

# Building Place: Students' Negotiation of Spaces and Citizenship in Schools

*Jennifer A. Tupper  
University of Regina*

*Terry Carson, Ingrid Johnson & Jyoti Mangat  
University of Alberta*

This study explored how high school students negotiate school spaces beyond the classroom within a broader context of citizenship education and identity construction. Using visual hermeneutics, researchers worked over three years with students and staff in a large, diverse, urban, public high school. Through student-produced photographs of school space, questionnaires, interviews with staff and students, and observations of students' use of space, researchers found that physical and social construction of space, students' occupation and congregatation in spaces, the visual landscape of a school, and practices of school surveillance all influence the negotiation of identities and citizenship among students.

Key words: identity, physical environment, social environment, visual hermeneutics, school landscape

Cet article relate comment des élèves du secondaire négocient des espaces scolaires en dehors de la classe dans un contexte d'éducation à la citoyenneté et de construction d'identité. À l'aide d'une herméneutique visuelle, les chercheurs ont travaillé sur trois ans avec des élèves et des membres du personnel dans une école secondaire urbaine de grande taille accueillant une clientèle diversifiée. À travers des photos d'espaces scolaires prises par les élèves, des questionnaires, des entrevues avec des membres du personnel et des élèves et l'observation de l'utilisation de l'espace par les élèves, les auteurs ont trouvé que les constructions physiques et sociales des espaces, leur occupation par les élèves et leurs habitudes de rassemblement dans ces espaces, le paysage visuel de l'école et les pratiques de l'école en matière de surveillance exercent tous une influence sur la négociation des identités et de la citoyenneté chez les élèves.

Mots clés: identité, environnement physique et social, herméneutique visuelle, paysage de l'école

Although students spend much of their school time in classrooms, they also spend time in hallways and other common areas. In these spaces students often negotiate their emerging identities, peer group affiliations, and a burgeoning sense of citizenship. This "lived" curriculum of school space tends not to be the focus of research in schools. Rather, research focuses on tangible effects of teaching and learning. Although the use of school space may appear more intangible, it offers rich potential to consider how public schools contribute to young people's negotiation of identities in "spaces and places outside of the classroom" (O'Donoghue, 2007, p. 62). If researchers consider that "places are what people make of them - that people are place makers and that places are a primary artefact of human culture," then it seems reasonable that schools "might play a more active role in the study, care and creation of spaces" (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 627). Thus, within high schools, possibilities exist for students to negotiate emerging identities and to explore understandings of what it means to enact citizenship in myriad spaces beyond the classroom.

#### *Exploring Spatial Practices*

By examining how students inhabit, move through, and interpret the geography of a large school, researchers can achieve some understanding, beyond what is learned through the formal curriculum, how adult identities are formed from the experience of going to school. Second, from the perspective of the future of citizenship in an evolving Canadian nation, a nation that is paying greater attention to diversity, it is helpful to reflect critically on the nature of the identities being formed in ethno-culturally diverse urban schools through spatial practices and to consider the implications of this identity formation for a pluralist, democratic society. Because the informal curriculum of schools is enacted in spaces outside classrooms and because this curriculum has much to do with social relationships, it is useful to consider the extent to which students and staff accept responsibility for understanding and embracing diversity.

Understanding curriculum as a spatial practice suggests that the physical and social environment of schools plays as important a role in shaping cultural identities as does the formal curriculum (Gruenewald, 2003; Prosser, 2007). Educators give much effort and attention to designing the formal course of study and justifying it in terms of attaining explicitly identified competencies and responsibilities of adult citizenship.

They give much less consideration to how students experience the social and physical geography of schools and the influence of this experience on identity formation and the construction of citizenship.

In considering how school is experienced, as opposed to the design and intended outcomes of the curriculum, we follow a broader sense of curriculum studies – beyond understanding curriculum as a bureaucratic text (Pinar, 1995), which serves the institutional needs of formal schooling, to also consider curriculum as the “lived experience of schooling” (Aoki, 2005, p. 231) in the course of students’ lives. We believe that responsible citizenship and the negotiation of individual identities are intimately connected to the spaces that students negotiate as they live within the social and physical structures of schools. We recognize that school spaces can be both emancipating and controlling, that ultimately school is “constructed space as opposed to some form of ‘natural’ or ‘automatic’ space” (Fain, 2004, p. 11). We also recognize that school spaces and places “sustain dominance, hierarchy, surveillance and segregation” (O’Donoghue, 2007, p. 69). For this reason, our research, with its visual elements, “contribute[s] to understanding both the symbolic and the physical meanings of the built environment of schools” (Prosser, 2007, p. 15), particularly as these meanings are informed by relationships of power which, in turn, inform the ways students negotiate identities, their sense of agency, and their sense of belonging.

