Dangerous spaces, dangerous memories, dangerous emotions:

informal education and heteronormativity – a Manchester UK

Youth Work vignette

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This article makes a connection between youth work spaces, emotions and some

elements of memory, exploring the construction of spaces dangerous for social

justice in both meanings of the term 'dangerous for'. It investigates the

contribution to social justice of lesbian and gay youth work and other

nonheteronormative youth work in a British context and considers the spaces of

youth work practice as both potentially threatening to the prospect of social

justice and also as potentially 'for' social justice, that is, capable of proposing

social justice and therefore replete with danger for current social relations. The

argument seeks to engage with recent discussions of how collective subjectivities

emerge and become politically active, of how lives become liveable and indeed

what counts as a life.

Heteronormative public space is central in perpetuating injustice and making lives less liveable. Heteronormative space is meant as spaces which valorise and make present the heterosexual couple and which make invisible or denigrate other relationship practices. These include not only powerful spaces such as the spaces of democratic political debate or places of religious worship but social spaces such as

clubs, leisure facilities and sporting venues, as well as, most significantly for this article, schools and youth projects. However, such public spaces are being transformed by the everyday and courageous practices of living openly in samesex relationships. The development of some urban districts and some towns and villages as hospitable centres for lesbian and gay populations has begun to transform children's centres and schools in such areas, and the political practice of 'coming out'

has been an essential part of that transformation. Such courageous practices over time create public memories which themselves sustain the boundaries of liveable public spaces (Cooper, 2004).

Social practices in schools and youth work confirm the heteronormative in myriad ways. However, youth workers in the UK and especially lesbian, bisexual and gay practitioners have created counter-hegemonic spaces over the past 30_40 years. Lesbian and gay youth groups (now more often referred to as lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans youth groups) were established in a variety of covert ways at first, gradually coming into the open often as part of Local Authority Youth Services. Paradoxically, it was the period of campaigning against the notorious Section 28 of the Local Government Act (1988), which prohibited the intentional

promotion of homosexuality and the 'teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship', which enabled outright resistance in many metropolitan and county councils, supported by the declaration of campaigners that they were 'Never Going Underground'. Even more paradoxically, the period following the equalisation of the age of consent in 2001 and the repeal of Section 28 in 2003 (both by Labour) was followed by a period in which specialist provision for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans (LGBT) young people has been threatened, as it has been suggested that the need for it, now that equalities legislation protects young homosexuals, has come to an end.

The questions addressed in this article are therefore part of an enquiry into what has made youth work a potentially critical space and whether it remains so. Is this to do with the marginality of youth work? Is it to do with informality and negotiation and the practitioner's role in creating safe-enough spaces? Is it because youth work is by definition a border pedagogy (Coburn, 2010; Giroux, 2005)? How do professional/worker roles both open up and regulate spaces?

Closely connected to discussion of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic spaces and memories is the question of identity claims and citizenship. What are the emerging models of the 'liveable city' and what kinds of education in the future might support this? How might schools as social spaces become open to and re-iterate patterns of citizenship emerging outside school?

The article draws on participant observation and a series of interviews conducted with Lesbian and Gay Youth Manchester (LGYM) during 2009 and from a two-year period of participant observation of The Blue Room which began as a formative evaluation in January 2008 (Batsleer & Davies, 2008). These two research contexts are both projects in which same-sex relationships are made visible as part of a

learning process. LGYM, a Manchester Youth Service group, was involved in a

partnership with Exceeding Expectations, focused on the invisibility of lesbian, gay,

bisexual and trans experience within schools and within the Sex and Relationships

Education curriculum. Together they ran workshops in schools which enabled young

people to meet 'out' gay adults and explore issues on non-heterosexual identification

and homophobia.

The second context, a project called The Blue Room _ now part of a new agency,

The Men's Room _ uses creativity to engage with young men who may be involved

in selling sex in Manchester and other cities.

The value of an extended period of ethnographic study, involving 'immersion' in

the practice of this emerging project was that it enabled serious critical engagement.

