

MICHAEL B. MACDONALD

2. A PEDAGOGY OF CULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY

YEGH3 (Edmonton Hip-Hop History) as a Decentralized Model for Hip-Hop's Global Microhistories

YEGH3: PROJECT-BASED LEARNING AS ENGAGED ARTS PEDAGOGY FOR HIP-HOP EDUCATION

Michael B. MacDonald PhD (Assistant Professor of Music, MacEwan University)

HipHop Kulture¹ and Hip Hop, the elements of its practice, are slowly democratizing aesthetics and aesthetics education.² The democratization of aesthetics is significant because it introduces a critical cultural dimension into aesthetics where none before existed. Aesthetics is still, for the most part, marked by universality that postcolonial scholars like Walter Dignolo (2011) identify as a hallmark of modernity. In the first part of this chapter, I will discuss the emergence of 'African- American aesthetics' (Caponi 1999) or 'Black Aesthetics' (Neal 2000). I will also illustrate how critical consciousness resonates at the heart of HipHop Kulture.

In the second part of the chapter, I will introduce a pedagogical approach that has emerged from my work in HipHop Kulture, *engaged art pedagogy*, and the project- based learning methods that I have begun to employ as a consequence. I have found that as an aesthetics educator responding to the democratization of aesthetics, project-based learning has become an important element of my higher education curriculum. The chapter will conclude with an example of project-based learning, a microhistories iBook on Edmonton Hip Hop called YEGH3.

FROM HIP-HOP CITIZENS TO HIP-HOP HISTORY

This journey began with my 2012 publication, *Hip-Hop Citizens*, where I discuss the centrality of informal/community pedagogy in 'street' Hip- Hop education. As a note, I have since taken up KRS-ONE's approach to writing HipHop Kulture/ Hip Hop/hip-hop from his 2009 *Gospel of Hip Hop*, so I would now have titled it Hip-Hop Citizens. I have since been engaged in community dialogue with members of the HipHop Kulture circle and Hip-Hop citizens, or hiphoppas, featured in that publication. These conversations have strengthened my commitment to a critical pedagogy of aesthetics that, inspired by John Dewey's *Art as Experience* (1934), Maxine Greene (2001; 2004), and bell hooks (1990; 1994; 2010), might provide

a basis for rethinking aesthetics education through HipHop Kulture. But I am also less naive to the difficulties that are often faced in the development of *engaged arts pedagogy*. I have identified in particular, two aspects of this challenge. First, there is the struggle to stay true to the goals set out by Paulo Freire in *Education for Critical Consciousness* (2010) and *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), expanded by bell hooks as *engaged pedagogy* (hooks 1994; Florence 1998). The challenge is to develop an approach to Hip-Hop education that emerges authentically from HipHop Kulture. These are theoretical issues informed by community concern. More than one hiphoppa has expressed to me that school-based educators need to be sensitive to the cultural impact studio-based curriculum will have on HipHop Kulture when Hip-Hop elements are reframed for classroom use. This is an area where music theory, cultural studies, and music education cross, and a rich direction for future research, that I refer to as the cultural studies of aesthetics education.

The second challenge, which might be called the *public pedagogy of hip hop* (Giroux, 2009), stems from a lack of research on the cultural impact of global entertainment products that transform Hip-Hop elements (usually rap and graffiti art) into commodities for sale as ‘authentic’ HipHop Kulture. While there is a mountain of theoretical work generated by critical cultural theorists who discuss this process, there are few community-based research projects that examine these speculations and provide social science feedback on the potential long-term cultural effects, although there is every reason to believe the impacts would be significant.³

This situation might be complex enough if it was not for even newer struggles that Mark Anthony Neal frames as the *post-soul aesthetic*:

In the post-soul aesthetic I am surmising that there is an aesthetic centre within contemporary black popular culture that at various moments considers issues like deindustrialization, desegregation, the corporate annexation of black popular expression, cybernization in the workforce, the globalization of finance and communication, the general commodification of black life and culture, and the proliferation of black “meta-identities,” while continuously collapsing on modern concept of blackness and reanimating ‘Premodern’ (African?) concepts of blackness. I am also suggesting that this aesthetic ultimately renders many ‘traditional’ tropes of blackness dated and even meaningless; in its borrowing from black modern traditions, it is so consumed with its contemporary existential concerns that such traditions are not just called into question but obliterated” (Neal, 2002, 2-3)

Within this complex territory I am working towards the development of Hip-Hop pedagogy. My approach began with Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy for Critical Consciousness* (2010) documented in *Hip-Hop Citizens*. I formed a culture-circle of hiphoppas, all recognized as important community members. Over a period of months we discussed the above challenges and worked towards articulating our core concerns, our priorities, and next steps. I have since realized that I stumbled

into *Participatory Action Research* (Carr and Kemmis, 1986; Fine and Torre, 2008; Noffke and Somekh, 2009).

