

Research goes to the cinema: The veracity of videography *with, for and by* youth

Research in Comparative &
International Education
2015, Vol. 10(3) 354–366
© The Author(s) 2015
Reprints and permissions:
sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/1745499915581084
rci.sagepub.com


Kate Tilleczek

Young Lives Research, University of Prince Edward Island, Canada

Janet Loebach

Young Lives Research, University of Prince Edward Island, Canada

Abstract

This paper addresses the use of participatory videography as a way of knowing and bearing witness to the complexity of young lives in educational research. We outline the principles for engaging young people in participatory videography. Working in the framework of humanities-infused praxis *with, for, and by* young people, we explore the place of visibility and invisibility. We identify what is gained, lost and unsettled in the use of video as a cultural process and production. We offer our theoretical and aesthetic considerations in relation to two projects. The first is a project about the youth mental health system in rural Canada, wherein we explore the fractured system visually through documentary filmmaking in the *cinéma vérité* cinema genre. The second is a project in which we are working with young Aboriginal Canadians who are framing the intersections of mental health and technology through filmmaking. We interrogate videography as a form of cultural production with the potential for engaging young people in educative experience, symbolic activity and cultural production. Youth videography offers opportunities for comparative education research in which social and cultural analyses are made visible. We explicate videography as a potentially meaningful experience for youth and for a deeper cultural analysis in educational research while addressing the tensions surrounding its claim to veracity.

Keywords

Youth-attuned videography, participatory video, videography, visual research

Introduction

Modern youths are experiencing considerably difficult socio-political realities. Technology, digital media, social inequalities and mental health challenges are significant components of the realities they face in public education. Moreover, schools and educators are consistently challenged for providing poor life opportunities and educational experiences to many young people who are

Corresponding author:

Kate Tilleczek, Young Lives Research, University of Prince Edward Island, PEC C1A 4P3, Canada.

Email: ktilleczek@upei.ca

rendered marginal to education and society (Tilleczek, 2013, 2012; Tilleczek and Ferguson, 2013). Comparative education is at a crossroads when it comes to responding to these contemporary problems; it needs to acquire authentic ways to know and respond to young lives. We contend that youth-attuned videography is one of these ways. In no way, however, do we suggest that youth videography in isolation is able to make or lead essential changes in public education. To insist on the veracity of video in this way is to trivialise the entrenched problems that youths face and the ability of “art” to address this fully. No quantity of films can alter the educational structures that daily reproduce social inequalities for young people. However, the use of videography *with, for* and *by* youth does open a window to a better understanding of these social contexts from this too often invisible point of view. Furthermore, it could connect and contextualise the lives of youth within the complex modern socio-political world. As argued previously, Tilleczek (2014) invoking Mills’ (1959: 6) sociological imagination “allows us to grasp history and biography and the relations of the two in society” to provide a robust and authentic comparative analysis of schools and young lives over time and place. Through such an imaginative endeavour, we gain an understanding of experience in the sense that Joan Scott (1991) in *The Evidence of Experience* and John Dewey in *Art as Experience* (1934) and in *Education as Experience* (1938) suggests: as a crucial aspect of social analysis that is not free floating, but rather connected to the world in which schools and youths dwell.

When executed thoughtfully and collaboratively, youth-attuned videography could, therefore, assist us to understand both the complexity and variability of young lives and the cultures in which they are lived. Social analysis is animated through explication of and engagement in cultural production. It could function as a way to initiate thinking about how youth and school have been understood in simplistic, naturalistic or essentialised ways, how young people are imagined and treated in schools, and the social conditions that are necessary for reproducing inequity there. It could help us to interrogate the socio-political character of each as long as the biography, history and social analysis come together in the frame as discussed further below. In addition, youth-attuned videography could provide more spaces through which educative experience happens. Such art making is a kind of experience, as defined by Dewey (1934: 1), and stands in contrast to how it is often understood, i.e. a “common conception [of] the work of art is often identified with the building, book, painting, or statue in its existence apart from human experience.” He goes on to warn us that,

[W]hen an art product once attains classic status, it somehow becomes isolated from the human conditions under which it was brought into being and from the human consequences it engenders in actual life-experience. When artistic objects are separated from both conditions of origin and operation in experience, a wall is built around them that renders almost opaque their general significance, with which aesthetic theory deals. (1934: 1–2)

A paradox, therefore, exists in addressing the veracity of youth videography. On the one hand, young people (some more consistently than others) have been made invisible, have been marginalised or have disappeared from sight in modernity. We no longer see them outside scattered and/or demonised in media representations. When making art, telling their stories and being seriously heard, youths are often treated only as consumers of media; they are sold to, or sold out (Schissel, 2006). By contrast, the simple act of youth art making and storytelling through film is both necessary and necessarily incomplete. As Solnit (2014: 88) insists in “Woolf’s darkness: Embracing the inexplicable” in *Men Explain Things to Me*,

There is so much we don’t know, and to write truthfully about a life, your own or your mother’s or a celebrated figure’s, an event, a crisis, another culture is to engage repeatedly with those patches of darkness, those nights of history, those places of unknowing.