Prosser (2007) suggests that “because schools comprise individuals, agency and the capacity to (re)interpret generic visual culture, school people create their own unique visual culture” (p. 14). A school’s visual culture contributes to the many ways in which students move through, occupy, and feel about particular school spaces. In our research, a school’s visual culture revealed through both the physical aesthetics of the school as building and how particular spaces were organized and occupied. These spaces are not neutral and how they are interpreted depends very much on an individual’s lived experiences in relation to particular spaces as identities are constructed and citizenship negotiated. It is to a more conceptual discussion of citizenship that we now turn before describing our research and examining how the young people in our study negotiated both citizenship and identity as they “lived” within school spaces beyond the classroom.

*Exploring Citizenship*

Schooling as the production of good and responsible citizens has long been the central tenet of public education (Dewey, 1916). However, contemporary theorists have taken a more critical approach to this notion of what constitutes good and responsible citizens (Apple, 1996; Giroux, 1998; McLaren, 1989; Noddings, 1992). Responsible citizenship is a contested concept, and as such, researchers and educators are continually challenged to interrogate their own understanding of how responsible citizenship is constructed in schools, particularly as it pertains to maintaining or subverting the status quo and conforming to or challenging informal and formal rules that attempt to govern student conduct and behaviour in schools.

To frame our understanding of responsible citizenship, we draw on the work of Cogan and Derricott (2000) who advance a multi-dimensional understanding of citizenship and its corresponding responsibilities. Cogan and Derricott suggest that citizenship characteristics include individual and collective responsibilities for members of a global society: working productively with others, understanding and embracing diversity, working towards and defending human rights, being stewards of the environment, engaging in non-violent conflict resolution, and thinking critically and systemically.

Like Cogan and Derricott (2000), Hall, Coffey, and Williamson (1998) have connected the process of becoming an adult with a broad conception of citizenship that is not limited to legal status and entitlement. They suggest understanding citizenship as a "normative ideal, incorporating the central notion of membership and evoking a host of other related themes - belongingness, independence and equality, responsibility and participation, and shared existence and identity" (Hall, Coffey, and Williamson, 1999, p. 504). We understand this normative conception of citizenship as youth moving towards membership in society, as becoming responsible and participating members. For us, it is a useful lens to understand the spatial practices of high-school students, particularly as these practices support diversity. Within this framework, we found it important to examine how students struggled to occupy certain spaces within the school. These struggles point to broader issues of belonging and membership that impede an individual's ability to fully engage in society as a citizen. They also suggest how diversity influences the construction and enactment of citizenship.

Lister, Smith, Middleton, and Cox (2003) argue that educators must pay attention to how young people understand and negotiate citizenship because "youth is a time when the relationship to citizenship is in a state of flux (p. 3)." In our research, we have paid attention not only to young people's negotiation of citizenship, but also the relationships between citizenship, identities, and space, particularly as these are influenced by value systems inherent in the uses of space and the extent to which diversity is undermined or embraced. Schools themselves often represent value systems not always supportive of diversity or belonging among students. These systems may influence the extent to which students understand and are able to negotiate a sense of citizenship within school.

#### THE RESEARCH PROJECT

We conducted our research at a large urban high school, educating students in grades 10 to 12 and offering a range of programs, including the International Baccalaureate and an active English as a Second Language program. Over the course of two years, we worked with four social studies grade-10 and grade-11 classes, using several methods to gather data:

1. *A survey of students regarding their perceptions of out-of-class school spaces.* Forty-two students participated in the survey that required them to rank-order a list of school spaces from most to least preferred, and most to least frequented. We included an open-ended question to provide students the opportunity to note anecdotal information on school locations that were significant to them, and to give reasons for the significance.
2. *Student production of photographs of school spaces.* All students who responded to the survey were invited to participate by taking digital photographs of significant school spaces. Twelve students volunteered.
3. *Individual interviews with students.* Through audio-taped, semi-structured interviews with the twelve student participants, we explored their understandings of the significance of the photographs to explain how spaces were constructed and negotiated in the school. These interviews, in conjunction with the student produced photographs served as visual narratives of school spaces and places.
4. *Interviews with school staff.* Using audio-taped interviews with two teachers, an administrator, a counsellor, a secretary, and the school

Police Resource Officer, we explored their perceptions of students' spatial practices.

#### *Researcher Observations*

Acting as participant-observers for part of the data collection process, we observed students' interactions and conversations in the hallways between classes and after school. This approach complemented the other methods of data collection, allowing us to see more clearly the complex ways students interacted with school space and negotiated identities. Although the student-produced photographs revealed a particular physicality of school space, the social aspects of the school were largely absent from images, an absence due to the ethical dimension of this research. We took seriously our responsibility to ensure informed consent and anonymity by encouraging student researchers to take photographs of places, not people. Yet as the research progressed, we became aware that the social elements of a space, along with aesthetics, attracted or deterred students from being in the space. For a more detailed discussion of the ethics of using student produced photographs in research, please see our discussion in Carson, Pearson, Johnston, Mangat, Tupper, and Warburton (2005).

