Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education

Youth media and agency

Chelsey Hauge[a]

[a] Language and Literacy, University of British Columbia,
Vancouver, BC, Canada
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Chelsey Hauge*

Language and Literacy, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada

This article addresses how capacity is conceived of and understood in youth media/civic education programming, and how beliefs about agency, development, relationality and youth manifests in the discourses, programmes, and practices of organizations operating youth media programmes. Through attention to a youth media and development programme in rural Nicaragua, the article addresses a key gap in theorizing *how* capacity operates within discourses and related practices that constitute 'youth media' and, in particular, it critically investigates how youth media discourse rests on an assumed foundation where capacity is defined as agency, empowerment or voice. This article situates youth media production within modernist discourses about education, development and 'change', in order to re-conceptualize agency through a mobilities framework that more fully attends to the complex and affective moments in youth media discourses.

Keywords: youth; media production; agency; mobilities; Nicaragua; development

Introduction

Scores of youth media programmes operate globally, underwritten by the particularly robust assumption that media engagement will foster voice and empowerment for youth involved with them. There is a real need to trace how the pedagogical practices that constitute youth media programming are situated, informed and authorized by a particular set of Western and modernist discourses concerning 'media', 'development' and 'youth'. Media programmes offer opportunities ranging from media production to deconstructing mainstream media, and have been offered by schools, non-profit organizations (NPOs), and other institutions, since the 1990s (Goldfarb, 2002). Recently, development organizations have broadened youth programming (Burde, 2012), often incorporating media into their work with young people, as many major development agencies and small non-profits like Amigos de las Americas have done. The tendency in this kind of media programming is that youth are mentored to produce documentary-style work about social issues affecting their lives and communities (Broughton, 2012). By expecting youth to explore and impact social issues through new media, media production becomes intertwined with practices of hope, and is deployed as the *de facto* means through which issues affecting young people are addressed.

The particular modality of 'hope' in the context of media programming involves using media to tackle urgent issues like poverty and education within a framework wherein it is assumed a priori that media literacy will engage youth in becoming involved – by means of participation – in enacting solutions to issues in their lives, communities and world.

*Email: chelseyhauge@gmail.com

This belief in agency, learning, media and hope for a better future, foregrounds agency as the way to move forward creating change in the world, and it constructs youth participants as key bodies that can create change. Multiliteracy theory suggests that capacity, conceived of as agency, is more than the ability to produce media, it is the ability to critically analyze relations of power and representation in the world and in the context of media so that they might effect some kind of change (Hull, 2003; Soep, 2006). Because the concept of agency is surrounded with complications and historicity, it is useful to re-theorize the link between youth, media and public practice through a 'mobilities' lens that focuses on how youth move through and within systems including materialities, ideologies and discourse (Bryson & MacIntosh, 2010).

This article addresses a key gap in theorizing *how* capacity operates within discourses and related practices that constitute 'youth media' as programmes run by NPOs. In particular, it critically investigates how youth media discourse rests on an assumed foundation where capacity is defined as agency, empowerment or voice. Of course, young people live in saturated media ecologies and engage in media use and production in both formal institutions and initiatives and in informal spaces. Jenkins (2006a), for example, in his work on convergence and youth participation in commercial storylines, writes that as youth participate in online communities they 'are using the internet to connect with children worldwide and through that process, finding common interests and forging alliances' (p. 216).

The desire that when youth produce media there are positive outcomes is symptomatic of the pan-optimism in youth work, a hope that youth represent the world and the future getting better (Lesko & Talburt, 2012). While *some* youth may be 'finding common interests and forging alliances', the optimism that focuses on those alliances obscures those for whom growing interests and building alliances are not the norm. The desire to recognize youth participation in a way that produces good feeling about youth and 'the future' obscures the conversation around capacity, chalking it up as 'enough' that young fans are connecting and collaborating. In situations where formal institutional and organizational media programmes are concerned, the problem with only celebrating and documenting the impressive multiliteracy benefits linked with media production is that it conceals how the structures that allow for youth to 'do' media also marginalizes youth, and leaves researchers with little space to ask 'tough questions about the actual quality and impact of young people's learning experiences, or the extent to which the benefits carry over into measurable social and educational capital' (Soep, 2006). This article situates youth media production carried out in the youth-focused non-profit world within modernist discourses about development and 'change', in order to re-conceptualize agency through a mobilities framework that attends not only to optimistic youth media programming but also to the complex and affective moments in youth media discourses.