We defy the complete picture, but continue to make art and live artfully. Both Virginia Woolf (1929) in *A Room of One's Own* and Susan Sontag (1977) in *On Photography* have eloquently and repeatedly argued this point about images and stories. We continue to make and interpret them, but they are always incomplete as both artefacts and interpretations. Video *with, for and by* youth is, therefore, an important medium to contemplate in comparative educational research. It opens up possibilities for better social analysis and educative experience, but holds no guarantee of truth or liberation. It never completely exposes the invisibility, the darkness or the unknown. Films made by youths should be seen repeatedly. However, they still do not resolve ongoing disputes about problems with public education or young lives. The authenticity of videography is developed in the process of the telling. It is in the invitation to create the cultural productions that, as Solnit (2014) and Sontag (1977) suggest, could simply *make us care*. This ethic of invocation of care and relationship is the central practice in youth-attuned videography that we attempt to foster and attend to.

Lost in the Woods: starting out in videography

This paper begins a decade ago, with the making of a research-based documentary film. At that time, our team was undertaking its first such project¹; the lessons learned were both aesthetic and practical and informed our current work, which is discussed in the following section. These early reflections have been important to us for engaging youth-attuned videography as an aesthetic process in which we work alongside young people to create and discuss cultural productions as social analyses. On the one hand, our early documentary film assisted in our analysis of systemic barriers encountered by young people who were being marginalised in school because of their struggles with mental health. The film rendered them emotionally and narratively visible in a way that an academic report did not. On the other hand, the film fell far short of youth-attuned participatory videography as we now approach it today. We missed a critical opportunity to fully engage young people in cultural production and social analysis.

This first documentary film, *Lost in the Woods*, was completed following our ethnographic research project and final report (Boydell et al., 2004). We approached a university-based filmmaker and his students to bring our findings to life with the small amount of funding we had remaining. We wished to provide audiences with a narrative and visual means through which to engage with our findings regarding the sustained difficulties being faced by youths and their families as they entered the mental health system. The documentary film offered the opportunity to investigate these issues further in narrative and visual format (The film can be viewed at <http://katetilleczek.ca/youth-mental-health/>).

We knew from the literature and from our ethnographic fieldwork of the fractures and mistreatment that many families and young people come upon when dealing with issues of mental health. We also knew that struggles in school were often related to the stigma that attaches itself to youth who experience lack of care, lack of funds and lack of meaningful service integration (Boydell et al., 2006; Tilleczek et al., 2014). Our report provided a trustworthy analysis of the complex barriers and facilitative factors relevant to the 30 families and 30 service providers we had interviewed. However, the research also unearthed competing and paradoxical factors and tensions. The mental health system, it seemed, was not a linear road to be navigated but a labyrinth within which many youth and families were being lost. We wished to enhance our research through filmmaking for three primary reasons. The first reason was to open a new space for families and young people to speak about how they were experiencing the barriers and facilitative factors. In the original report we did not have the time or space to fully explore the nature of the system and to interview young people. The film provided an opportunity to make both youth and the system more visible.

The fact that many families were willing to continue participating in the project through the film-making stage was indicative of a desire to continue to express themselves. The second reason was to make visible the fractured and non-linear character of the system in a fresh manner in order to engage new audiences. The labyrinthine metaphors we provided in our report were not adequate. It was through the use of hand held cameras and *cinéma vérité*² framing that the non-linear, fractured complexity became better represented in a visual manner. The participants in our film were *lost in the woods* of the mental health system. The camera invited audiences into the narratives juxtaposed with visual footage of being lost. Our third rationale for producing the film was the hope of reaching audiences who may not be inclined to read or who may not have access to the written report.

In the process of filmmaking we discussed the theory and practice of arts-based research and the potential power of the visual narrative provided by film. The film took approximately eight months to produce and the task was accomplished through a new ethics process with the engagement of filmmakers as directors and researchers as producers. Dr Tilleczek was co-located in both the research project and the film project, and acted as the producer of the film. She attended numerous meetings with the film crew to discuss the research and the ethical process for re-inviting these families to participate. We developed original music for the film by inviting the group to watch rough cuts while a guitar player composed music to the images simultaneously. There were several editing meetings, which were themselves enlightening from a social analysis perspective. The research team and film crew discussed the film content to be kept, made visible or cut out. When we were finished editing the film, we screened it in cinemas in three communities during Mental Health Awareness Week with the aim of engaging new audiences. We also posted the film to websites and screened it in university classes devoted to qualitative inquiry or mental health, where we encouraged comment and discussion.