At the close of the first phase of the Hip-Hop PAR, what we now call *Cypher5*,⁴ we collectively decided that we needed to develop an Edmonton HipHop Culture curriculum and that this must begin with a documented history of Edmonton's Hip-Hop practitioners. As YEGH3, Edmonton (YEG) Hip-Hop History (H3) took shape, I leaned heavily on Freire's assertion that "the starting point for organizing the program content of education or political action must be the present, existential, concrete situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people" (2010, 95). We decided it is necessary to frame the development of Hip-Hop locally, so that learners would recognize their place, and their lives, within and through community Hip-Hop history. We may be a long way from New York City or Toronto but we do have HipHop Culture.

What is at stake here is the opportunity to write a community collective history and in the writing of it, to work towards empowerment. Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* suggests this role for educators, just as surely as Afrika Bambaata's *Zulu Nation* and KRS-ONE's Temple of Hip Hop does for hiphoppas. This comparison is not a surface accounting. KRS-ONE, in his lecture at Temple University,⁵ said that low self-esteem is created when a person's "well being is connected to something outside of themselves" this, he argues, is the beginning of poverty. Freire writes in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) that: "the oppressed, having internalized the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines, are fearful of freedom" (47). These different voices coming from different times both identify that the pain of domination will be overcome with the development of critical awareness and the expansion of imagination.

What I began to puzzle over in *Hip-hop Citizens* was how a critical pedagogy of HipHop Culture might be understood also as a critical pedagogy of aesthetics. But what I did not account for in that discussion was how the power of dominator culture is located in aesthetics. For instance, in the 18th century Alexander Baumgarten defined aesthetics as the science of how things are cognized by means of the senses, but soon after, in 1790, Immanuel Kant redefined aesthetics as *disinterested perception*. Kant's definition has exerted a far greater impact on the philosophy of art in the Western tradition than Baumgarten's. Once *disinterested perception* became the basis for aesthetics, and not a scientific study of human expressiveness and meaning-making (a cultural study, only European fine art is included in aesthetics. John Dewey's *Art as Experience* (1934) attempted to overcome Kant's mentalist construction of aesthetics and more recently, both Terry Eagleton and Luc Ferry have pointed out that aesthetics is really about an Enlightenment conception of individual/personal development and bourgeoisie morality (Guyer 2005, 30) and little about an inquiry into human practices of expression and reception. Walter Mignolo (2011) has argued that the very notion of art, upon which Kant's aesthetics is based, is itself a social construction, used as a tool to establish *hierarchies of expression* that allowed European bourgeois cultural expression to dominate the rest with terms like folklore, craft, popular culture etc. Mignolo calls this technique the *colonial difference*.

In this chapter I contribute to this developing discussion by illustrating the way HipHop Kulture challenges the *colonial difference*. And since the practice of HipHop Kulture is found in the elements of Hip-Hop, a class project that documents the local history of its practitioners allows for a foregrounding of a postcolonial challenge to aesthetics, provides an opportunity for students to gain critical insights into the writing of history, firsthand experience in doing the cultural studies of aesthetics, and has led to the production of a freely available educational product that will likely make a positive contribution to our community.

HIPHOP KULTURE IS ENGAGED ARTS PEDAGOGY

I believed for some time that I was applying critical pedagogy to hip-hop. But as I read more postcolonial theory, studied the history of aesthetics, listened more to hiphoppas, and watched my students coming into awareness of their place and responsibility in university and their city, I realized that I was missing perhaps the most important aspect of my project. HipHop Kulture *is* critical pedagogy. I understand critical pedagogy to be an educational philosophy interested in developing socially oriented, critical consciousness that emerges when students are provided educational situations that engage with core values of democracy and social justice. The hiphoppas I worked with were all engaged in the development of critical consciousness, something central to HipHop Kulture.