Using a visual hermeneutic approach to data analysis, we interpreted the data to draw connections between spaces, student identities, and experiences of citizenship. We drew the notion of a "visual hermeneutic" from a more general understanding of hermeneutics as the art and science of interpretation. The activity of hermeneutic interpretation originally applied to the task of interpreting the true meaning of sacred and classical texts, but with the rise of empirical-analytical sciences in the nineteenth century, hermeneutics came to have a more general application as an alternative mode of interpretive inquiry to understand the life world. This movement is best exemplified in the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer, (1960/1994), which holds that language reveals a way of being in the world (the fore-structures of understanding), but also provides the way to new meaning (that all interpretation is creative). The interpretive act is an encounter between the horizon of the interpreter and the horizon of what needs understanding. The fusion of horizons produces new meaning. Davey (2001) extends this understanding to visual interpretation, pointing out that "hermeneutics insists that in any reflection upon our experience of art, we must focus on the question of meaning" (p. 3).

Our research involved capturing and representing "that which is not always linguistic – that which can be more profitably represented and understood through nonverbal forms of communication" (O'Donoghue, 2007, p. 63). We adopted a hermeneutic sensibility to focus on students' perceptions of photographed images in relation to their feelings of belonging or isolation in particular school spaces. Our observations of students' interactions and their use of space also informed our interpretations of these spatial practices as they influenced identity construction and responsible citizenship.

What follows is an exploration of the salient themes that emerged through the research: constructing spaces, occupying spaces, congregating spaces, visual landscape of the school, and school surveillance.

### CONSTRUCTING SPACES

In our research, students often commented on the physical structure of the school. The school, finished in 1967, is a sprawling single story building that was originally planned to house 1,200 students. With construction already underway, population pressures have expanded the original plan to enable the school to accommodate 2,000 students. In many ways, the school's design reflects what Upitis (2004) describes as the "factory model for learning":

Put. . . children in a confined space (called a classroom), process them for a year (fill them with knowledge), make sure they have learned the set and predictable curriculum (test them according to established standards), move them to the next processing container (another classroom), and continue the cycle until they have reached the age at which they are deemed ready to leave (and enter the workplace). (p. 20)

We see similarities between Upitis's (2004) description of the factory model and how students in the school research site moved between contained classroom spaces through a series of long, narrow, windowless corridors, one often indistinguishable from the next. The hallways were the conduits between classrooms, and students frequently offered their perceptions of the aesthetics of certain hallways, particularly those that seemed darker or gloomier. Having said that, students also identified hallways as spaces outside classrooms where they engaged in social relationships. One student commented, "it's [the hallway] where most other people we know hang out so you can go and talk to them whenever." Hallways serve dual purposes: as routes between classrooms and as

spaces where students negotiated identities through social relationships. (See Figure 1.) How students perceived these spaces and chose to use them have implications for their own sense of the responsibilities of citizenship within the school, both individual and collective.



Figure 1. Hallways serve two purposes: to connect classrooms and to provide a space for students to hang out.

In line with a common local construction practice of the 1960s, the school was designed with no exterior windows to improve heating efficiency. Consequently, there were very few sources of natural light in the building. An exception was an outdoor courtyard, which at the time of the study, had been designated as the smoking area. (See Figure 2.)

Because the courtyard was a smoking area, many students avoided the space, describing it as “smelly,” “messy,” or “generally unpleasant.” By contrast, the students described the hallway housing the human ecology food preparation classes as appealing because of the smell of baking that often lingered in the air. Ninety-four per cent of students surveyed identified the smoking area as the least preferred or not preferred school space. Although this assessment may have had much to do with the smell and look of the space, it may also have had to do with perceptions of the kinds of students who occupied such a space, and a sense of its being “their” space rather than “our” space (O’Donoghue, 2007). For example, when asked to respond to the open-ended survey question, “the following group is one I would be the least likely to hang around with at



school," several students named the "smokers," giving reasons such as "they generally seem like unintelligent people with many problems" and "our views of life would cause a lot of conflict. I wouldn't want to be around them when they're doing their stuff." Several students identified smokers as synonymous with "druggies," writing their response as "smokers/druggies." Seeing these two groups as inseparable suggests certain identities imposed upon students in the smokers' group which may be completely erroneous and unfair.



Figure 2. The outdoor courtyard served as a smoking area.

Students expressed frustration with the crowded hallways before school and at breaks, and described the claustrophobia that the lack of windows produced. (See Figure 3.) Maggie, a student in grade ten, made the following observation about one of the hallways she photographed:

This is by the automotives hall . . . it's really dark and loud because of the boiler room and just dark and gross. I just don't like that hallway . . . it's really long and the only light is the window on the other end. The lockers are all squished, and it feels really small. It might not even be smaller than the rest. But it sure feels like it. (Maggie, grade-10 student)



Figure 3. Students found the hallways dark, windowless, and uninviting.

The same hallway Maggie photographed was a space that students ranked in the survey according to their level of preference. Seventy-one per cent of respondents indicated it was their least preferred space or not preferred space in the school. Although this ranking may have a great deal to do with the aesthetics of the space (made obvious by the photograph), it may also be connected to students' perceptions of what they associated with the space: automotives. For students who perceived themselves more academically, it is possible that they felt automotives beneath them and had little or no need to "be" in the hallway. For others, it may have been a (mis)perception of the kind of student who took automotives. If the ranking has to do with the types of students associated with automotives, what are the implications for identity construction and students' understandings of and willingness to embrace diversity?