The process was both exhilarating and disappointing. Points of reflection included a naiveté about the place and power of film as cultural production and the tensions surrounding the creation and interpretation of video. For instance, the add-on character of the film was problematic since it kept us from fully mobilising the power of the visual from the outset. This film was an end product, but the participants were not fully involved in editing and production decisions. Three youth and two families were participants in the film, but they did not frame or co-produce it. The student film crew members were youthful and had a good deal of input in the making, shooting and editing of the film; however, the crew were separated from the youth and family participants by the camera during the shooting. While the film had an important role to play in enlivening research about youth mental health, it was not the youth-attuned participatory process we understand and invoke today.

Humanities-infused praxis

Since making *Lost in the Woods*, there has been greater consideration of the veracity of youth videography. For instance, we have had the opportunity to consider a humanities-infused praxis *with, for and by* youth (Tilleczek, 2011, 2012, 2013). This approach was developed amid the decline and death of humanities and liberal arts education. In no small way, the movement of art, story, and image into educational and social science research is a small but lively push against the demise of humanities in modern corporate educational models.

We see this move as *humanities-infused praxis* to suggest the deeper influence of the full range of philosophical, artistic, theatrical, photographic, linguistic, visual, literary and narrative gifts that the humanities have begun to bestow upon a few renegades in social sciences. The academic study of young

people is nicely moving towards this influence and thus these improvements are taking hold. (Tilleczek and Kinlock, 2013: 18)

We have argued that humanities-infused research has a power in enabling both a “making plain and troubling up experiences and witnessing of social marginalization” (Tilleczek and Kinlock, 2013: 19). Grounding research in the everyday worlds of young people who have been made socially marginal is an epistemological approach of mutually determined experience, conversation and art making (Tilleczek and Lezeu, 2014). We concur with Gaztambide-Fernandez (2013: 211) who insists that art making is cultural production. The instrumental certainty of the art product must be resisted as it arises from a rhetoric of effects that positions art as an easily definable and naturalistic phenomenon with specific outcomes. Instead, Gaztambide-Fernandez (2013: 229) invokes our concept of art as rhetoric of cultural production to view art as a cultural practice; “what matters is not whether there is something called “the arts” but what kinds of relationships evolve within the context of symbolic exchanges involving creative work.”

Indeed, humanities-infused praxis asks us to locate symbolic exchanges and forge new relationships within the social and political process of being made marginal. It also seeks to enter symbolic work such as videography to interrogate the conditions by which youth were made marginal and develop new relational spaces in schools through which this could change. The sociological imagination of CW Mills (1956) provides a crucial hinge that connects the being (biography) of youth to the social, historical and political contexts in which they dwell. Seeing and connecting everyday lives to the ways in which they are socially and politically organised is the thrust of the complex cultural nesting approach (Tilleczek, 2011, 2102, 2014) that is useful for both framing and interpreting youth videography.

Digital story telling *with, for and by* youth

When we embarked on a new youth videography project, we took with us the lessons learned from humanities-infused praxis to reframe both the young artists and the art-making process. This project aimed to interrogate the mental health experiences of Canadian Aboriginal youth by engaging individuals from the Mi'kmaq Nation in the province of Prince Edward Island (PEI). Youth participants were invited to frame and interrogate the ways in which technology intersects with their everyday lives to augment or impede mental well-being and to communicate this experience through youth-produced films. We wanted the spirit and design of this second film-making project to more fully reflect research *with, for and by* young people. This required embedding critical, decolonised and participatory practices deeply into the research design, process and products from the outset.

Working with Aboriginal youth in Canada necessitates a doubly decolonised approach since they have been doubly marginalised. As young people, they are ignored or made invisible by adult-centred policies and practices while also being pushed to the margins by the legacy of a colonial history that physically, culturally and politically set Aboriginal nations apart as “other”, and contributed to significant cultural losses and instabilities (Elias et al., 2012). Canadian Aboriginal youth comprise 5.9% of all youth in Canada but face startlingly different circumstances from non-Aboriginal young people. Aboriginal youth are two and a half times less likely than their non-Aboriginal counterparts to be granted a decent education, and almost three times as likely to drop out of school; these rates are significantly higher still for Aboriginal youth living on reserves or in remote communities (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009; Health Canada, 2003; Statistics Canada, 2011a, 2011b). Aboriginal youth in Canada are also almost three times more likely to live in low-income households, and twice as likely as non-Aboriginal youth to be unemployed (Statistics

Canada, 2008, 2009). Most alarming are the skyrocketing rates of mental health concerns within this group: suicide and self-inflicted injuries are the leading causes of death for First Nations youth; the suicide rate of these youths is more than five times the national average (Centre for Suicide Prevention, 2003; Health Canada, 2003; Kirmayer et al., 2007). These Aboriginal youth face significantly more challenges than the average Canadian youth and these challenges are manifesting in negative outcomes for their education and health.