Youth media

Informally, youth produce media and engage social media frequently in order to build networks, a kind of movement often referred to as 'participatory culture' (boyd, 2007; boyd & Ellison, 2008; Jenkins, 2006b). Many youth also participate in the pedagogical initiatives of non-school-based organizations (Broughton, 2012; Montgomery, 2007). Some of these programmes are run in the non-profit world (where an NPO – is one that uses surplus revenue to achieve a specific goal or mission as opposed to generate more revenue, and has no relation to the state in governance); unlike NPOs, others take the

form of apprenticeship experiences, and/or talent and creative development opportunities, that tend to avoid some of the concerns expressed in this article precisely because the pedagogical intention is different. However, in a survey of NPO youth media organizations in the USA, the majority of organizations identified a:

> … need to address the conditions of poverty by offering a structured place for youth to engage with media in social and recreational ways [and] the need to mentor youth as change agents who invest and participate in their communities. (Tyner, 2009, p. 128)

For the purpose of this article, I understand youth media to refer to interventions carried out by organizations along these lines, mostly envisioned to mitigate marginalization through critical media literacy. For example, the Educational Video Centre (EVC) in New York City works with students failing out of mainstream schooling by involving them in documentary production in and about their own communities (Goodman, 2003). Programmes like EVC often spend extraordinary amounts of time and resources working with youth to identify and develop relevant storylines for their productions, which makes them distinct from programmes that are oriented around a single theme and bring youth together to produce media specifically about that theme, often resulting in the reproduction of adult discourses in youth-produced media.

The desire to change or fix (often termed empowerment, agency or voice) youth has frequently been theorized as a moral panic that persists about the young (Bennett, 2007), producing arguments about how youth require protection from popular media (Poyntz, 2006) as well as programmes underwritten by the assumption that youth are problems that might be solved through media programming with adequate time and money (Blum-Ross, 2011). The positioning of this generation of youth as 'at the forefront of falling rates of civic engagement and political participation' (Xenos & Foot, 2008) provides further reason for concern. Critical literacy has historically been used to involve and educate people perceived to be disengaged from political processes, notably through work based on Freire (Freire & Horton, 1990). The link between literacy and civic engagement plays out pedagogically as organizations structure media programming, often scaffolding pedagogy for youth to make documentaries and socially oriented pieces (Broughton, 2012). This scaffolding is present even in organizations that partner with youth to at all stages of media production, in the sorts of activities, structures and pedagogy that constitute programming and its related discourses (Blum-Ross, 2011). In this way, pedagogy impacts upon agency, shaping the sorts of discourses, engagements and relationships made possible in youth media programming.

Media literacy is understood as part of a broader set of literacies that are politically, culturally and socially situated (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). Digital media has been taken up as one solution to the panic surrounding youth's political disengagement and the panic around the dangers of new media (Bennett, 2007; Montgomery, 2007). Media spaces are frequently understood as participatory and political spaces where youth can attain agency by uploading and posting, whether they do so in formal or in informal learning spaces (Ito et al., 2009; Jenkins, 2006a; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). Concerns about the digital divide have led a number of NPOs to create opportunities for marginalized youth to engage with media despite their lack of resources. Youth in media spaces are in need of guidance:

> … although a willingness to learn new media by point and click exploration might come naturally to today's student cohort, there's nothing innate about knowing how to apply their skills to the process of democracy. Internet media are not offered here as the solution to

young people's disengagement from political life, but as a possibly powerful tool to be deployed toward helping them engage. (Rheingold, 2008, p. 99)