All student participants were alert to roominess and light in their assessment of the feel of school spaces. For example, Melissa, another grade-10 student, photographed the library, which she described as "really bright, colourful, open and really big." In her photograph, she featured the library's skylight because "that's the only place in the school really with natural light." Eighty-eight per cent of students surveyed

identified the library as a preferred space in the school, a higher percentage than other spaces. Not surprisingly students tended to avoid areas that were dark, empty of wall displays, or away from much activity.



Figure 4. Students found the library bright and inviting, with its skylight admitting natural light.

It is unfortunate that the physical construction of school spaces often reflects an unremarkable and uninspired architecture, lacking in aesthetic vision (Tanner, 2000). Taylor (1993) highlights that “50 percent of [existing] school buildings were constructed cheaply and rapidly in the 1950s and 1960s, built as if architects used cookie cutters to create classrooms, hallways, and cafeterias” (p. 37). In the concern for economy, speed, and function, a particular aesthetic was created, one in which architects gave little consideration to the relationship between school architecture and its influence on the lived experiences of school. Without such a consideration, these schools continue to reflect early twentieth century notions of the school modeled on the factory, which as Upitis (2004) points out, “embody the transmission model of learning: the teacher has the knowledge and in assembly line fashion transmits that

knowledge to the students" (p. 20). Taylor (1993) notes the disjuncture between school design and declarations on the formation of citizenship.

[W]e expect schools to prepare children for living in a democratic society, yet we provide a learning environment that resembles a police state – hard, overly durable architecture, giant chain-link fences . . . [s]uch architecture fails to encourage a sense of ownership, participation, or responsibility. (p. 37)

These critical comments reflect a growing sense of the linkages between school architecture, the experience of schooling, and citizenship formation. Part of this awareness is the recovery of Dewey's (1916) early commentary on the utopian school that focuses on physical space, not pedagogy, teacher method, or administration (Upitis, 2004, p. 25). According to Uline (1997), Dewey described "open-air" interiors, the importance of having a variety of workspaces, easy access to books, and the "feeling of a well-furnished home" (p. 196). Upitis (2004) indicates that for many years, scholars have made connections between the role of lighting and colour and students' behaviours in schools. The visual narratives of the students in our research suggest that not only does the role of lighting and colour influence student behaviour, but also how students feel in particular spaces of the school, whether they choose to spend time in certain spaces, and the choices they make about how to occupy certain spaces.

The underlying message that functionalist architecture gives is that students must learn to live with the physical environment of the school, even if it is uncomfortable or uninviting. Because students exercise little control over school architecture, it creates the potential for them to disengage from meaningful involvement within and beyond the school. Given the multi-dimensional nature of responsible citizenship, we worry that functionalist architecture encourages students to assert minimal influence over their surroundings, to accept things as they are, a reality with serious implications for broader social issues. If students perceive they have minimal influence over their surroundings, perhaps they will feel much less empowered to address conditions of oppression that operate in society: to work toward a more socially and environmentally just world.

#### OCCUPYING SPACES

Being able to occupy space and associate with those with whom students are most comfortable is how cultural pluralism naturally plays out in this

large school as they exercise students' individual freedom around locker choice. The location and use of lockers were prominent topics in our interviews both with students and school staff. A student's locker was one of the few private spaces available to them. Sixty-two per cent of students surveyed identified the hallway housing their lockers as their preferred space in the school. Students' locker space can, to some extent, reflect their identity, offering a way to express themselves. The diversity of the school's 2,000-member student body, with its extensive geography of many separate corridors, allowed students to, in effect, choose their neighbours and their neighbourhoods. One Asian-Canadian student explained the process as follows:

*Calvin:* Usually on registration day . . . you'll get together with your friends and say, 'Where's your locker?' and then you'll all go to one side of it."

*Interviewer:* What about different cliques of lockers - do all the football players have their lockers together, for example?

*Calvin:* I think it's more nationality . . . Indian people will choose lockers together.

*Interviewer:* So in your friendship group is it mostly Chinese kids, or do you have a wide range of friends?

*Calvin:* More Chinese and South Korean people. We also have some non-Asian friends too, but their lockers are located in other places in the school. (Calvin, an Asian-Canadian student)



Figure 5. Students identified the location of their lockers as preferred school spaces

Hall et al. (1999) indicate that the “conspicuous occupation of territory” is how youth make their presence felt and “publicly affirm [collective] identities.” (p. 506) Students in this culturally diverse school chose to associate with friends who came from similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds, thus reinforcing and even augmenting a form of communalism. As a member of the school administration observed:

As the year progresses these groups get more and more solid. . . they are all Canadians . . . [mostly] born here, but because of their religious affiliations, their family connections, and the like, we have quite large groups coming together that way . . . you go with who you are comfortable with. (School administrator)

Because of the school’s labyrinthine geography, hallways then became unofficially designated as the “Mormon,” “Chinese,” or “Brown group’s” hallway. This apparently natural tendency to gravitate toward homogeneous associations is a concern for citizenship education in a multicultural society because it works against a responsibility to work collectively, and to understand and embrace diversity (Cogan & Derri-cott, 2000). Of note here is that already a counter form of citizenship education was being practised in the manner of locker occupation. However, this practice functioned to limit opportunities for positive cultural engagement and dialogue by creating what were, in effect, segregated neighbourhoods of lockers in specific hallways.