Aboriginal communities have also been historically affected by problematic relationships with research initiatives that tended to harm, devalue and/or remove ownership of their research outputs (Battiste, 2008; Castleden, Garvin and Huu-ay-aht First Nation, 2008; Denzin, Lincoln and Smith, 2008). These experiences with exploitation and misappropriation have fostered distrust of research and researchers. As LT Smith (1999) states in her seminal book on decolonising methodologies, we require a purposeful move away from dehumanising people by opening up to hearing voice and story in historical and cultural contexts. Smith (1999: 39) speaks of turning over the “the power to define” the technical and conceptual tools and processes of research, for the betterment of Aboriginal communities.

Some Indigenous communities and scholars are making substantial strides in the development of approaches that recognise and protect Indigenous culture, knowledge and people. For instance, Mi'kmaq Elder Albert Marshall is working with scientists in a process of two-eyed seeing³ in which both Indigenous and Western knowledge coalesce to form new knowledge that is beneficial to Indigenous people and communities. They use critical methodologies for decolonisation to honour Aboriginal voices, knowledge and customs, and acknowledge the legitimate right of the participant communities to the knowledge and cultural productions arising from research (Denzin, Lincoln and Smith, 2008; Evans and Foster, 2009; Mistry and Berardi, 2012). In addition, to further protect their endangered communities and culture, the Mi'kmaq Grand Council of Mi'kma'ki⁴ established in 2000 the Mi'kmaw Ethics Watch group⁵ to develop and oversee the implementation of ethical research systems and practices. These guidelines require all research projects to be jointly managed with Aboriginal peoples and give the researched community direct control over the development and use of the research itself (Battiste, 2014). All prospective research projects must apply for and receive permission from a Mi'kmaq Ethics Committee before they can proceed. Any knowledge or productions arising from the research within these communities is then understood to be the property of the Mi'kma'ki (Battiste, 2014). Dedicated to embracing the tenets of critical Indigenous research and the protocols established by the Mi'kmaw Ethics Watch, we developed our project in continuous consultation with representatives of the Mi'kmaq Confederacy of PEI (MCPEI), beginning with a rigorous review by their Ethics Committee to craft an appropriate framework.

The veracity of youth videography

The current participatory videography project is being carried out in collaboration with a group of 12 young people from a First Nation community in PEI and two Community Child and Youth Care workers from the MCPEI. Youth participants were recruited from the community by the Youth Care workers, primarily from the group of young people who were already involved in weekly afterschool youth programmes offered by the MCPEI. Youth were invited to participate in a film-making project where we would collectively explore the role of digital media and technology in their contemporary realities and any impacts on their personal or community mental well-being. The participating youth ranged in age from 14 to 20 years; most were attending secondary school at the time of the study.

Contemporary participatory approaches with youth seek to recognise young people as capable, creative agents with a compelling voice and the right and ability to speak to and act on issues of

relevance to them (Blazek and Hranova, 2012; Lomax et al., 2011; Tilleczek, 2011, 2014). Critical participatory approaches deliberately disrupt the traditional hierarchical researcher–researched relationship for more equitable partnerships that privilege voice and the contribution of participants (Kendon, 2003). Participatory videography is a methodology that embodies these principles by situating participants as filmmakers or storytellers who engage in self-research and direct the construction of their own visual productions (Evans and Foster, 2009; Lomax et al., 2011; Mistry and Berardi, 2012). In the current project, the powerful visual medium of film makes visible the gaze of the youth filmmakers as they determine how best to represent themselves within and beyond their communities, with the possibility of undercutting hegemonic representations (Foster, 2009; Kendon, 2003).

Legitimately establishing our youth participants as researchers and filmmakers intimately tied to the process required us to adopt a flexible and reflexive approach, continually adapted in response to and in collaboration with the youth (Blazek and Hranova, 2012). We, therefore, began by weaving art-making practices into the research processes from project conception and deliberately carving out an open and organic space for a youth-driven conversation. This work included ongoing consultation with the Mi'kmaq Confederacy Community Youth Workers to understand the participants' preferences regarding project tools and processes. We also held all gatherings in a community space with which they were already familiar and comfortable and spent time just getting to know the youth (and vice versa) in this safe space. Our project structure was designed to be malleable so that we could continually revise the project in response to the needs and ideas of the youth, and allow them to help mould project activities as the arts-making process clarified their perspectives and motivations. We also worked to provide the conditions that would encourage them to see themselves as legitimate researchers and filmmakers who were capable of framing the direction and performance of the project (Kendon, 2003; Parr, 2007).