Frankham and Smears' account, elsewhere in this special issue, of the ethics of

research, including their discussion of the processes of defamilarising, and the long

period of refusal of obvious 'aims' are very pertinent to the partial and not at all

innocent account presented here. The stories which emerged as needing to be told,

and the questions which emerged as needing to be asked were different from those

sought in technicist evaluations of 'impact'. These methodological issues are not

foregrounded here. Rather, the boundary practices found in the border pedagogy of

informal educators and their relationship to the stories, memories and emerging

spaces of sexual citizenship form the focus of the article.

Together these contexts have provided the research vignette which contributes

to wider investigations of the nature of hegemonic heterosexuality and of how

counter-hegemonic spaces emerge. In the process, I seek to extend the theorisation

of

the practice of informal education as citizenship or democratic education in

emerging 'glocations', to coin a phrase. I use the term 'glocation' to convey the way in which necessarily local practices are being shaped and formed by global forces.

Boundaries

The question of why particular spaces may be perceived as dangerous to the currently hegemonic constructions of 'citizenship', and the issue of what might make for a 'good' or 'better' polis or city from the point of view of those whose lives are lived on the edges, has been a preoccupation of much feminist writing. The discussion of spaces of necessity requires a discussion of boundaries. Drawing inspiration from the invitation issued many years ago by Donna Haraway to work in ways which take 'pleasure in the confusion of boundaries and responsibility in their construction' (Haraway, 1991), the starting assumption here is that boundaries which currently exist and which may only be made visible when crossed sustain hegemonic social relationships (Butler, 2006). Such boundaries are always to be questioned. Some recent theorisations of young people and public space have investigated liminality (Sibley, 1995; Valentine, 2004), recognising both long-standing analyses of liminal space as sacred space and the power of liminal space as a site of transformation. If to be young, from this perspective, is to be in a liminal space, at a boundary between 'child' and 'adult', then the pressure to an intense living of the heterosexual 'norm' in the space/time designated 'youth' can be seen as a societal defence against change or transformation. The pressure to enact the existing heterosexual norm is a response to an implicit recognition that the time/space of youth is replete with the potential for transformation in the inherited boundaries of pure/impure sex and sexuality (Rubin, 1984/1993). Whilst the place of identity claims

in the practice of challenging hegemonic heterosexuality has been widely discussed; in education research (de Palma & Atkinson, 2009), there has been less discussion of

the connection between space and identity claims. This connection is especially important in relation to the changing nature and meaning of the public_private divide and the significance of informal spaces in mediating change processes (Allan, Atkinson, Brace, de Palma, & Hemingway, 2008). It is less common, however, to recognise the place of specific pedagogies in enabling the development of such spaces.

The frequently encountered paradox is that whilst identity claims seem, by nature, to be deeply conservative and sustaining of existing classifications and boundaries, they appear nevertheless to be strategically essential for those seeking change, and this has been absolutely the case in relation to the recognition of the human rights of homosexual persons. It is, therefore, very significant to explore different strategic uses of identity claims as a means of creating spaces for contestation and challenge. Youth workers as informal educators are concerned always with the explicit forms the boundaries they work within and against take, precisely because they work outside of and beyond a set national curriculum, with the negotiation of the direction of learning as their starting point and informality as a key element of their approach (Batsleer & Davies, 2010). It is this pedagogic practice which is illuminated here. It has made claims to be a 'border-pedagogy', enabling the crossing and challenging of assumed identity-boundaries, in order to open up new spaces of conversation and freedom (Coburn, 2010).

The regulation and construction of sexuality has been theorised as a site of both boundary-making and boundary-crossing (Bell & Valentine, 1995). Significant

studies have demonstrated the ways in which schools act to reproduce social norms of heterosexuality, the processes involved in the social construction of sexuality and of racialised masculinities and femininities (Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Mac an Ghaill, 1994). Together such accounts have given a clear view of schools as hegemonically heterosexual. There have also been significant studies of the construction of 'gay space' within urban space. It is often assumed that informal community-based education exists in a relationship of permanent critique to schooling (Ord, 2007; Smith & Jeffs, 1990), but this is far from straightforwardly evident. Informal education, as much as schooling, may be a limited and constrained process in which outcomes are prescribed at the start.