In the eyes of the school’s administration, freedom of choice and the conspicuous occupation of locker space also represented possibilities for disorder and trouble. In our interviews with administrators, they seemed alert to what they perceived as students’ unruly behaviour, especially in the more remote areas of the school, away from the main office. The school administration has shut down lockers if students were perceived as behaving badly in those areas. In the interest of keeping order, school authorities had the ability to easily remove the freedom of the choice of locker spaces. Although such a decision might be a legitimate action from the viewpoint of safety, order, and the pragmatics of student discipline, it also curtails opportunities for the exercise of a wider range of responsible citizenship if these decisions are imposed only by administrative fiat, without discussion or due process. Students seemed to accept that it was within the rights of the administration to revoke the freedom of misbehaving individuals to choose the location of their lockers, but it did not necessarily mean that the miscreant would occupy the reassigned locker. The student might choose simply to move in and

share a locker with a friend who remained in the preferred space. In so doing, the student transgressed what the administration considered as an appropriate spatial practice, both in terms of the misbehaviour and in terms of the locker occupation.

#### CONGREGATING SPACES

Throughout the research, students spoke specifically about the atrium in the centre of the school as a place conducive to large-scale social interactions and activities. On many occasions, we observed how students occupied this particular space and noted through our conversations with students the relationship between the atrium and students' sense of belonging within the school. Although students selected various hallways and open areas to congregate, they repeatedly identified the atrium as the most socially active space in the school. As Hall et al. (1999) suggest "(p. 502), aspects of citizenship find expressions in notions of space and place," and these played out daily in the atrium through complex student interactions.



Figure 6. Students found the openness of the atrium encouraged social activity, where they could see and be seen.

One student described the atrium as "just a big open space where everyone gets together." Another said, "It is the centre of everything

and you can get to any place from there." Based on students' visual narratives, the atrium seemed to be the space where students position themselves to see and be seen, publicly express their membership in a particular community, and conduct much of the informal business of school.

From the comments of students and staff, it appears that the atrium functioned as a microcosm of the school, with students positioning themselves in groups with such self-identifying labels around the atrium as "jocks, hoochies, geeks, nerds, the 'brown' group, the prissy girls, and the drones." One student observed that "In the [atrium] there is a specific place for people and the same people are always hanging out in the same place. Our school has too much division of race, like brown people usually only hang out with brown people, Chinese with Chinese, etc." Another student commented, "Most of the groups are filled with people so alike." They noted the conspicuous occupation of space in the atrium: "You can see different ethnic group corners." Occupation of the atrium was not only connected to ethnic identification, but as another student suggested, "Where the people hang out sometimes depends on their race, but also what activities they enjoy" (whether it is smoking, playing sports, or doing homework). These identifications suggest groupings are linked to a variety of affiliations. Commenting on how these group affiliations develop, student participants in the study indicated that they selected their peer groups on any variety of factors that included social status, religion, race, and popularity. Remarkably, it seemed easier for students to articulate a group identity for others than for themselves. Among their own peer group, they could see the individual similarities and differences that create friendships. One student shared:

I don't know if there's actually a said thing like, you don't hang out with them because they're a different race than you, I mean I'm just naïve but I don't think anyone actually thinks about that when they're hanging out with them. Like because, the brown group will hang out next to the people of the Asian group. (Clare, grade-10 student)

Staff at the school identified student affiliations along racial and religious lines. The school guidance counsellor commented that "cultural ethnic groups tend to kind of hang together." A secretary, who has been in the school for many years, discussed the changing demographics of the student population and noted that "certain groups from diverse cultural backgrounds group together during breaks," and the school Police



Resource Officer indicated he had observed particular tensions among the groups, specifically between Muslim and Sikh male students.

In reflecting on how the groups congregated and interacted in the atrium, student participants in the study focused on the hierarchies that particular groups established and on the tensions and unspoken rules that governed how students behaved in this central space. They also noted the personal risks and potential embarrassment that lay in store in this very conspicuous public space. A student commented:

I can also see how some people wouldn't feel comfortable in the [atrium]. Because there are groups and because going in the middle is so forbidden and some people think, like, if you fall on the stairs you'll be criticized for the rest of your high school career. (Melissa, Grade 10)

As a highly conspicuous public space, the atrium in the school also served as an informal platform for civic participation, reflecting the changing demographics of the larger society and enabling students to try out various identifications and affiliations within the safety of their selected groupings. Students considered the atrium as their own space in which to negotiate a burgeoning sense of agency and belonging. Hall et al. (1999) suggest that places such as town centres, or in this case, the atrium of the school, "seek to provide young people with the opportunity to establish themselves locally: to make their presence felt and to publicly affirm [collective] identities through the conspicuous occupation of territory" (p. 506).