When asked about media messages of the culture he grew up on, in a 2004 lecture at Temple University, KRS-ONE remarked that the dominant theme was “everything that you have has no value”. He goes on to explain that dominator culture works to convince you that your culture is valueless, and that the only way to become valued, to get validated, is to buy into its commodities, practices, and institutions. But there is a catch he says. These same institutions, the only ones that have the power to validate you, have created frameworks that keep you out. This negates any possibility of attaining the validation that you are told is essential. This is an impossible situation.

Gregory Bateson (1972) calls this impossible situation a *double bind* (271-278). He explains that it is technique of domination without the outward appearance of it, and sometimes, without the dominators even realizing they are upholding a system of domination. It works when a social actor, as a functionary of a system, makes two contradictory demands. This strategy is powerful as there is no way to solve the dilemma of the double bind within the system. If you stay inside the system, you will forever remain trapped in its double pincers. While Bateson did not theorize the double bind with aesthetics in mind it is evident in KRS-ONE’s story.

KRS-ONE explains that Hip-Hop was a movement to “create an entirely different community”. It needs to be noted that what emerges is a community based on aesthetics. HipHop Kulture is a new type of community culture that is not based, necessarily on traditional notions of ethnicity, language, and geography. In this sense, Hip-Hop HipHop Kulture is the emergence of a postcolonial culture based on aesthetics. This move is perhaps more complex than might at first be noted. It is

not just that a group of people that were kept out of the dominant system created an alternative. It is more significant than that. The emergence and success of HipHop Kulture as an alternative aesthetic illustrated that aesthetics are cultural.

Since this is so, then the philosophical discourse of aesthetics is also cultural and is the cultural product of European Art culture. The entire history of aesthetics is no longer a philosophical discussion of Art (universal), it is the detailed elaboration of one cultural system, one among a great body of other cultural systems, that is aesthetic systems, that are found all over the world. Art is one way of thinking about human creativity. This realization, that aesthetics is a cultural system, also means that Kant's definition of aesthetics as *disinterested perception* only holds true only within the cultural system from which it emerged, and that we must reorient the study of aesthetics, so that it now might be the study of culturally informed aesthetic systems.

As you have likely already noted, when aesthetics is shown to be an aesthetic system, then the educational projects that serve it are also culturally bound. It is no longer enough to talk about music education, my area, or art education generally, we must now begin to research and experiment with culturally bound approaches to art/aesthetics education. Music education might now be understood as Western Art Music education, Hip-Hop education, Jazz education etc.

Returning to the issue at hand, the democratization of aesthetics and the *double bind* of the colonial difference is a struggle that was hard won (if indeed it has been won, of that I am not certain). It began to take shape in the Harlem Renaissance, was forwarded by the Black Arts Movement, and now flourishes in HipHop Kulture. Perhaps the search for HipHop Kultural education will start here.

THE BLACK ARTS MOVEMENT

Inspired by civil rights and Black Power discourses of the 1960s, the Black Arts Movement was radically opposed to any concept of the artist that "alienates him from his community" (Neal 1968), and was "the period extending somewhat beyond the defining decade of 1964 (the year of Malcolm X's rupture with the Nation of Islam) to 1974 (the year of Baraka's renunciation of absolute black nationalism), during which the category of 'blackness' served as the dominant sign of African-American cultural activity. (Benston 2002, 3). Black Arts built on Alain Locke's 1925 publication *The New Negro* and upon the Harlem Renaissance which focused on 'Blackness'. Kimberly Benston (2004) observes:

Blackness...a term of multiple, often conflicting, implications which, taken together, signal black American's effort to articulate its own of possibility. At one moment, blackness may signify a reified essence posited at the end of a revolutionary 'meta-language' projecting the community toward 'something not included here'; at another moment, blackness may indicate a self-interpreting process which simultaneously 'makes and unmakes' black identity in the ceaseless flux of historical change. (3-4)

By encouraging African-American artists to seek inspiration from an ancestral heritage as well as from the ghetto community, Locke believed a unique art “would emerge” (Fine 1971, 374). Black Arts joined with Black Power to form a political and cultural movement within ghetto communities:

The Black Art Movement artists are linked to Black separatist politics and Black Nationalism. The social political and economic conditions of the country during the 1960’s gave birth to the latter group of young, militant artists, who, disdaining the traditions of Western art, seek to communicate with their brothers and sisters in the ghetto. (ibid.)