As other studies have noted, employing a participatory filmmaking approach requires removing or minimising any technological barriers related to filmmaking. When technical expertise such as camera operation or film editing is primarily in the hands of researchers or technicians, the power relationship with participants can again be inverted and creative control could be lost (Evans and Foster, 2009). For this filmmaking project, we engaged local filmmakers and technicians to provide training in filmmaking history and strategies, equipment operation and care as well as digital video editing. Over the course of the project the team also endeavoured to expose the participants to Aboriginal films and filmmakers. Possessing these art-making and technical skills heightened the ability of the young participants to freely express themselves through their films and maintain control over their cultural production. Ultimate editorial authority can, therefore, remain with these young filmmakers.

Participants were encouraged to storyboard their ideas as they developed their films. We then provided opportunities for them to solicit feedback from both the university researchers and the professional filmmakers, but participants understood they were free to accept or reject advice without prejudice. In congruence with Aboriginal and participatory frameworks, the youth were positioned to decide how they wished to represent themselves in their films, the messages they wanted to convey and the meaning they took from the arts-making experience. Capacity is built not only through the accumulation of new technical and communication skills, but through the potentially transformative, and likely novel, experience of being given dominion to direct their own creative process.

To exemplify the principles of participatory and decolonised processes, it was also imperative that we be able to acknowledge the ownership rights of the young Aboriginal participants to the films they produced and the knowledge arising from the project. This brought us into conflict with Western institutional funding and ethics processes, which by default assign

intellectual property rights to researchers rather than participants. Despite official declarations from university and funding bodies in support of decolonised approaches, the entrenched Eurocentric institutional practices continue to protect and acknowledge the rights of the researchers alone, making it difficult to find the space to work in genuine collaboration with youth and their communities (Battiste, 2008). We did manage to successfully lobby for exceptions to the boilerplate legal agreements in order to provide the youth with legitimate rights of ownership to their films. Honouring this provision, however, means that the youth participants ultimately have the right to decide not to share their films with the research team or funders, even if this conflicts with our research objectives (Parr, 2007). While our project participants have been aware from the outset of our desire to widely share the films, they may in the end deny us permission. This is a risk that needs to be taken, however, if researchers want to engage in legitimately participatory and decolonised work. Our small steps to recognise the rights of participants are only stop-gap solutions that must be reinforced through large scale changes to academic research policies and practices.

One noted benefit of our participatory filmmaking framework, however, was the minimisation of the “inside/outside” dilemma common to community research, particularly in culturally sensitive areas (Evans and Foster, 2009). Rather than data being collected by “outside” researchers, Aboriginal youth participants utilised their “inside” identity as community members in tandem with their roles as researchers and filmmakers to guide their knowledge gathering and film production in ways that were contextually- and culturally-appropriate. The storytelling approach is also well understood within their communities, where such cultural productions align well with oral and narrative traditions as ways of knowing and learning (Mistry and Berardi, 2012).

After spending time getting to know the participants, we planned a workshop to outline the concept of the project, clarify our role and interests as researchers as well as explain their roles and rights as co-researchers and filmmakers. To position the project in relevant cultural terms, we also initially framed the project and ethical considerations (theirs and ours) through the *Seven Sacred Grandfather Teachings*, which are a set of values (love, honesty, respect, truth, courage, wisdom and humility) that are known by many Indigenous groups in North America. Discussions around rights and ethical practices also drew from the *Storyteller's Bill of Rights* developed by the *Centre for Digital Storytelling* (www.storytelling.org) to verbalise the rights of participants engaged in the production of digital stories and films. We aligned these rights with the *Seven Grandfather Teachings* to integrate across cultures for a two-eyed seeing approach to the project, content, process and ethics.

Early on, we also prepared a presentation for the participants giving a brief synthesis of contemporary Western medical research, which examines links between technology and youth mental health and a review of several graphic models of mental health including the Mi'kmaq First Nations paradigms of health and wellness. We utilised these resources to encourage youth to frame the meaning and experience of mental health for themselves and discuss how they live and negotiate it in a technological world. We did not presume, however, that these issues or representations would necessarily resonate with their own everyday experiences of mental well-being. In fact, it soon became evident that our planned large group Talking Circle approach held little allure for the youth participants. We, therefore, read this as a moment in which we needed to alter our approach, instead invoking arts-based activities; for instance we invited the youth to move about the room in groups and engage with drawing materials to craft a story in the form of a graphic comic about how their world might change if digital media suddenly disappeared. This exercise was much more engaging. We then held smaller, informal discussions with the participants as we wandered from group to group while they developed and discussed their graphic. The small group process and visual product provided an alternate mode of expression that was

more in keeping with their skills and interests, while still providing the necessary space and prompts to provide us access to their unique perspectives and priorities. Over the next several meetings, we continued to engage the youth in small, informal discussions as well as giving them open worksheets based on the *Seven Grandfather Teachings* on which to record their own personal ideas or thoughts regarding the intersection of technology and mental well-being in their lives. Rather than developing a single understanding of mental well-being, we had each participant visualise their own unique understanding of mental well-being and technology, which they are further developing through their own community-based research and will eventually share through the medium of film. This approach is also in better keeping with Indigenous cultures' celebration of diversity of experience and understanding.