The resulting gap is the space in which educators and non-profits create opportunities for civic participation through new media (Broughton, 2012). The EVC aims to provide young people from poor communities of colour with the tools which affect issues in their own communities, because taking a video camera 'into the community as regular method for teaching and learning gives kids a critical lens through which they can explore the world around them' (Goodman, 2003, p. 3). Likewise, Amigos de las Americas and a major International Development Agency (IDA) working in Nicaragua, the organizations whose programmes are addressed in this article, provide youth with the tools to build relationships with each other and to communicate with local and global audiences in order to effect change. In a 2008 survey of organizations offering media programming to young people, Tyner (2009) found that the primary missions for offering media programmes were to 'give youth a voice, to encourage self-expression, to build and strengthen our community' (p. 106). The concern materialized in these initiatives is that a lack of participation related to voicelessness is linked to youth's marginalization, and that given the right tools, resources and learning spaces, this can be remedied. The hope is that media production will foster a sense of capacity that will lead to the improvement of social ills, especially in marginalized communities.

Agency is often inferred based on the ability to produce media and engage communities. Programming that shows youth how to debunk popular media and to produce documentary media about and with their own communities engenders a positive feeling about youth and the future they represent (Broughton, 2012). The positive documentation of this phenomenon is problematic because it posits 'a fully egalitarian environment where none exists, thereby obscuring rather than unsettling the uneven distribution of power' (Soep, 2006, p. 201). The embodied, affective moments in youth media and the feelings they produce may indicate a different and more complex set of experiences in youth media altogether. The focus on voice and its representation as agency or capacity obscures the broader socialities and materialities in which production is situated (Barad, 2003). The optimism about youth work and its potential for changing the world is an instance of 'pan-optimism … The desire to feel good about the outcomes of youth projects and youth studies' (Lesko & Talburt, 2012, p. 280). Pan-optimism within youth studies provides youth workers, theoreticians and others with a site of hope that produces an orderly future, obscuring the underworkings and relations of power that occur in youth work (MacIntosh, Poyntz, & Bryson, 2012). It is important to carefully document and analyze how capacity operates, in a reflexive attempt to attend to more than just optimistic outcomes but to the complex and affective moments of mobility within youth media.

Development

Youth media scholars have researched the multiple ways that international relationships can be formed online, and how those relationships prompt cosmopolitan feelings of empathy and social engagement (Hull, Stornaiuolo, & Sahni, 2010). The interest in cosmopolitanism and youth participation has brought about a number of initiatives that work with youth on capacity building and community development. These interventions are often grounded in language about rights and civic engagement that will produce a better future, and rationalize interventions by imagining them 'as acts of citizenship … interventions to

ensure effective citizenship are rational. Youth must be reinvested as our future, and we must ensure a good future' (Baez, 2012, p. 156).

There is a long-standing tradition in which organizations originating in the west support and facilitate the development of rural communities and marginalized populations in the developing world. The linkages between north,west and south are essentially 'modern'; however, such modernity clashes with coloniality, and is dependent on the production of good feeling about helping a 'needy' other (Escobar, 2007; Mignolo, 2007). Development discourse functions so that:

> … there exists a verifiable underdeveloped subjectivity endowed with features such as powerlessness, passivity, poverty, and ignorance, usually dark and lacking in historical agency, as if waiting for the (white) Western hand to help subjects along. (Escobar, 1994, p. 8)

In order for cosmopolitan engagement to function as a feel-good experience with the other, affective networks emotionally align people and communities through the intensity of attachment to certain kinds of ideas about the relationship between those perceived as other (Ahmed, 2004). The relationship of helping the less fortunate other aligns organizations and people from the global north and global south through neo-colonial histories and relationships.