This was the emergence of a separatist aesthetics. Its success depended, not upon eventual inclusion into aesthetics, but instead, upon creating an alternative, what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (2012) has called, aesthetics ‘from below’. Walter Mignolo in *Local Histories/Global Designs* (2000) emphasizes the historical significance of this struggle:

In the sixteenth century, when European men and institutions began to populate the Americas, founding universities and establishing a system of knowledge, training Indians to paint churches and to legitimize artistic principles and practices that were connected with the symbolic in the control of authority and with the economic in the mutual complicity between economic wealth and the splendor of the arts. (Mignolo 2011, 20)

The complex relationships between aesthetics and politics (Werner 1994, 213-218) often called by Theodor Adorno (1977; 1984; 1991) and more recently Jacques Ranciere (2000; 2005; 2007; 2010) *the politics of aesthetic/politics of aesthetics* is usually reserved for white artists. But “as analysts from W.E.B. DuBois to Cornel West and bell hooks have continually asserted: in African and Afro-American life, culture *is* politics and politics *is* culture.” (Werner 1994, 213). This is not unique to any particular culture as Gena Dagele Caponi notes:

Through cultural expressions such as dance, religion, music, and play, societies articulate and transmit the ideas, values, and beliefs that bind people together. Within the very body of the expression—the form of the music, the shape of the dance, the worship practices of the religion—are embedded cultural values. The structure of cultural expression—the cultural aesthetic—reflects and supports the ethics of the society, reinforces its values and philosophy...they emerge from a particular culture in a particular way, and they carry with them what musicologist Gary Tomlinson calls ‘archaeological rules of formation,’ which means their structure has evolved over time in relation to their social function” (1999, 7-8)

Democratizing aesthetics education requires the acknowledgement that cultural aesthetics, because of the **colonial difference**, do not meet as equals. Just as postcolonialism works to undue political inequalities so too should aesthetics informed by postcolonialism. The first step of this, as I have noted above, is to

problematize aesthetics claim on universality, by recognizing cultural aesthetics. This is an act of aesthetic deconstruction that, in this case, might be understood as “African-derived American Culture (Caponi 1999, 17-31) and should perhaps be seen not so much in terms of participants of one system rejecting another aesthetic system, but more accurately as an emerging into consciousness of a new paradigm. This new paradigm is not anti-*aesthetics*, but always *cultural aesthetics* that function as complex social systems which inform the consciousness and identities of participants and observers.

The act of aesthetic deconstruction looks like aesthetic separatism, I think, because there is a political need to create public space for new art systems. An assertion of existence and therefore, independence, is made by the emergence of aesthetic systems that have been ‘othered’ (and dismissed like Black Aesthetics, African-American aesthetics among many, many others).

The separatist aesthetics of the Black Arts is instructive in this regard. Black Arts mentors supported young, mostly African-American artists to take inspiration from their home communities, to recognize their unique perspective, their unique imagination, and to use their arts to help rejuvenate their community culture. Often this would take the shape of “boldly patterned murals painted on the decaying walls of ghetto buildings” (Fine 1971, 374), community theatre, or literature based on street art and inner-city life, that emerged from place-based imagination. That it might be also beautiful is not the only characteristic of significance, the way it might be for aesthetics. It is also significant to note that the Black Arts, as Hip-Hop would later, is a place-based articulation of creative intelligence and a fully flourishing imagination blended with craft that does not require acceptance from (colonial) art institutions. In this regard Blues, Jazz, the Harlem Renaissance, Black Arts, Soul, Funk as well as HipHop Culture’s emergence, are some examples of postcolonial aesthetic movements that contribute to the decolonization of the imagination. But I do not want to generalize too much, nor make too grand a claim. These are not examples of victories, but a history of public struggles in the realm of symbols, meanings, and social orders.