In discussions throughout the project, it was critical that we continued to clarify the objectives and motivations of all parties, including participants, community workers and researchers. It may be assumed that critical participatory researchers must hide in the background in order to make participants, in this case the youth, visible within both process and product; however, it is deemed enough to make the researcher's agenda overt so as to be clear on how and when their objectives differ from those of the participants. Participatory videography, as with any other critical methodology, does not need to suppress the aims of the researcher nor align them perfectly with those of participants; it needs only to make each group's objectives transparent to one other and to prospective audiences (Evans and Foster, 2009; Mistry and Berardi, 2012). In this project, we made space for the youth to voice their main interests and motivations, including consideration of the topics they wanted to explore, the style of film they wanted to make, and even the technical equipment and skills to which they wanted exposure. Conversations around project objectives and outputs that held the most value for them subsequently guided the evolution of the project. However, we also made room for collectively reflecting when and how youth interests coincided or conflicted with those of the research team and considered strategies for reconciling any tensions. The project steps and filmmaking process were continually adapted in light of such discussions and the evolving experiences and revelations of both the youth and academic researchers (Blazek and Hranova, 2012; Mistry and Berardi, 2012; Reed and Peters, 2004).

We also made it clear to participants that, as researchers, we were also immensely interested in the processes through which they explored and crafted their ideas around the intersections between technology and mental health. Deliberate pauses for reflection, both formal and informal, were, therefore, also utilised to engage the youth in discussions about their experience of both the research and of arts-making; they were encouraged to articulate their creative process and highlight the ways in which they used the medium of film to make meaning of their experiences and to explore and stretch their notions around mental health in a digital world.

Visual productions, such as films, have the potential to draw viewers deep into the reality of the youth filmmaker through what Ramella and Olmos (2005) refer to as an "extended language" (cf. Mistry and Berardi, 2012: 114); the immediate and expressive nature of film moves beyond giving a "voice" to youth, showcasing their "multi-faceted, enlivened and multi-sensory forms of knowledge" (Blazek and Hranova, 2012: 153) and highlighting the diversity of youth experience. The accessible nature of film allows these cultural productions to function as powerful educative and political tools, able to quickly and robustly deepen our intellectual and emotional understanding of both the subject and the filmmaker (Blazek and Hranova, 2012; Evans and Foster, 2009). With permission from the youth filmmakers, the final films will eventually be screened to audiences both within and beyond their communities, followed by panel discussions with the filmmakers. These discussions will hopefully deepen and further enliven the learning experience for the audience, the young participants and the researchers. Audience feedback will also help the young filmmakers to understand how their cultural productions are received and are experienced by viewers.

Participatory filmmaking experiences can bring youth back from the margins, making them visible once more. First, youth are explicitly made visible to audiences by appearing in their own films; however, they are also “seen” through their creative process and their choices of representation, possible only when the framing and production of the film is shifted into their hands (Haynes and Tanner, 2013). The accessible visual medium of youth-produced film gives the viewing audience a small but authentic glimpse into the distinctive reality of young people attempting to navigate the myriad socio-cultural and political contexts of the modern technological world.

Summary

A mindful approach to youth videography yields two benefits for comparative education research. The first is the promise (not guarantee) of educative experience as young people engage in symbolic activity. Through the making of video and digital stories, young people are invited to make visible what they are “always already doing” (Gaztambide-Fernandez (2013: 211). Educative experiences include guiding this ongoing symbolic activity and the use of a sociological imagination to reflect on how experiences at school connect to social and political contexts and relations. If symbolic activities are already happening in young lives they could be invited to shift human relationships and power in schools.

The second benefit is the promise (not guarantee) that this symbolic activity provides glimpses into the lives of hidden youth. To examine the conditions required for the reproduction of marginalisation at school is a robust social analysis of young lives. Both promises of processes and cultural production enliven a deeper social analysis that is necessary for educational research. We can see, from within and below, the ways in which tensions in public education have been made and are held together. As a methodology, youth-attuned videography offers a possibility for educational research that is committed to moving past the reproduction of inequalities in public education and towards an authentic engagement with young people. It is in the research relationships, making of cultural productions and social analysis then that young people teach us about systemic problems and promises of schools and the fears and hopes of modern youth.