Development organizations that have recently expanded youth programming focusing on citizenship and civic engagement (Burde, 2012), do so in order to combat the criticism of development as a Western practice of assimilation (Latouche, 1996). The civic engagement approach to development is manifest in a focus on 'youth' activities like media, where youth are encouraged to use cameras to narrate stories important to them, and in doing so, become engaged citizens. Many organizations use media in some way to enhance their work with youth, often encouraging public posting of the creations. This masquerades as engaged citizenship through the over-valuing of voice that is 'heard' in digital publics. It is here that the 'public voice of individuals, aggregated and in dialogue with the voices of other individuals, is the fundamental particle of "public opinion"' (Rheingold, 2008, p. 101). The assumption is that through media production, youth attain voice that enables participation in digital publics. Some media productions reflect development discourse and narrative, others deviate from what was desirable as public participation, and others fall flat. It is important that these stories that are less hopeful be recognized as part of youth media production, because too often the only narratives made visible are the small(er) percentage of youth productions whose stories mirror the desired narratives. It is important to deconstruct the assumptions made around voice, and publics in which young people's work is engaged – or not – and the complex ways in which stories are produced through the pedagogical underpinnings of media programming, as opposed to simply understanding and celebrating youth video stories as representations of reality that signify voice, empowerment or agency.

Mobilities and *La Contaminación*, a youth video project

In order to move beyond the feel-good possibilities of youth media, critical engagement with the taken-for-granted notion of 'agency' deployed as an outcome of youth work becomes urgent. The desire to produce agentive subjects is linked to the understanding of the individual person who can effect change, who is present in writing about development and youth media (Bryson & MacIntosh, 2010; Lesko & Talburt, 2012; MacIntosh et al., 2012). Agentive capacity has been theorized as an ability possessed by the sovereign

subject, and is frequently conceptualized this way in youth media (Davies, 2000; Zerilli, 2005). The change-producing subject can be challenged by foregrounding the complex constellation of transnational movements and forces that shape capacity with particular attention paid to the pedagogical spaces opened in development practice. The usefulness of the notion of agency is questionable given the historical and theoretical understandings that have plagued the concept, and in the case of media and capacity, it is more useful to conceptualize mobilities and how they are shaped, constrained and released (Bryson & MacIntosh, 2010). Capacity and movement have to do with intervening in becoming, changing or affecting what matters. It is imagination that 'allows us to bring particulars into an unexpected and potentially critical relation with each other – critical because we are able to see something new' (Zerilli, 2005, p. 61). A mobilities framework allows for capacity in movement through relationality, where relationships are born of imaginative and affective practices (Bryson & MacIntosh, 2010). Mobility places an emphasis on publicness and being in the world in a relational way, fixating less on the individual's ability to affect change and more on the constellations of movement that make participation and publicness possible. When youth make media, they engage multiple networks connected through new and old media and movement, engaging communities and people locally and globally (boyd, 2007; Hull et al., 2010; Jenkins, 2006b). This sharing can be wildly fun and energizing – it can also be riddled with tension between youth, communities, storytellers, subjects, organizations and other constituents. As the media pieces move through diverse networks, youth mobilities shift dramatically, dependent on a complicated constellation of who is involved, how the piece circulates and the flows and constructions of those spaces and subjects (Sheller & Urry, 2006).

In the community of Villa de Ada, youth participated in a media programme run from 2010 to 2012 by two inter-linked development organizations: Amigos de las Americas and a major IDA. Both organizations work on development and youth leadership projects in rural communities across Latin America.[1] The organizations partner to carry out a two-month summer youth media programme, where youth predominantly from North America live in rural communities and work with local youth to produce a series of media projects. In 2010, Villa de Ada was provided with media production tools – laptops, cameras, recorders and media editing programmes – and youth received training on how to produce media projects and how to execute small-scale community development initiatives from 2010 to 2012. The data were gathered as part of a two-year ethnographic case study on the programme, during which time I was also the Director of the programme. The research was carried out using the case study method, and takes up ethnographic methods including participant observation, interviewing and video recordings of youth as they engage in media production (Stake, 2005; Yin, 1981, 2009). The production of media pieces was the central activity of interest, and the unit of analysis is the media-making event inclusive of the planning, production and presentations stages of the video project. This includes youth group meetings, regional meetings and production in communities and the presentation of the video in the regional groups among other meetings and events.

