developing civic self. In other words, his social capital has become integrally linked with his environmental knowledge and helps to situate him as a civically informed subject. This case also highlights how the socio-historical traces of the camera – particularly its widely accepted use as a means of transmitting factually oriented, documentary style knowledge – simultaneously enabled and constrained a developing civic self.

In summary, this example has sought to illustrate how the civic self is always a product of situated activity within multilayered social, historical, and cultural fields, each informing the other, coming together to construct moments that demonstrate emerging civic subjectivities. It also draws attention to considering how when we engage in processes of "unpacking" an agentive act, we need to consider how past actions and histories "seed" new actions. In this way, agency can be understood as a relational practice, one that resides in the tension between agent and object, culture and event, each acting to mediate the subject's actions.

Site Two: Participatory Theatre

At Street Spirits Theatre Company, the participating youth were frequently contracted by local community groups to explore, through theatre, social problems specific to a community or agency. For example, during the course of this study, the youth actors were asked to develop plays for community and school productions that explored teen pregnancy; for a parent group around Crystal Meth use; for the staff of a financial institution about how to deal with sexual harassment in the workplace; in an aboriginal community struggling with addictions; and in a community that was concerned

with women's access to health services. Prior to each event, members of the community or institution were randomly interviewed by the Street Spirits youth members in a range of public locations—malls, schools, recreational facilities, for example—to canvas local community members about the topic or issue that had been initially identified for investigation. In some cases, full day workshops were sponsored so that community members would have the opportunity to explore, through improvisational theatre techniques, enhanced understandings of the problem or its consequences to the community. The latter part of the workshop would be devoted to designing a short theatre presentation focused on the identified issue(s); this short play would be performed publicly in the evening. The play's Joker (usually the Artistic Director of the Company) would act as commentator to encourage the members of the community to stop the play at various times and replace various youth and/or community actors in order to try out potential solutions in response to the play's central and secondary conflicts. As such, the play offered a means of "rehearsing for life," a safe environment in which to try out ideas about how to engage in community based problem solving.

Producing Knowledge in Theatre

Boal's (1985, 1993, 1995, 1998) Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) was originally conceived as a tool of empowerment for class oppressed Brazilians; in its North American context, its theatrical mechanisms have been adapted to more generally explore other forms of oppression or discrimination. The forum theatre process, as adapted by Andrew[11], the Artistic director of the Youth Theatre Company, is an interesting combination of self directed action, improvisation and dramaturgical direction. It does not require much in the way of props or costumes. As a general rule, only a few chairs are used to simulate a room or space, although occasionally the Joker (Andrew) will narrate an opening to a scene by saying "It's a day later," or by giving other information about which the audience needs to be aware.

The process of play development is a combination of actor initiation and dramaturgical direction. Andrew, as Director, observes as the actors initiate and play out a scene, and then may become involved in discussions at its conclusion. Often, discussions focus on how actors' experiences informed the events being enacted through improvisation; it is a very flexible and fluid process where dialogue and actions evolve through participant, actor, and director collaboration. When a line or an action really works, someone says, "Ok, let's keep that," and the actors continue to collaborate as they build new scenes, often resulting in the addition of "before" and "after" events or the construction of "back stories" for characters to support the developing action. Other actors or community members who may be observing the play development process also become active participants as they add comments or ideas to the scenes that unfold. In this way, ideas, images, conversations and scenarios are drawn from the community participants' understandings and experiences. If interviews have been conducted within the community by the youth actors, these issues are also explored so that the play deals with local issues in an authentic context. Community members are encouraged to participate in the play creation process and in taking on roles for the final play production.

Affordances of Participatory Theatre

As the process outlined above illustrates, collaborative and shared decision making in the public production of knowledge around social issues is at the center of how Street Spirits Theatre operates. There are no parts of the production process which are not shared: youth and adults, experienced actors and community members alike are all involved in processes of interviewing community members, brainstorming ideas for play production, as well as in the direction and selection of scenes and characters as a part of the final play production. The affordances of participatory theatre as a process of social transformation is enhanced through these processes; the process itself is a form of civic action, while also shaping civic commitment

through engagement with the authentic experiences arising from individual social locations.

The importance of authenticity as an affordance that enables civic agency cannot be underestimated. Street Spirit members, in their interviews with me, stressed the ways that engagement in issues of local concern have directly empowered them to take action on a number of fronts. For example, Emily shared the story of a performance on an aboriginal reserve, and how a small child (probably around the age of eight) staged a type of intervention that they had never done before: she insisted that there could be a new character introduced—an Auntie—who was then able to successfully intervene and care for the children of the two adult alcoholics portrayed in the scene. What needs to be emphasized in this example is the way the intervention process became one that respected and reflected the cultural practices of its audience, rather than insisting on a process that had been part of the TO philosophy. In doing so, it demonstrates how authenticity is afforded through the aesthetic tool of forum theatre. The play process, focused as it is on the direct experiences, contexts and understandings of people in the community, provided a public space from which to actively consider or imagine how alternatives could be pursued as a way to achieve social justice in this particular community.