Students' sense of ownership, however, was ambivalent and somewhat illusory. Although they had the right to decide on informal rules of group ownership and behaviour, students were still performing within the imperatives of school which saw its role in loco parentis as one of control and management. Students had the right to make certain decisions and to perform certain behaviours in the social space of the school agora; at the same time, they operated under a shared responsibility with the administrators and teachers in the school who made the formal rules that governed how students lived within the school's open spaces.

Unlike the town square, the shopping mall, or other public spaces in a community, a high school is a space that is occupied by those whose identities are between adolescence and adulthood. In this place the tensions between autonomy and control are enacted on a daily basis. Teachers, and especially the members of the school administration, are well aware of concerns for safety and of their responsibilities to maintain a

positive learning environment. Feelings of pedagogical responsibility along with the pragmatics of crowd control and daily school operations often take precedence over attention to more abstract goals of civic education. In the routines by which places like the atrium are occupied and governed, the important elements of citizenship education are occurring. Public events, like fashion shows, sports rallies, and displays of the multicultural heritages of the school are staged in the atrium. Student council and the existing clubs and organizations in the school largely organize these public events. The question remains how these self-consciously public displays relate to the segregationist tendencies in the students' voluntary and unorganized spatial practices. Such a relationship raises legitimate concerns for the future health of multicultural societies like Canada, which could be in danger of becoming mosaics of ethnic ghettos rather than vibrant intercultural communities.

#### THE VISUAL LANDSCAPE OF THE SCHOOL

Media advertising, prevalent throughout society for many decades, has in recent years also become common in public schools. As Molnar (2000) suggests, there has been an increasing "allocation of school space such as scoreboards, rooftops, bulletin boards, walls and textbooks on which corporations may place corporate logos and/or advertising messages" (p. 432). Schools are seen as attractive venues for marketing activities, with teenagers targeted as prime agents of consumer consumption. In our research site, although the visual landscape was not dominated by corporate advertising, the visual landscape of the school was dotted with posters promoting the school's character education program.

The very enterprise of education assumes, at a certain level, that values and virtues can be taught. However, difficulties arise in determining the curriculum and pedagogy of such character education. If a school is a microcosm of society and reflects the changes and concerns of the larger community, then educators must think critically about the assimilative and reductive tendencies of many pre-packaged character education programs that standardize students through the promotion of specific attributes all students ought to possess. In this particular site, posters advertising the virtues of "respect," "responsibility," "honesty," "forgiveness," "fairness," and "integrity" were constantly in view. (See Figure 7.)



Figure 7. Character education signs and banners were part of the school's visual landscape

These posters were sometimes in an ironic juxtaposition in their placement next to the signs reminding students of the video surveillance cameras throughout the school. The posters were part of the character education strategy of visual reinforcement. Brooks and Kann (1993) assert that "the visual presentation of character values is, in effect, an advertising campaign intended to keep the words, concepts and behaviors learned in class at the forefront of students' attention" (p. 20).

We spoke with students and school staff about the character education program and its visibility in the school. From the perspective of Clare, a grade-10 student, the program had no significant impact on student conduct. She suggested that the mere presence of the posters had little or no effect on actual student behaviour, stating that "just to hang the poster somewhere doesn't help because when you read it, it doesn't make you do it." This student demonstrates the understanding that mass advertising is part of her everyday life, her visual world, and she is increasingly equipped to read the visual landscapes that surround her.

Introduced as it is in the form of pre-packaged programs, character education has become yet another in a series of top-down initiatives that experienced teachers have seen far too often. Having grown used to administratively inspired innovations, most teachers are inclined to "just go along" with the latest one, but to do so with little enthusiasm. As Vinson (1998) asks in his critique of the trend towards character education, "Are we simply jumping on the bandwagon, identifying with the peda-

gologically chic while ignoring our obligation to influence critically the meaning of democratic citizenship?" (p. 112).

Educators ought to be concerned about the long-term negative effects to important educational questions of such packaged solutions. Mileen, one of the teachers at our research site, appreciated the significance of character education and would have liked especially to focus on her special concern for honesty, but she was prevented from doing so by the limitations of the school's particular character education program. This program's prescriptions mandated that a different virtue be focused on each month and that each virtue be dealt with through prepared classroom activities. Feedback was also expected from students. These structured activities frustrated Mileen's personal investment in character education in her classroom and contributed to a loss of pedagogical control over her own teaching.

Lack of teachers' and students' personal investment provides a rich soil for breeding cynicism – a cynicism that was clearly evident in the students' responses to the character education program. Growing up as they are in a media-saturated culture, the students are used to advertising campaigns. They know that they are being "pitched to" and are obviously cynical of a program that reduces character education to posters and slogans, as evidenced by Clare's comments that the mere presence of the posters did not influence student behaviour.