In Villa de Ada there is an ongoing potable water project, initiated by IDA in 2010 in response to water-borne illnesses, and funded through a partnership between IDA and a foreign (European) donor. The youth from Villa de Ada were encouraged to make a video about the water project. IDA was hopeful that the youth would learn how to *do* community participation through the documentation of this water project. Some hoped that the video could be shared with the Western funders donating the money for the

potable water project. Youth in the community were not terribly excited about documenting the water project, and did not mobilize after the request was made. As one community development professional expressed after long discussions about a desire for youth to 'do' civic engagement through media and their responsibilities to the water project and the community:

> They should go and film it (the water project) and give an analysis, film it, and record it, with what they have learned. It would be nice for them to be able to present this to the funders. I even told them we could bring the projector to the community to show it. And look, none of them made a move. That's where, I think, we need to tell the youth that they are part of the community and they are the future of the community – in five or ten years, they'll be the adults.

While certainly there are unfair expectations expressed, there is also a feeling of urgency to 'get youth involved'. This feeling of frustration is not uncommon in youth programming especially when there is a desire for youth to be empowered, inspired leaders. The youth involved in this project are constructed as the future of the community, the community's hope. Frustration ensues because there is a gap between what we hope we do, what we say we do publicly and what actually happens on the ground in youth media production. What becomes valued is a certain kind of mobility that evidences, by means of participation, youth leadership. It is materialized through interaction with community media projects, organizations and activities like canvassing the community gathering stories about community projects, or attending meetings about community issues. These activities are valorized and rewarded as representative of participation or civic engagement even when they conflict with responsibilities youth might have outside of community participation arise, or when they have concerns about the mode of participation made possible through community development.

When the youth first refused the request to make a video about the water project, they did so precisely by not moving in the ways that the organization wanted them to: they refused the paths of mobility offered, even though those paths were connected to substantial financial resources. This refusal is productive in and of itself, and disrupts the assumption that media literacy represents youth participation and that participation is unequivocally positive. The assumption that media literacy can powerfully improve conditions of living functions to hide ideological assumptions so that multiliteracies become neutral, positive effects of participation. The ideological assumptions that tie literacy to a more productive, hopeful 'better' future are actually deeply situated within Western understandings and ideals about literacy (Street, 2003).

Youth in Villa de Ada eventually made the video about the potable water project for an AMIGOS 48 Hour Video Competition. The idea that resulted in this video was initiated by one of the North American volunteers after a workshop about a video challenge the community participated in, titled the '48 Hour Video Challenge' led by AMIGOS. She explains:

> I was just sitting there, and they were like 'issues in the community', and I was like 'Oh, the IDA project. They're doing all these things in the streets. Making it hard to walk everywhere. They have super controversial meetings every week. The IDA guy's in the community every day'. So I was like, 'That's kind of big!' I told Kara, and Kara told Clemente, and Clemente was like, 'Yah, let's do a dramatic spin on it ... let's do this ...'. And we were like, 'Oh, ok. That's way more interesting than a documentary'.

The documentary aesthetic is portrayed here by the youth as the organization's agenda. The excitement around a dramatic spin on a story positions the youth agenda as

aesthetically divergent from the organizational agenda. This is one way for youth to put images and stories into movement in ways that represent a parting from organizational agendas. The dramatic spin allows for increased creative authorship, and for youth to produce a video without such pressure to 'truth'. Youth are thus freed to make ideological and discursive moves that may be contrary to organizational ideological positions.