As the political elements of Black Power Movement were finding their aesthetic expression in Black Arts, they found new expression “in the aesthetics of Afro-American dramatists, poets, choreographers, musicians, and novelists” who were defining “the world in their own terms” (Neal 1968, 39). These elements, championed by a Black inner-city Avant-Garde, posed a challenge to aesthetics, stripping it of any illusion that it could, any longer, claim universality:

In critical theory, Baraka was instrumental in the creation of what became the ‘black aesthetic’ of the 1970s, as well as the ‘vernacularism’ of the 1980s, demanding that African American literature and music be examine in the context of the culture that gave rise to it, with particular focus on the oral traditions of storytelling, sermonizing, and music of all sorts—sacred and secular (Caponi 1999, 21)

Linda Martin Alcoff (2007), reflecting on similar findings between Foucault and Mignolo, remarked on the difference between hegemony-seeking versus subjugated knowledges:

Subjugated or local knowledges always tend to do less violence to the local particulars and are also less likely to impose hierarchical structures of credibility based on universal claims about the proper procedures of justification that foreclose the contributions of may unconventional or lower-status knowers. (80)

Black Arts work to undue the aesthetical double bind and create a new aesthetic order rooted in local expressive practices that leads to critical awareness and liberation. We might see this in the words of Baraka writing about Black Arts aesthetics in a language with which Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal (2006) would resonate:

Our theatre will show victims so that their brothers in the audience will be better able to understand that they are the brothers of victims, and that they themselves are blood brothers. And what we show must cause the blood to rush, so that pre-revolutionary temperaments will be bathed in this blood, and it will cause their deepest souls to move, and they will find themselves tensed and clenched, even ready to die, at what the soul has been taught. We will scream and cry, murder, run through the streets in agony, if it means some soul will be moved, moved to actual life understanding of what the world is, and what it ought to be. (Baraka and Harris 1991, 76)

Baraka's career-long interest in showing "what the world is" is echoed in the street logic of HipHop Culture, keepin' it real. Marvin Gladney (1995) characterized this heritage: "Black art has always been rooted in the anger felt by Afrikan- Americans, and Hip-Hop culture has remained true to many of the convictions and aesthetic criteria that evolved out of the Black Arts Movement of the '60s, including calls for social relevance, originality, and a focused dedication to produce art that challenges American mainstream artistic expression...Public Enemy's Chuck D refers to Hip-Hop as the "CNN" of the Black community"(Gladney, 291).

The Black Arts movement contributed to a political "movement poetics" (Smethurst 2003, 268) that helped create a symbolic politicization of the HipHop Culture voice that, as Rachel Sullivan (2003) points out, has subjective impact, "African American rap fans are not arguing that rap leads them into social protest, they seem to be indicating that it offers a counter-dominant message that they use as an affirmation of their experience" (Sullivan, 616). It is precisely this self-affirmation that characterizes critical pedagogy and why I think the study of postcolonial aesthetics movements like HipHop Culture lend an important basis for developing a culturally informed approach to music education that I call *engaged arts pedagogy*.

FROM ENGAGED ART PEDAGOGY TO PROJECT-BASED LEARNING

Building upon Freire's work and her own feminist and antiracist work bell hooks (1990; 1994) has critiqued tradition educational practices by noting:

(a) the metaphysical notion of knowledge as universal, neutral, and objective; (b) the authoritative, hierarchical, dominating, and privileged status of professors; (c) the passive image of students as recipients of compartmentalized bits of knowledge, which limits student engagement in the learning process by not considering them as whole human beings with complex lives and experiences; (d) the traditional notion that the sole responsibility for classroom dynamics rests on teachers; and (e) the Western metaphysical denial of the dignity of passion and the subordination of human affectivity to the rationality. She also points out that the reification of official knowledge from the implications stated above reinforces White supremacist, patriarchal, and capitalist ideologies. (Florence 1998, 77)

These observations are in keeping with the above characterization of the *colonial difference* that dismisses cultural approaches to knowledge. To counter this hooks advocates:

- a. re-conceptualization of the knowledge base; (b) relating of theory to practice to make education more relevant and meaningful, (c) empowerment of students to assume responsibility in conjunction with teachers, for creating a conducive learning environment; (d) encouragement of teachers' pedagogical emphasis on learner participation and engagement; and (e) understanding of teaching beyond "compartmentalized" schooling, a longer term involvement, development of critical consciousness, and teacher/student self-actualization. In sum, in addressing issues that impact students' day-to-day lives, engaged pedagogy 'restores to education and the classroom excitement about ideas and the will to learn,' while simultaneously nurturing critical consciousness in students (hooks, 1994, p. 12)" (Florence 1998, 78) hooks calls this project *engaged pedagogy*. The idea of engagement is also found in arts pedagogy and was forwarded by critical aesthetic education pedagogue Maxine Greene: Engagement—the opposite of malaise and not-caring—has been trivialized in current times, as simply affect (certainly not as important in education as cognition) or as motivation (a way to get students to study the things teachers think they should). Engagement, to Greene, involved not just happy involvement or a motivational trick, but rather 'arousing persons to wideawakeness, to courageous and resistant life' (Stinson 1998, 224).

Maxine Greenes' definition of *engagement* is connected to *consciousness* and "recognizes the contextual and positioned nature of consciousness: 'Human consciousness...its always situated; and the situated person, inevitably engaged with others, reaches out and grasps the phenomena surrounding him/her from a particular vantage point and against a particular background consciousness'" (Greene, 1988,

21, cited in Henderson et al. 1998, 193). The process of engaged music education therefore satisfies the coming-into-consciousness of the Freirian critical pedagogy, but does so in a way that it retains, and perhaps, elevates the body-in- community. Greene warns that if the aesthetic experience remains inside “aesthetic experience becomes pure escapism, a vacation from the cares of everyday life....aesthetic experience is not just a state of being in a feel-good place: ‘Consciousness... involved the capacity to pose questions to the world, to reflect on what is presented in experience’” (Stinson 1998, 225).

In an interest to create this type of *engaged* learning environment in a university cultural studies classroom, I approached members of the HipHop Kulture circle to discuss the possibility of producing a project that would connect hiphoppas and university students. I had recently been experimenting with iBook author and thought that an iBook of Edmonton’s Hip-Hop history would make a compelling project that would solve our problem of needing a history book. I pitched the idea to the HipHop Kulture circle and gained support. The project came to be known as YEGH3 (Edmonton International Airport letters [YEG] plus Hip-Hop History [H3]). There were two issues that I needed to address. The first was a curriculum issue, how would I frame producing an iBook as a class activity? The second, was another practical issue, how would we put the book together. That is, how would we write the history in a way that remained true to the aesthetics lessons learned above? The answer to the first question was project-based learning, and to the second, microhistories.

COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE: PROJECT-BASED LEARNING

Project-based learning⁶ (PBL) is an instructional method advanced by the Buck Institute for Education. The method has a five-point definition:

- (a) “Projects are central, not peripheral to the curriculum”;
 - (b) “projects are focused on questions or problems that ‘drive’ students to encounter (and struggle with) the central concepts and principals of the discipline”;
 - (c) “projects involve students in a constructive investigation”;
 - (d) “projects are student-driven to some significant degree”; and
 - (e) “projects are realistic, not school-like”
- Collaboration is also included as a sixth criterion of PBL. (Thomas 2000, 3-4)

PBL provided an environment where students and I, along with two hiphoppas who attended class as community representatives, could engage directly with the production of knowledge. PBL allowed me to put critical conversations into action. Student groups were paired with a historically significant Edmonton Hip-Hop artists, as decided by the HipHop Kulture circle, and were tasked to write their stories for the iBook publication. Not only would students finish the class with a new sense of their city, but also would have a writing credit in a digitally delivered free cultural history book of interest to the Hip-Hop community and likely to general readers.

COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE: MICROHISTORIES

It was decided early in the process that we would not write a single narrative history, but instead present individual histories of 16 artists. We found that there were so many different perspectives and versions of events in these stories that we could not privilege one over the other. This observation was supported by a discussion on writing postcolonial history, how we might learn from the Harlem Renaissance and the Black Arts Movements, as we write ‘our’ history. It was further expanded by a close reading of Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s (2012) *Decolonizing Methodologie*. We paid special attention to the chapter on *Imperialism, History, Writing and Theory*. From these class discussions, students engaged with the writing of their individual pieces, what we began to call microhistories. Microhistories is the recognition that history is constituted by a swarm of localized acts and negotiations that in their totality is recognized by its impact and effect as history. In the introduction to *Small Worlds* (2008) John Walton, James F. Brooks, and Christopher DeCorse argue that while microhistory “eludes formal definition”(4) the “link between micro and macro perspectives is not simply reduction or aggregation but rather qualitative and the source of new information” (6, quoted from Peltonen). Instead of framing microhistories in terms of master and metanarratives, I follow Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari (1983,1987), and Manuel DeLanda’s (2006) philosophy of multiplicity and scale that recognizes knowledge and experience are produced by influences occurring at different scales. Therefore, reducing microhistories is the act of documenting history at a personal and metroscale, instead of a regional, national or global scale. The metroscale allows the researcher to resist the types of generalizations that make enlightenment modes of history so contentious to postcolonial scholars. Knowledge exists in geospatial nodes (Mignolo 2011, 84) and microhistory is a way of constituting these nodes. Furthermore, constructing nodes plays an important role in a postcolonial aesthetics because as Maida’s (2011) has recognized project- based learning is a critical pedagogy that supports “a sense of ‘knowing-in-action’ that emerges from participating in practice-oriented learning experiences” (763). Doing microhistory is therefore a method for engaged arts pedagogy.

YEGH3: STUDENT RESPONSES

The value of PBL has to be evaluated on the quality of the learning experience not on the quality of the product that is produced. While there is still much to learn about assessing the pedagogical value of PBL, I will contribute feedback provided by students on their experience with the project. The purpose of PBL for me was to create an engaged learning environment that would help students gain critical consciousness. One student’s response illustrated their newfound understanding of the world:

For me, project based learning was as much about the process as it was the final result. At first we were 3 kids emotionally shackled by the bonds of academia,

then we were rather fractionated with different opinions and dissent (which sometimes wasn't taken lightly), eventually, however, we used all of our unique talents to form a piece with direction, insight, and, most importantly, a message. Unlike many other 'group' projects that I've participated in as a Political Science student, this project demanded collaboration. It's impossible to capture the human spirit by merely dividing up the introduction, body, and conclusion to each different member- a common practice in other disciplines. This project demanded in-depth collaboration, emotional investment, and a common direction. By its end, I truly felt that we had achieved something and I take pride in what we produced.

Student comments that illustrated a focus on process over product were surprising. I expected that students would concern themselves with the end product of their world. It was a pleasant surprise to receive some comments that illustrated an awareness of the importance of process:

This has been an amazing journey that has opened my eyes to another culture that I would not have experienced otherwise because of this course. Music has the power to teach and connect people that may not be connected otherwise. This type of leaning (community based group work) was not easy at first because you have a group of different people coming together with different backgrounds/ideas for a project, but I learned a lot from the others in my group.

I definitely found that I personally learned more and was engaged more with this type of "hands-on" learning. I am grateful for this experience that showed me that research does not have to be boring.

YEGH3 provided an opportunity for classroom theoretical work to reach outside the walls of the university to engage students in the life of their community, as one student remarked: I very strongly think that this type of class is important to have more of at the university level and in classrooms more broadly as well. I feel that this type of project-based learning really forces students to interact with their community and helps to show students that they are capable of doing actual, immediate work that really matters to a particular group of people, as opposed to only doing it for a gpa, resulting too often in ambivalence. Project-based learning lends itself to more engaged and enthusiastic students and I know, for me at least, this has made a huge difference in my academic career and has in fact changed the path I will take in graduate studies - highly recommended.

But I have also learned that PBL does not happen without some significant challenges for some students. As a number of students remarked the process had many periods of struggle: Project-based learning helps you to step outside of your comfort zone by engaging in group discussion and teamwork. By doing this, critical thinking becomes more focused and more worthwhile by engaging you in topics you would have never

thought about before. It helps to remind you that everyone has diverse experiences and opinions and encourages a more open-minded, patient way of interacting with our world. I also found that PBL presented challenges for me as the instructor. Some students held resistance to the pedagogical experiments that I developed. As many students noted, PBL is not a norm in university classrooms which has the potential benefit of being new. But this benefit often serves as a double-edged sword. There is a threat that if the project does not go well, students might feel let down by the process, perhaps even used. While I did indeed have periods of concern, I am happy to note that the project was a success and students felt that their time was well used. Yet, it is interesting to note that resistance memories are still so present with students:

[student a] Since Project-based learning is not a norm in university classes, I was at first skeptical at how this will work, but as I attended the classes and did the work I realized that this is the best form of learning. Writing essays and exams just allows you to reiterate what you have learned and then you forget right away, but project-based learning allows you to take everything that you have learned and actually apply it and create something that you can say is mine. You actually have something that you have produced rather than just an essay or exam that you don't even see or think of again. This is the best form of learning, it allows for the real world to collide with the classroom.

