

# Perspectives on “Civic Agency” from Project Zero’s First 50 Years



PROJECT ZERO  
FIFTY YEARS  
HARVARD GRADUATE  
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION



At the beginning, PZ’s research focused on investigating cognitive processing in the arts. This seminal work led researchers to expand to broader aspects of human potential including learning, critical thinking, creativity, and intelligence. In the recent decades, PZ research built on these rich traditions by exploring further fundamental questions of human potential as they relate to contemporary issues facing an array of educational settings—schools, families, museums, and businesses. To celebrate 50 years, PZers looked across the vast body of research and developed an organizing framework that includes nine research areas representative of many facets of the five decades of work. These nine areas include: The Arts, Assessment, Character and Ethics, Civic Agency, Creativity, Developing Understanding, Global Competencies, Intelligences, and Thinking. PZ created a brief overview of each of the 9 areas as stand-alone “booklets.” Each of the four-page booklets describes PZ’s research in the area along with a set of “PZ perspectives,” notes some big questions that are launching PZ into the future, lists key PZ projects, highlights important PZ quotes, offers a sample of notable PZ publications, and visualizes the main frameworks and ideas.

*The artwork and graphic elements featured on these pages was created by our collaborators, dpict, a local graphic facilitation and design firm, along with Matt Riecken, PZ’s digital learning specialist.*

# CIVIC AGENCY

Project Zero's research considers civic agency as a multifaceted capability, a set of skills and dispositions to support one to participate in today's interconnected world. When we support learners to be effective and reflective agents of positive social change, we expand their notions of the who, what, and where of civic engagement, and prepare them for deep engagement in their communities, and with critical problems facing our world, both offline and online.

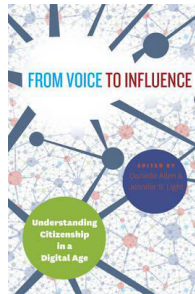
## BIG QUESTIONS

What is civic agency and how do we help young people develop it in today's world?

How does the digital world present positive opportunities and risks for the development and enactment of civic agency?

What specific pedagogical/classroom moves can support the development of civic skills, inclinations, and agency among school aged children?

How can we consider young children (as well as older students) as civic agents?



## PZ PERSPECTIVES

Civic agency is multi-faceted and involves listening to diverse perspectives, imagining and advocating for a better world.

Digital and social media pose new civic opportunities (investigating issues, sharing one's voice in creative ways, and mobilizing for change) and new challenges (news literacy, surveillance, uncivil exchanges).

We can support civic agency among school-aged children by using specific pedagogical/classroom moves.

Young children (as well as older students) can be as civic agents if we give them opportunities.



## KEY PROJECTS

Making Learning Visible (1997 - 2012)

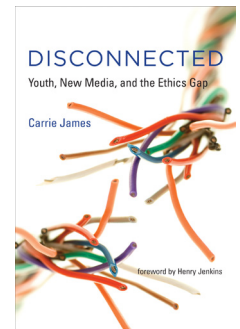
Youth and Participatory Politics (2013 - 2017)

Children are Citizens (2013 - current)

*"If we are to embrace an education for participatory readiness, we need to aim our pedagogic and curricular work at...the idea of civic agency as the activity of co-creating a way of life."* – Danielle Allen

*"Among the most significant blessings of the digital landscape are the opportunities afforded to youth to be active participants in the public sphere – sharing their voices, showing support for and mobilizing others on behalf of social justice issues."* – Carrie James

*"Children are not just future or hypothetical citizens, or citizens in training, but rather they are citizens of the here and now, with the right to express their opinions and participate in the civic and cultural life of their communities."* – Ben Mardell & Mara Krechevsky



# CIVIC AGENCY

WHAT *is* CIVIC AGENCY and HOW DO WE HELP YOUNG PEOPLE DEVELOP IT?



**CHILDREN** ARE NOT JUST FUTURE or HYPOTHETICAL CITIZENS, OR CITIZENS in TRAINING, but RATHER THEY ARE **CITIZENS** of the **HERE & NOW**, with the RIGHT to EXPRESS THEIR OPINIONS and PARTICIPATE in the **CIVIC** and **CULTURAL LIFE** of THEIR COMMUNITIES.

- Ben Mardell and Mara Krechevsky

**NOTABLE PZ PROJECTS**

- COMMON SENSE MEDIA
- MAKING LEARNING VISIBLE
- CHILDREN AS CITIZENS
- THE GOOD PARTICIPATION PROJECT
- OUT OF EDEN LEARN
- HUMANITIES AND THE LIBERAL ARTS ASSESSMENT

# KEY FRAMEWORKS

## MAKING LEARNING VISIBLE

### 5 FEATURES of DOCUMENTATION

- 1 INVOLVES a SPECIFIC QUESTION that GUIDES the PROCESS, OFTEN with an EPISTEMOLOGICAL FOCUS.
- 2 INVOLVES COLLECTIVELY ANALYZING, INTERPRETING and EVALUATING INDIVIDUAL and GROUP OBSERVATIONS; IT IS STRENGTHENED BY MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES
- 3 MAKES USE of MULTIPLE LANGUAGES (DIFFERENT WAYS of REPRESENTING & EXPRESSING THINKING in VARIOUS MEDIA & SYMBOL SYSTEMS)
- 4 MAKES LEARNING VISIBLE; IT IS NOT PRIVATE
- 5 NOT ONLY RETROSPECTIVE, IT IS ALSO PROSPECTIVE. IT SHAPES the DESIGN of FUTURE CONTEXTS for LEARNING.



## CORE PRACTICES of PARTICIPATORY POLITICS