The youth produced a short narrative film which they titled *La Contaminación*.[2] The film tells the story of a young girl who collapsed on the steep walk to the river to bring water, and dies of a water-borne illness. Screen titles tell us that 'IDA wanted to help this community with the worst kind of problem – no clean water'. The story continues as a development work enters the community, asking about the biggest problems, and learns of the water problem. The IDA representative returns after the child's death, with hopeless news: the problem cannot be resolved because there are not enough funds. Children and the mother of the dead girl beg him to find the funding for potable water. The dead girl's folks visit her grave, telling her they have found a way to solve the potable water problem. Text comes on the screen about how IDA and the community began work on a clean water project funded by a European donor because of the girl's death. A series of images of men digging ditches, and then faces of children flash on the screen before the credits scroll, and the video ends.

In *La Contaminación*, mobility is situated within relationships. The girl does not survive a water-borne illness because her parents are unable to take her to the hospital for lack of resources like money and transportation. She is rendered immobile, and dies, because of the kinds of relationships that did not allow her to access clean water. Her death results in a visit to the community from a development organization attempting to provide assistance, and through the relationship constructed between her death, the grieving community and the development organization, people from the community are construed as unable to take action about this serious situation until an outsider has arrived. In order for the movement of funds to occur into the community, there is a parallel movement of solutions and ideas from the north to the south that the youth dance around in their story, where they are both critical of development practices, and represent the same kinds of colonial narratives that have produced this situation in the first place.

In *La Contaminación*, the community is approached by IDA, and asked what 'the biggest problem' is in the community. It seems IDA brings help, hope and a better future to a plagued community, though soon it becomes clear that IDA is also reliant on outside financial support. The community waits for this funding through the figure of the IDA representative who bears hope, dependent on northern benefactors, a hope that seems too far away to actually materialize. All the actors in the story are caught in globalized relationships of development that situates power firmly in Western hands, and makes resources increasingly challenging to access across the space-time continuum that expands, as opposed to compresses, for those in the Global South as globalization occurs and it becomes harder to access resources that become farther away (Katz, 2004). In this development context, resources filter through numerous hands, fostering a sense of hopelessness in those who requested the resources. Likewise, while civic engagement theories and asset-based development practices attempt to connect communities with resources and help them to become mobile within networks that are rich with resources, this often involves numerous steps in terms of whose hands the resources pass through, and in *La Contaminación*, it is apparent how this becomes immobilizing.

In the *Contaminación* film, the youth make very clear how access to clean water is tangled with coloniality – the layers involved in providing this public service extend far beyond the nation state. It is the goodwill of the Western donors that 'brings' the potable water system. Local impotence is constructed as par for the course, resulting in an immobility that situates locals as in need of help to access resources, allowing for the importance and necessity of the benefactor. For the youth involved, the programme and video production functions as a discursive field where youth and community members are situated as grateful recipients of benevolent aid. This way of relating to and being in the world deeply affects how youth can move within networks, with community organizations, from within and around media and media production. While the video is fictional, its narrative grew out of the desire for a video for IDA to present to the Western funders the actual water project in Villa de Ada. Youth make discursive moves to situate themselves so that they can have mobility within this global/local schemata in which funds, ideas and collaboration are moved:

Interviewer:	I heard that you feel proud of the project, and that's why you made the video.
Clemente:	Yes, we are proud of the project.
Dora:	And blessed. Even though it will be a project … It won't get to all the houses, but will be …Well, a water spigot for every 10 people. So it will be more flexible. Because the amount of money that there is for the project is not enough for us to have a spigot in every house. So that's how its going to be. But at the same time maybe with the help from this program we can coordinate with other organizations to have help so that the water can get to every community and every person … so that every home has its own water spigot.
Interviewer:	So are you going to use the video to show to other organizations and ask for help?
Clemente:	Yes. To see if, when they see the video, they are suprised or feel an emotion of sadness. I don't know. They could come and talk to someone from the community or maybe someone with money/influence here in Nicaragua, and come to our community and say to us: We want to help with this project. We will give a donation so it can continue.