In view of the cynicism that the character education program seemed to inspire, especially among the students in this school, educators should ask what kind of public is being created, and what kind of society? Marketing to students in school spaces contributes to their sense of what it means to be a citizen not only in the in-between spaces of school, but in the broader social milieu. In this sense, citizenship becomes passive and disembodied as students follow rules, written and unwritten, and adhere to authority. The discourse of liberal democracy accepts that citizenship is about rights and responsibilities, but the institution of schooling tends not to trust students to articulate a truly embodied citizenship.

#### SURVEILLANCE

O'Donoghue (2007) describes school spaces outside the classroom as "spaces and places for performance and display, control and surveillance . . . that embody specific values, beliefs and traditions constructed, regulated and constituted through various constituting forces" (p. 63). As researchers, we understand schools to operate as neither completely

public nor completely private places. As such, they become spaces where students navigate their own multiple understandings of citizenship within the context of broader social expectations. These expectations are framed by a perceived need for both safety and security in society in general. Such events as the Dawson College shooting, the James Bolger kidnapping in England, the Columbine High School tragedy in the United States, and global repercussions of September 11, 2001, have heightened the perception that increased security leads to increased safety.

In common with other institutional settings, schools regulate and control behaviour through a highly complex system of formal and informal rules governing perceptions of safety and security. Formal rules may include policies on lateness and attendance and zero tolerance policies on school violence. Informal rules may involve expectations around students' language use, students' own understandings of appropriate behaviour, and the spaces that students are allowed to occupy outside classrooms. Many rules, particularly surrounding the use of space, are often enforced through the strategic use of video surveillance cameras and closed circuit television.

In this school, as in many Canadian high schools, the administration had chosen to use video surveillance cameras to monitor activities of visitors and students. (See Figure 8.)



Figure 8. Video surveillance cameras were placed throughout the school.

The security measures at work in public schools highlight the tensions around issues of freedom and control associated with adolescence. Traditionally, this is an age where young people push the bounds of freedom and control to negotiate their emerging identities as citizens. The school is one of the sites of this negotiation and schools are caught in a paradox: they are expected to nurture yet discipline and keep children safe. Schools throughout North America employ a variety of measures to reconcile these demands, but, adults and students have differing perspectives about the impact of the strategies that schools implement.

The presence of video cameras and closed-circuit televisions in this particular school was a relatively new phenomenon. However, Canadian schools in general are following in step with the prevailing trend in post-Columbine, post-September 11th, 2001, North America. Lewis (2003) claims that:

Columbine has become a watershed event in the history of school security . . . . In the aftermath of the school shooting, districts across [the United States] began to implement a plethora of new surveillance measures including the use of cameras in halls and night-vision cameras in parking lots, bomb-sniffing dogs, random locker checks, armed police guards, crime analysts, metal detectors, transparent backpacks, and computerized student ID cards. (p. 336)

These surveillance measures are generally conflated with security: students, teachers, and parents are meant to be reassured by the “new and improved” safety measures (Lewis, 2003, p. 335). The presence of security videos during the Columbine shootings seems to have reinforced the notion that such technologies, while they are able to record the event, should also have been able to prevent it from occurring in the first place. In the United Kingdom, the James Bolger kidnapping was a similarly significant moment in the escalation of video surveillance in public spaces. The images of two older youths leading the young boy to his death galvanized public support for the increased use of video cameras in Britain. The overwhelming perception, then, is that individuals in society are being watched for their own protection and this ethos has made its way into schools in North America.

When we spoke with one of the school administrators about the surveillance equipment, he suggested that it was intended primarily to monitor visitors to the school. He went on to indicate that the equipment was installed during the previous school year and that “it has an impact on the students because I notice they’ll look up and they’ll see that

there's a camera." He also explained that from his perspective, these cameras "made all the students aware that they are more accountable for what's going on in the hallways." Although they were used "surprisingly little," having them in the school "tells the students that they need to be responsible for what they're doing." Indeed, in a Foucauldian sense, "this system 'enables the disciplinary power to be both absolutely indiscreet, since it is everywhere and always alert, and absolutely discrete, for it functions permanently and largely in silence'" (Lewis, 2003, p. 339). This administrator's discourse around the presence of the video cameras in the school works within the increasingly urgent discourse of security and safety, while at the same time reinforcing the disciplinary mechanisms of "a new, fear-driven surveillance economy" (Lewis, 2003, p. 337). Like the visual presence of character education throughout the school, the video surveillance cameras evoked issues of power in which students were in many respects treated as non-citizens. Rather than creating spaces for democratic citizenship, surveillance of students acted to undermine the principles of citizenship advanced by Cogan and Dericott (2000).

Students who participated in our research accepted the use of video cameras, expressing little concern for the use of the surveillance equipment. One student, Serena, commented, "It's a big school so they might just need those [cameras] to know what's happening." When asked if she felt she was being watched, she responded, "No, not really. I've never actually thought about them. I sort of just see the sign and I'm like, oh, okay." Her matter-of-fact attitude towards the cameras was echoed by many of her peers. Perhaps students' apparent nonchalance was a reflection of their having come of age in a society where forms of surveillance are the norm, ranging from video cameras in stores to the popularity of reality television programs.