Over the course of the study, I noted how this was one of the most powerful features of the Street Sprits Theatre process: frequently audience and community members would cry, celebrate, or rage as a consequence of the intense and gritty portrayals of social problems that occurred on the stage[12]. Often, following the play community members would report how the play had inspired them to take civic action in their community, afforded them with new community allies, or provided new ideas to develop into community action plans. One example was described by a member of the RCMP[13], whose local detachment adopted a policy of hiring street involved youth to hand out food and clothing to other displaced youth or adults in the downtown core. This policy idea had been generated during a community based forum theatre workshop.

The inclusion of authentic community based issues was a primary affordance of participatory theatre that accomplished this goal. A less obvious, but perhaps more important affordance is how participatory theatre engages the body in knowledge production.

As actors and community members engaged together on stage, social concerns were enacted; the consequences of inequality or unfairness were played out using the everyday experiences of the participants, and so the ways in which inequality is produced by social actors was emphasized. In schools, skills-based methods are often used, and our pedagogies have adults or youth engage in exercises of reasoning in order to understand how we might alter our behaviors in order to produce different social outcomes. Frequently, dialogue becomes a focus that centers on effectiveness of the intervention. In social action theatre, the test of effectiveness comes not in dialogue and reflection, but in the immediacy of the performance. As such, the mind and body respond as one—through embodied action—to the social context of the moment. Here we have not the reasoned self, but the engaged and enacted self, a display and enabling of subjectivities that arise in the moment of their performance. As my own self reflective notes as actor documented, this becomes a moment of considerable personal empowerment and agency.

> It seems to me that we often discuss "experience" but I haven't necessarily located that experience in my body, but rather, as an abstract function of memory. Now I'm really focused on how our bodies are inscribed with particular trajectories, movements, habits and memories: how feelings and meanings are bypassed, accessed or shaped as our bodies travel through current, past and future spaces is a largely unconscious process, but one that becomes at least somewhat more accessible in the deliberate attention to its physical articulation…. It is as if the reflexive space has

> been enlarged because the mode of expression (bodily gesture) used in theatrical work has a porous quality, one that allows for the body's residual histories to be more easily accessed through the image production process, while also creating a space for open interpretation and multiple readings by others… In the body image work, there seems to be a greater possibility for reading in many ways, and the possibility of one "truth" or "correct" reading is less apparent. (excerpt from research journal)

Interviews with former members of Street Spirits Theatre helped substantiate these personal observations: participation in social action theatre becomes a tool for self growth and awareness of social inequities and creates a civically oriented, relational space in which to engage with others in processes of bringing change to the world.

Constraints of Participatory Theatre

As with the photo essay project, participatory theatre as a cultural tool also acts to constrain civic agency and subjectivities. The very nature of its improvisational and situational form permits opportunities in which inappropriate solutions might be modeled: For example, the person who replaces an actor with a more "controlling and in control" parent may feel they are modeling appropriate skills for others about how to deal with non-conforming teens. Another limitation is the propensity of some to model magical solutions, approaches that miraculously transform a "villain," such as a sexually harassing landlord, into a "nice guy." It requires a very talented Joker to re-direct audience efforts in ways that engage participants in genuinely authentic, tough and often difficult situations so that the interventions become tools for social learning.

Another constraint is that while the play process carefully mimics the "real," it remains (always) a site of performance, with audience and actors engaged in imaginative spaces. Despite their very gritty and real feel, actions taken in a theatrical space may have only short term effects as to their civic potential. Some solutions may be generated that, while useful, will require the active engagement of social or policy actors not present during the play itself; or they may be difficult to implement because of limitations of resources. Replicating the situation developed through theatre is not always easily accomplished.

Becoming a Civic Subject: Sasha's Interrogation of Victimization

Sasha was one of the longer term members of the Street Spirits Company, and a very skilled actor. At the age of 19 she had a one year old child, and worked part time as a staff member who supported the work of the theatre company. As a long time member, she had also been involved on at least two other occasions when Street Spirits had been asked to perform for International Women's Day at the local post secondary institution.