The youth involved in the production of *La Contaminación* situate themselves this way not because they believe that they are disempowered or in need of North American help, but because they are keenly aware of the relationships that render financial support to the community and programming possibilities for the youth. One of the ways that they effect changes in programming and funding is through immobility, and refusing participation.

In *La Contaminación*, the characters from the community stayed exclusively in the community. However, in interviews the desire to move in and out of communities is frequently expressed. Often, programme facilitators from IDA and AMIGOS expressed a concern that pedagogical experiences like multiple-community workshops outside of the community served as a justified way for youth to convince parents to allow them to leave the community. Programming is often designed with particular intentions – civic engagement, media literacy and community development – and taken up with different intentions, including mobility, seeing friends from other communities and accessing resources. Youth expressed a desire, frequently, to be able to move in and out of the community, though in the video all of these characters waited *in the community* for help, suggesting again that youth navigate complex relationships in development and leadership programming as they go about media production and video storytelling. One North American volunteer described the mobility of her peers from the community this way:

Kara:	Mona is great. But she's in college, and home only half the week.
Christina:	And Dora … But she wants to go places and …
Interviewer:	What do you mean 'go places'?
Kara:	She's not going to be in Villa de Ada too much longer?
Interviewer:	Where's she going?
Kara:	She's dying to get out of this community. It's so obvious. She's like, 'Can we go to Boaco please?' And William –
Julia:	It sucks for Dora. Because her family doesn't really …
Kara:	… let her do much. Like they wouldn't let her go to Boaco (for an overnight video showing/workshop).
Christina:	Then Bea. We don't know. Because she has a problem … They have a big store in the community. And she can only go if her mom doesn't go milking. But her mom doesn't really know if she's going milking until the morning. So we don't really know. If she says she's going to Boaco, there's a good chance she won't actually go. So we don't really know. And Mercedes – this meeting even. She didn't do an experimental video because she was like 'I don't know if I can go in the morning'.

These kinds of differing demands on youths' time and how they spend it make interesting challenges for the ways in which organizations can involve youth in something resembling 'civic engagement' or 'community development'. The line between programmatic concerns about civic engagement and youth desire for mobility (for all media/programme activities, the organizations pay for transportation and related costs for attending programming) is complex, and to interpret the nature of civic engagement, community ownership and empowerment, from young people's participation with media production and media literacy, is misleading. Youth navigate organizational goals about civic engagement as well as the desire for increased mobility and access to resources not related to development, media and civic engagement through their participation. By producing these kinds of locally oriented expectations, and hoping that through development/organizational programming, youth will participate, where participation is mostly tied to local interventions and involvement, development discourse at times constrains mobilities even as it attempts to open them up and offer youth a plethora of experiences and opportunities. When asked to discuss the video, the Nicaraguan youth return to development discourse that situates them as recipients – disempowered – even though it is so clear they cannot be so simply constructed as disempowered.

If we were to read this video through the lens of agency that is commonly deployed in youth media, important observations about how youth become involved with their community, and how that involvement sets them up to continue working on community projects would be made. In the agency paradigm, community participation reflects optimistic desire for the future to be better, and youth to be central in the future (Lesko & Talburt, 2012). Critical literacy might be read off the construction of the narrative about the development representative as critical of the development complex, through the portrayal of the representative as unable to access financial resources. The attachment to agency produces the belief that youth are rational beings, capable of critical thought about development and change. The desire to form agentive subjects brings us back to the idea that multiliteracy practices have inherent power to make the world a better place (Street, 2003) and to the idea that multiliteracies and media production are tools with potential to almost always engage youth in civic ways (Rheingold, 2008). Within this paradigm, the camera is a tool for producing agentive subjects through critical literacy (Goodman, 2003). Literacy and agency are intertwined with civic engagement, yet the focus on production, engagement and participation leaves little space for considering ways in

which media literacy and media production are not only tools simply for learning and critical citizenship but also politically situated tools of power embedded in development practices and pan-optimism about youth programming.