This allows a space not only to make problematic the struggles of youth, but also to record and diarize the actions against them. The diversity of knowledge attained from humanities-based praxis highlights that youth marginalization can be addressed from a multitude of areas: from creating new policies, learning more effective ways in approaching and communicating with youth, developing new programs that aim to support youth and their development, and so on. After combining youth and researcher perspectives, in addition to observing how marginalization affects youth development, education and life outcomes, we can either ask, ‘When is *society* going to do something about this?’ or we can be empowered by the roles that we as individuals play within society and decide to ask ourselves ‘What can *I* do about this – *right now?*’ How can we open spaces, whatever our locations, to engage and diarized the esoteric fears and hopes of youth? (Tilleczek and Kinlock, 2013: 36–37)

Our work *with, for and by* youth is presented in the hopes that we can collectively understand and care about the educational marginality of modern youth. Humanities-infused praxis and the symbolic activity it invokes leads to an esoteric hope. It embraces the darkness and the impossibility of fully knowing while opening the window to the light of seeing and caring.

Funding

The Lost in the Woods project and the current digital storytelling project was funded in part by The Children and Youth in Challenging Contexts Network, Dalhousie University.

Notes

1. Dr Kate Tilleccek, Dr Katherine Boydell, Dr Tiziana Volpe and Dr Elizabeth Wilson led the process that engaged the filmmaking team. The film can be viewed at <http://katetilleccek.ca/youth-mental-health/>.
2. This genre of film is meant to combine a type of improvisation with the use of the camera to unveil people who have been hidden or made invisible. Contemporary television such as the Trailer Park Boys or Homicide: Life on the Streets provides examples of this style of filmmaking.
3. See <http://www.integrativescience.ca/Principles/TwoEyedSeeing/>.
4. The seven districts include Mi'kmaq communities throughout the Maritime Provinces of Canada (including PEI in which we are working) as well as Quebec.
5. For more information on the development of the Mi'kmaq Ethics Watch (Ethics Eskinuapimk) and its guiding principles, see Battiste (2014).

References

- Battiste M (2008) Research ethics for protecting Indigenous knowledge and heritage: Institutional and researcher responsibilities. In: Denzin N, Lincoln Y and Smith LT (eds) *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.
- Blazek M and Hranova P (2012) Emerging relationships and diverse motivations and benefits in participatory video with youth people. *Children's Geographies* 10(2): 151–168.
- Boydell K, Pong R, Volpe T, et al. (2006) Family perspectives on pathways to mental health care for children and youth in rural communities. *Journal of Rural Health* 21(2): 182–188.
- Boydell K, Pong R, Volpe T, et al. (2004) *The rural perspective on continuity of care: Pathways and barriers to care for children with emotional and behavioural disorders*. Report for the Canadian Health Services Research Foundation. Ottawa: Canada.
- Canadian Council on Learning (2009) *The State of Aboriginal Learning in Canada: A holistic approach to measuring success*. Ottawa: Canadian Council on Learning.
- Castleden H, Garvin T and Huu-ay-aht First Nation (2008) Modifying Photovoice for community-based participatory Indigenous research. *Social Science & Medicine* 66: 1393–1405.
- Centre for Suicide Prevention (2003) *Suicide among Canada's Aboriginal peoples; Alert #52*. Calgary, AB: Centre for Suicide Prevention.
- Denzin NK, Lincoln YS and Smith LT (eds) (2008) *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.
- Dewey J (1934) *Art as Experience*. New York: Penguin.
- Dewey J (1938) *Experience and Education*. New York: Kappa Delta Pi.
- Elias B, Mignone J, Hall M et al. (2012) Trauma and suicide behaviour histories among a Canadian indigenous population: An empirical exploration of the potential role of Canada's residential school system. *Social Science & Medicine* 74(10): 1560–1569.
- Evans M and Foster S (2009) Representation in participatory video: Some considerations from research with Métis in British Columbia. *Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue d'études Canadiennes* 43(1): 87–108.
- Foster V (2009) Authentic representation? Using video as counter-hegemony in participatory research with poor working-class women. *International Journal of Multiple Research Approaches* 3(3): 233–245.
- Gaztambide-Fernandez R (2013) Why the arts don't do anything: Toward a new vision for cultural production in education. *Harvard Educational Review* 83: 211–236.
- Haynes K and Tanner T (2013) Empowering young people and strengthening resilience: Youth-centred participatory video as a tool for climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction. *Children's Geographies*, doi: 10.1080/14733285.2013.848599 (published online ahead of print).
- Health Canada (2003) *A Statistical Profile of the Health of First Nations in Canada for the Year 2000*. Ottawa, Canada: Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Statistics Canada.
- Kindon S (2003) Participatory video in geographic research: A feminist practice of looking? *Area* 35(2): 142–153.
- Kirmayer L, Brass GM, Holton T et al. (2007) *Suicide among Aboriginal people in Canada*. Ottawa, Canada: Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