As a researcher attached to this same institution, I had particular interest in this performance, and had volunteered to be a part of it. Yet the day we were scheduled to begin rehearsals for the event, Sasha acted oddly, becoming uncooperative, eventually refusing to participate, and finally leaving the rehearsal area to sit alone in another part of the room. Not too long after this, the rest of the actors came to join her in order to find out what was wrong. Eventually, Sasha began to talk[14]:

> I can't do this event, I just can't. I won't be put up on stage again to perform for those people. I mean, to them I'm just an object, someone to point to and say "see how women are exploited? Look at her, she's a poor teenaged mom, and she had her whole life ahead of her. We need to help her and others like her." I mean, they think they are being so compassionate, so inclusive and so empowering. But you know what? They

> need me… they need me to be their victim, so they can feel good about themselves and what they are doing. I mean, I am not a victim. I'm a strong woman, I'm a mother, I'm a daughter, and I'm doing perfectly OK. They're a bunch of so-called feminists, but they make me their victim. I won't put myself in a position to be their victim again, so they can just celebrate without me. I can't do it.

The room was quiet in the aftermath of Sasha's tirade against the politics of International Women's Day and the tyranny of feminism. At various points, I felt pride in her assertiveness, but simultaneously concerned with her characterizations of feminism and its goals. Yet this monologue became an incredibly powerful catalyst, a cultural tool through which we engaged in a process that led to the complete re-configuration of our performance strategy. Eventually, we designed a piece that was a series of monologues, each of us taking on the normative expectations of International Women's Day and the assumptions about women and girls, men and boys, and the dynamics of power over others. The play shifted the power dynamics from performing "for" a group of academics and professionals to one that sought to unpack their privilege and language of victimization; it became about empowering the youth who had been naturalized as victims, or characterized as deficit human subjects requiring the remediation of experts.

The performance was initially uncomfortable, evidenced by the looks of anxiety on the faces of the organizers; as it continued, you could see this discomfort increasing on the faces of the organizers as each youth actor spoke from his/her experiences. Yet despite this high level of discomfort, the richness of what followed in the dialogue between performers and audience transformed each party's expectations and altered our understandings of ourselves and how "others" were categorized.

This brief vignette illustrates again, as the earlier example from Northern High also demonstrated, how the social, cultural and political contexts as well as the cultural tools available in the moment of action—taking up the tools where they lie—are implicated in the construction and performance of agency. Of significance to this discussion is the ways in which feminism has been historically and socially situated in the academic culture as a discourse of empowerment that simultaneously created victims so that they might be rescued by powerful discursive change agents. Disrupting this discourse became an act of resistance and demonstrated agency for the youth actors, and the forum theatre process became the tool through which these power imbalances could be disrupted and deconstructed. Unpacking the social expectations of the audience transformed the dialogue into one in which shared understandings of how particular civic events might create power imbalances, rather than empower so called "disadvantaged others" or "victims." It was a powerful and significant moment of agency realized by both actors and audience. In this example, competing discourses served as civic tools conveyed through the aesthetics of production, but realized in the changing subjectivities of its actors and audience.

Limitations of the Study

The focus of this article has been to report on the ways in which a qualitative research study might trace the ways that aesthetic civic tools produce agency among youth. The very nature of this work makes it subject to many limitations as to its generalizability. While reporting on the effects and outcomes of the use of participatory theatre and digital photography as aesthetic civic tools are specific examples which help build theory about how civic subjectivities and agency might be constructed, they can only be considered applicable in the context of their particularities. In addition, processes of discursive analysis are designed to consider the constitutive effects of discourse, yet the interpretation of such discourses are always subject to the interests, views, beliefs and understandings of the

researcher who reports them. In this way, the research cannot be said to be a "true" representation of the events it describes, but rather one way in which such events might be seen and understood. Finally, self reflexive methodologies and methodological approaches that rely on participants' understandings are always a product of a particular social and cultural location, as well as a product of power differentials. The goal has been to produce research that authentically engages in ways that reduce privilege and a power differential as much as possible, as well as acknowledging that processes of collaborative construction can produce legitimate research texts.

Concluding Thoughts and Reflections

I have argued that a focus on activity and action and the development of civic subjectivities and agency through aesthetic means among groups of participating youth provides a useful alternative to the study of teacher's educational practices as citizenship educators. By focusing on the ways in which the youth themselves use, alter or "take up" particular cultural tools as they actively engage as civic agents, the focus on the affordances (and constraints) of some knowledge production practices provides important information for educators and researchers interested in how we might best support and nurture such subjectivities in our own educative practices.