The mistake in using an agency lens is to assume that media production is representative of agency or civic participation. There are multiple and competing interests that play into every youth media project. The assumption made by interpreting agency or civic engagement from *La Contaminación* is that all self-expression is liberatory (Fleetwood, 2005) when clearly, these youth are caught in and producing media about competing dialogues about development, globalization, social organizing and access to funding/resources. While civic engagement is taken up to mitigate paternalistic development practices (Latouche, 1996; Youniss et al., 2002), the language used to talk about civic engagement actually functions to further obscure them, making them harder to identify. A focus on mobilities allows us to engage with and identify the complex networks and ideologies within which youth produce video. Mobilities attend to the temporal and spatial interactions and relationships that structures ways in which affect, images, organizations and people move through different situations like the water project and video, and the related race to access resources in the development context. The ways in which the youth play with the failure of the development organization to respond to them, initially, are important. That playfulness might be situated critically in a mobilities lens that does not essentialize or fix youth participation in a way that allows for little understanding of workings of power through the movement of affect, images, organizations and people, allowing for more latitude in youth motivation and learning beyond civic engagement. A mobilities lens sheds light on some of the underworkings of power in ways that are otherwise overlooked by pan-optimism and the tendency to understand the subject as the interlocutor of social change (Bryson & MacIntosh, 2010). In Villa de Ada, the tendency to pan-optimism becomes necessary for IDA to attain funding – it is through youth video that they aim to secure future funding. The competing demands on the youth, organizations and community illustrate how pedagogy affects and shapes agency, and visa versa. All elements of the video story made by Villa de Ada's young participants – its hope, its production by youth and the involvement of a foreign donor whose finances 'saved the day' in a difficult and tragic situation affecting an entire community – are integral in affecting mobility of resources and people in the development context.

Conclusion

The complex mobilities involved in youth media are compounded by the belief that by engaging with different others youth can and will build local, national and international networks that will produce 'good' in the world. These beliefs extend to pedagogical practices that impact how agency and, more importantly, how mobilities take shape. There is a strong sense of hope that participation in these programmes will facilitate feelings that 'extend beyond the local to include larger arenas of concern, and to construct new spaces for the practice of dialogue, where our human obligations can transcend traditional ties of kith and kind' (Stornaiuolo, Hull, & Sahni, 2011). Notions of understanding the other through media practices that somehow transcend or suspend difference obscure the ways in which youth come to participate, and the important mobilities that allow that participation to happen at all. Media practices, especially those that transpire in pedagogical spaces with liberatory desires must not only be celebrated

for their possibility (Bryson & MacIntosh, 2010), but also examined for complex feeling and disjuncture because as youth integrate into programming their experiences of telling are shaped by relationalities extending to include the construction of the pedagogical space by institutional actors and how youth come to participate at all.

Youth media programming has numerous positive outcomes for participants, and it is of utmost urgency to create and provide opportunities for young people to engage with each other, media and their communities in ways that are useful, interesting and engaging for them. When the desire to produce agentive subjects is situated in pan-optimism, it becomes very challenging to understand the myriad ways youth engage in storytelling, and how that storytelling intersects with the necessary programmatic pedagogical structures and space. The intensity of focus and celebration of social change and youth bodies obscures mobilities and stories and experiences that might not be as overtly politicized in the mode of 'hopeful social change' but which tell important tales of mobility, media and globalization in the lives of youth. How youth move into youth media projects, and how they negotiate movement once they are involved, is an important area of understanding in order to make sense of capacity. Understanding youth media production and pedagogy through relational mobility instead of agency positions a variety of actors – including development organizations, many community actors, globalization, media and other youth, to name a few – as a network that produces the spaces of youth media, in which marginalization and resistance, moments of mobility and emergent relationships can occur.

Notes

1. www.amigoslink.org.
2. Video link: http://tinyurl.com/7ebka4g.

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