- Lomax H, Fink J, Singh N et al. (2011) The politics of performance: Methodological challenges of researching children's experiences of childhood through the lens of participatory video. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 14(3): 231–243.
- Mills CW (1959) *The Sociological Imagination*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mistry J and Berardi A (2012) The challenges and opportunities of participatory video in geographical research: Exploring collaboration with Aboriginal communities in Guyana. *Area* 44(1): 110–116.
- Parr H (2007) Collaborative film-making as process, method and text in mental health research. *Cultural Geographies* 14: 114–138.
- Ramella M and Olmos G (2005) *Participant Authored Audiovisual Stories (PAAS): Giving the camera away or giving the camera a way?* LSE Paper in Social Research methods, Qualitative Series 10, LSE, London.
- Reed MG and Peters EJ (2004) Using an ecological metaphor to build adaptive and resilient research practices. *ACME* 3: 18–40.
- Schissel B (2006) *Still Blaming Children: Youth conduct and the politics of child hating*. Halifax, Nova Scotia: Fernwood Press.
- Scott J (1991) The evidence of experience. *Critical Inquiry* 17(4): 773–797.
- Smith LT (1999) *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. London: Zed Books
- Solnit R (2014) Woolf's darkness: Embracing the inexplicable. In: Solnit R (ed.) *Men Explain Things to Me*. Chicago: Haymarket Books, pp.85–108.
- Sontag S (1977) *On photography*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Statistics Canada (2008) *Aboriginal Children's Survey: Family, community and child care*. Ottawa, ON: Social and Aboriginal Statistics Division, Statistics Canada.
- Statistics Canada (2009) *Aboriginal Data at Statistics Canada*. Ottawa, Canada: National Association of Friendship Centres.
- Statistics Canada (2011a) *Education in Canada: Attainment, field of study and location of study, 2011 National Household Survey*. Catalogue no. 99–012-X2011001. Ottawa, ON: Statistics Canada.
- Statistics Canada (2011b) *Trends in Dropout Rates and the Labour Market Outcomes of Young Dropouts*. Ottawa, Canada: Labour Statistics Division, Statistics Canada.
- Tilleczek K (2011) *Approaching Youth Studies: Being, becoming, and belonging*. Toronto: Oxford University Press.
- Tilleczek K (2012) Policy activism with and for youth transitions through public education. *International Journal of Educational Administration and History* 44(3): 253–267.
- Tilleczek K (2013) On being poor at school. In Tilleczek K and Ferguson B (eds) *Youth education, and marginality: Local and global expressions*. Waterloo, Canada: Wilfred Laurier University Press, pp. 155–175.
- Tilleczek K (2014) Young lives: Biography, society and time. In: Ibrahim A and Steinberg S (eds) *Critical Youth Studies Reader*. New York: Peter Lang Press, pp. 16–25.
- Tilleczek K and Kinlock K (2013) Humanities infused praxis by, with and for youth: Esoteric hope, In: Tilleczek K and Ferguson B (eds) *Youth, Education and Marginality: Local and global expressions*. Waterloo, Canada: Wilfred Laurier University Press, pp. 17–39.
- Tilleczek K and Lezeu K (2014) Journeys in youth mental health. *Education Canada Special Issue: Youth Mental Health* 54(2): 12–18.
- Tilleczek K, Ferguson M, Campbell V et al. (2014) Mental health and poverty in young lives: Intersections and directions. *Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health* 33(1): 63–76.
- Woolf V (1929, reprinted 1992) *A Room of One's Own*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Author biographies

Kate Tilleczek is the Founder and Director of the Young Lives Research Laboratory and a Full Professor in the Faculty of Education and Arts (Sociology and Anthropology) at the University of Prince Edward Island, Canada. She is a Canada Research Chair in Young Lives in Global/Local Contexts, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Her work is interdisciplinary and international in

scope, with a current focus on the impacts of technology on young lives over time and place, youth pathways into and out of mental health, and reimagining education.

Janet Loebach is a Postdoctoral Fellow with the Young Lives Research Lab at the University of Prince Edward Island, Canada, coordinating projects related to the impact of technology and digital media on the lives and health of youth. She earned her doctorate in Children's Geographies from Western University in London, Canada. Her ongoing research and consulting interests focus on the influence of sociocultural, digital and physical environments on the health and behaviour of young people, and the potential of participatory processes for engaging youth in research and design.