At Northern High, the ways that the camera enabled the re-signification and production of alternative discourses helped illustrate how discourses, objects and subjectivities create trajectories of action, as cultural tools are taken up in particular ways. The potential of enacting civic imaginations and dispositions through self directed and creative forms of investigation and representation were realized as the "play of the work," and became a central method for engaging youth authentically in civic action. At Street Spirits Theatre Company, the embodied nature of theatre demonstrated how cultural tools are embedded in social activity and within the body; how the conscious and unconscious are implicated in the resources or tools we draw upon in enacting our lives, including those civic matters of concern to us. The creation of a civically oriented, relational space in which to perform our civic subjectivities offers an exciting opportunity through which to authentically engage youth in civic practices that produce knowledge in and for local communities.

As teachers, researchers and educators, such knowledge positions us to consider how we might integrate these processes into our classrooms. More than this, however, it offers a tool for deconstructing what we currently consider appropriate pedagogical practices that may enable the development of youth civic subjects. In what ways might our current practices afford or limit the ways in which civic activity is understood and performed? How might some alterations in our approaches, in particular, the consideration of authentic production based in the interests, understandings and sociocultural contexts of youth's lives, better inform the ways in which we approach civic knowledge production and reproduction? As teachers, educators, or community culture workers, our work needs to involve a more careful examination of our own practices and pedagogies to consider how our programs might engage youth creatively—playfully—in civic knowledge production. As this study has illustrated, the potential for the arts in particular in developing civic subjectivities and commitment seems compelling. Finding ways of enhancing such approaches in the crowded and assessment driven curriculum of schools may be difficult; the promise may lie in what community agencies can do—on their own, or potentially in collaboration with schools and educators interested in such outcomes.

Importantly, unpacking a civic practice that may enable enhanced civic commitment means considering not only what specific contexts, social locations or tools are implicated, but also how past actions "seed" new actions. This interplay between subject(s), object(s), tool(s), context(s), history(ies), and practice(s) suggests the conception of agency is distributed across

multiple fields of action (Knappett, 2002), including future trajectories. As such, it emphasizes networks, associations, and relationships between entities, rather than within the entities themselves (p. 100). That is, agency needs to be understood as a relational practice, one that resides in the tension between agent and object, culture and event, each acting to mediate the subject's actions.

In this article, the experiences at both Northern High and Street Spirits Theatre Company traced the networked actions which potentially seeded new actions of civic agency. As such, these aesthetic civic tools offer considerable promise in their capacity to develop more engaged, impassioned and committed youth agents, genuine civic agents in their own communities.

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End Notes

1 In British Columbia, "Alternative" classrooms are those formally structured programmes for students who have been unable to complete or appropriately participate in the regular school environment. The programmes are therefore designed to provide an alternative route to meeting basic graduation requirements. These can vary in their structure and programming methods. In the case of Northern High (a pseudonym), students of mixed age in Grades 9, 10, 11 and 12 were provided with sequenced modules of written course material in a range of required courses; these programme modules are completed under the supervision of a teacher.

2 A pseudonym.

3 Street Spirits is the actual name of the youth theatre group. The participants and its director asked that the real name of the company be used in any publications reporting on their work as a part of this research study.

4 A pseudonym for the urban center in which the youth of this study largely resided in.

5 The smoking pit is the name given to the area across the street from the school that until recently had been a place where students could smoke between classes and over the lunch hour. During the course of this study, the school administrator closed the smoking area, prohibiting any smoking in the areas immediately adjacent to the school.

6 During this study, teachers in British Columbia were on strike for approximately two weeks. The regulation of class size was the primary teacher demand.

7 Post structuralist theory emphasizes the discursive construction of the subject as an ongoing and always incomplete process, creating partial, fluid and fragmented identities rather than fixed or already determined selves. Paraphrasing Davies, (2000) our understandings and experiences, our social identities, and our places in it, are constructed through the categories and concepts available to us in discourses. This understanding of the processes of subjugation has been explored by a range of authors and theorists, among them Butler (1990, 1993), Davies (2000), and Frazer (1990).

8 This and subsequent youth names are all pseudonyms.

9 Like a number of aboriginal youth, Jade was boarded in town with relatives in order to attend high school. Her home community was on an Indian reserve approximately 200 kilometers away.

10 A pseudonym of a Northern BC community.

11 Andrew is the name of the Artistic Director at Street Spirits Theatre; his real name is used with permission.

12 In fact, because of the sometimes intense audience reaction, local volunteer counselors or community agencies would be on hand to help with any needed debriefing by audience or community members. This was announced at the beginning of the performance so that these services could be accessed if necessary.

13 RCMP is an abbreviation for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the police force that serves many Canadian communities.

14 This description of events is a shortened version of a rather lengthy dialogue that developed over the course of approximately 90 minutes; the re-telling here draws on selected phrases and ideas in order to meet the space limitations of this publication.

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