In discussing Foucault and schooling, Pitsula (2001) suggests "that the person who is constantly fixed in the gaze of the supervisor begins to internalize the mechanism of power to which [she] is subjected" (p. 386). In the case of these students, self-regulation as a result of the presence of surveillance cameras was evident. Michelle, a grade-11 student, told us that at her old school, there were no signs informing of the use of cameras for surveillance. At this school she was not sure that there should be signs indicating the presence of cameras. When asked why she thought that she replied:

Cause people are going to be careful. I guess that's a good thing, but I mean they're going to try and stay out of the way of the camera (if they are planning to do something). But if you don't know there's a camera, then you'll do it and get caught. (Michelle, grade-11 student)

Michelle's comments, like Serena's, suggest that students are very aware of the purpose of the surveillance cameras and, although they do not know if they are being observed "at any given moment," they are "always sure that [they] may be so" (Pitsula, 2001, p. 386).

#### CITIZENSHIP AND SPATIAL PRACTICES

High schools are places concerned with students becoming autonomous acting citizens in a democratic society. Yet they also function in loco parentis, concerned both with the safety and protection of youth and their learning and development. Ellis (2005) reminds educators of the importance of understanding space not simply as a physical site (place), but as a site conceptualized and experienced by human beings (place-ness). Place and its placeness, argues Ellis, must be understood as "dynamic and changing" (p. 58). Our study highlights the complexities of students' understandings and experiences of both the place and place-ness of school because students' spatial perceptions encompass a range of categories, identifications, and understandings. It was clear through our conversations with students that their perceptions of the spaces in the school were intimately connected to placeness, how these places were negotiated and occupied. Our research also illuminates the dynamic and changing nature of place as students learn what teachers teach (the required curriculum) while simultaneously enacting identities and citizenship through their participation in the informal curricula of school spaces.

Schools have a legitimate concern for safety and order, but a concern that risks engendering passive citizenship of following rules, written and unwritten, and adhering to authority. The discourse of liberal democracy accepts that citizenship is about rights and responsibilities; however, the institution of schooling does not always trust students to articulate a truly embodied citizenship. If schools view methods of surveillance and control as necessary features of school environments, even in a precautionary way, then what message is being sent to students and what messages are students taking with them as they leave schools? The complexities of school spaces beyond the classroom cannot be discounted as important considerations in the lived experiences of students in schools.



The high school in our study reflects many of the currents that exist in the public space of Canadian political and social culture, including individualism and cynicism. Yet there is also a concern for the collective welfare and values of students. It is possible for schools to begin using such issues to build more active, involved school citizens. Rather than imposing policies in a top down manner, school administrators might instead involve students in a process of thoughtful, informed deliberation and decision making. The message to students might be that their lived experiences are valued, giving them a greater sense of ownership over place and placeness. Further, the school reflects the tension between diversity and social cohesion existing in Canadian society. This tension manifests itself in students' understandings and experiences of place and space within their school.

The physical structure of a school also plays a role in how students experience place and enact citizenship. Physicality influenced how the students in our study negotiated their occupation of school spaces, whether through locker selection or where they chose to eat lunch. Similarly, students congregated in certain school spaces like the atrium to try on identities and express citizenship, confirming or rejecting their belonging to particular groups. This tendency of students to gravitate towards homogeneous friendship groups in the atrium and in selecting their locker locations has worrying implications for citizenship. It reflects a trend towards the formation of increasing numbers of ethnic enclaves found in urban Canada, a phenomenon that raises concerns for the future of sociality and communication across differences in a diverse Canadian society (Walks & Bourne, 2006).

Throughout our research, students articulated the importance of aesthetics in their relationships to school spaces. The functionalism reflected in the architectural design of the physical building, along with fences, security cameras, and an absence of windows created an unwelcome space. At the end of this research, we are left wondering how schools might become more environmentally friendly, aesthetically pleasing, and socially inclusive places where students' emerging identities and expressions of citizenship can be negotiated in positive and productive ways.

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*Jennifer Tupper* is an associate professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Regina. Her research interests focus on high school students' understandings and experiences of citizenship, First Nations issues in education, particularly with respect to the numbered treaties, and the lived experiences of curriculum for both students and teachers.

*Terry Carson* is a Professor of Curriculum Studies and Graduate Coordinator in the Department of Secondary Education at the University of Alberta. His research interests include curriculum theory, the internationalization of curriculum, teaching and cultural difference, and the educational experiences of immigrant and refugee youth.

*Ingrid Johnston* is a Professor in the Department of Secondary Education and Associate Dean of Research and Graduate Studies in the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta. Her research and teaching interests focus on post-colonial literary theories and pedagogies, English education, adolescent literature, and questions of cultural difference and teacher education.

*Jyoti Mangat* is a high school English teacher and administrator. Her research and teaching focus on diasporic literatures, postcolonial reading practices, and teacher education. She has published articles and book chapters dealing with culture, reading, and identity.

Contact: Jennifer A. Tupper, Faculty of Education, University of Regina, 3737 Wascana Parkway, Regina, Sk. S4S 0A2  
Phone: 306-585-0677, Fax: 306-585-4880, Email: Jennifer.Tupper@uregina.ca