[student b] Overall I thought that the project based learning course was a nice change of pace from my other classes and I look forward to participating in another project based learning class in the future. It allowed me to fully engage in the subject material and further explore something that truly interested me. I enjoyed working with our Hip-Hop artist and learning about the history in our own city of Edmonton. I was hesitant about the group project portion but we all worked together nicely with the same end goal. I'm looking forward to seeing our creation come together!

[student c] This process was chaotic yet rewarding. There was no carved out path and no procedure for this project, but this allowed for a deeply honest and intimate portrayal of Hip-Hop history in Edmonton.

[student d] I was at first a bit skeptical because I'm used to more structured courses. But once my group and I began it started to flow. And I also enjoyed that the course promoted outside class interaction especially being able to interview artists.

[student e] This class was my first experience with project-based learning and it was probably my most enjoyable class at University. It was definitely challenging at times, mainly because I was forced to step out of my comfort zone, but it was well worth it by the end.

CONCLUSIONS

The PBL process and the product, YEGH3, pushed all of us (students, myself, the HipHop Kulture circle) deeper into the issues that will ultimately inform our Hip-Hop curriculum. In this process we learned invaluable lessons that we would not have come up with had our discussions remained only theoretical, or only practical. Finding a blend of theory and practice helped me see the value of developing engaged arts pedagogy.

One of the obstacles that I have been struggling to overcome is the divide between the world of culture creation and the world of aesthetics education in academia. The history of the Harlem Renaissance, the Black Arts Movement and HipHop Kulture has illustrated that civil rights, ultimately the expansion of democracy, impacts all parts of our society, even (and maybe specifically) arts education. As an arts educator, I am committed to learning these lessons and finding an education environment that can nurture democratic learning, and contribute, in some small way, to a better world. I am relieved that after this difficult work a student will comment that a classroom “pushes you to develop the skills necessary to create an environment built out of a deep respect and responsibility for the community, your team, and your work” and that learning might “expand the way we see society and the cultures within it!”. The history of the Black aesthetic is not just a history of African American artists; it is a history of community resistance that may help all students see their role in making a more equal society. As one student commented: “This project helped me connect with artists and musicians in my area, understanding that our experience of Edmonton was that of a community. It’s hard to feel like there is a place for the arts in this town. Because of YEGH3, I saw that there were other artists, struggling to build the same foundations.”

END NOTES

- ¹ I use KRS-ONE’s terminology from the Gospel of Hip Hop (2009) as a guide to distinguish between HipHop Kulture as “our unique community of consciousness,” (80), Hip Hop as the name of the cultural acts that include Breakin’, Emceein, Graffiti Art, Deejayin, Beat Boxin, Street Fashion, Street Language, Street Knowledge, and Street Entrepreneurship” (ibid), and hip-hop, “those things and events associated with Rap music entertainment, hip-hop is a music genre” (ibid).
- ² I use *Aesthetics* as the philosophical study of art that began in the 18th century, *aesthetics education* as the instruction provided to enhance cultural appreciation, and *aesthetic* in the casual sense of the term that means *of the senses* and in a general sense is the opposite of anesthetic.
- ³ I do not follow the traditional Marxists notion of dialectics, that HipHop Kulture is necessary changed by hip-hop products, but I have seen in this my research that Edmonton hiphoppas are invisible even to local fans of Hip-Hop elements. It is as if hip-hop controls the channels of access, the gateways to the Artworld, to use the sociological terms, and that this creates cultural undergrounds which HipHop Kulture is both obscured and protected.
- ⁴ Cypher5 because we are in a circle freestyle knowledge. Knowledge is the 5th element of HipHop Kulture after the first four artistic elements.
- ⁵ KRS-ONE: Hip-Hop Beyond Entertainment, public lecture at Temple University, April 2004. Accessed November 2012. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ybufC_3KJwk
- ⁶ As reported in the University of Indianapolis Center of Excellence in Leadership of Learning June 2009 report: *Summary of Research on Project-based Learning*.

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