Nevertheless, being active in constructing the boundaries of safe-enough space is critical to the practice of groupwork in youth work in informal community settings. Boundary-making and boundary-holding processes undertaken by youth work practitioners enable aspects of experience to be spoken about and, concomitantly, others to be silenced. How such professional practice intersects with and challenges or conforms to the wider change processes which ambivalently open up and close down both new subject positions and forms of urban life and citizenship is a matter for detailed investigation. In the case of the projects discussed here, the possibilities of sexual citizenship for individuals involved with lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans lifeworlds may be opened up. Yet as they open up, they are also thereby regulated in new ways.

Mac an Ghaill (1994) drew attention to the interplay between the masculinities of teacher roles and those of their pupils, and Richardson (1996) further argued that the currently hegemonic construction of sexuality assigns 'sociality' to the heterosexual (so that heterosexual life is understood, across the culture, as involved in the

complexity of relationships, law, commerce and so on), whereas homosexuality is constructed as merely and entirely sexual and therefore private and not to be spoken about in the public domain. Epstein and Johnson (1998) have shown over many studies how schooling has become a site for the construction of identities. Embodied practices of sexual identifications and demarcation of 'otherness' are, in this model, not understood biologically but as the means through which young people engage in the construction of their sexual identities. They argue that young people construct themselves through their own sexual cultures but that these are always in interaction with the practices of schools, commercial culture and the family and household practices they inhabit. Young people make their identities but not in conditions of their own choosing. Understanding processes of sexual identification therefore involves recognising that 'practitioners are involved in the identity formation of their young clients, students or patients in the same moment as they are involved in the construction of their own identities' (Epstein & Johnson, 2008, p. 34). There are, however, powerful emergent constructions of sexual citizenship with which educators can engage, and this is made possible when informal educators positively choose to work with lesbian and gay projects.

Schools in the main lag behind the prevailing culture and reinforce earlier dominant constructions of heterosexuality and homosexuality, even as these cultural forms are being transformed in the new forms of global capitalist constructions of 'difference' which other commentators (Binnie & Skeggs, 2006) point towards. The role of youth workers as informal educators in opening up new spaces for conversation is highlighted in the following case studies.

Challenging heteronormativity in schools: the invisible queers and the coming out process

The culture of silence in primary schools was both documented and challenged in the

No Outsiders research project (www.nooutsiders.sunderland.ac.uk), and the construction

of a culture of silence and invisibility in secondary schools about the

presence of lesbian and gay bisexual and transgender students and teachers

potentially undermines the sense produced by a brief glance at Manchester's

corporate construction of the urban village as a gay-friendly space, in which the

gay festival 'Pride' is indeed a source of pride to the city, winning the UK Gay

newspaper Pink Paper Top Council awards on its behalf. The reasons why schools

have 'lagged behind' other parts of urban society in accepting the visible presence of

lesbian and gay teachers is complex and rooted in a hegemonic homophobia which

has sexualised lesbian and gay identities whilst producing 'heterosexuality' as

normal. Homophobic discourses propose a 'transmission' of homosexuality (like a

disease) from teachers to pupils, possibly, a sexual transmission, since gay identity is,

as Richardson (1996) argued, sexualised. Such sexualisation in discourse raises fears

of allegations and accusations of sexual offences with 'under age' young people.

Non-heterosexual presence may risk being seen as a sexual offence. Lesbian, gay,

bisexual and trans teachers have sometimes chosen to remain closeted as a result of

fear of attacks. Other teachers also remain silent and non-affirming of same-sex

relationships, and an openly homophobic and heteronormative culture thus remains

dominant as young people who may 'suspect' their teachers are gay and unable to be

open about it are unlikely to be open about it themselves. In this way, the closet and

the 'open secret' remain a powerful aspect of the experience of many people.

Furthermore, the distancing, especially of 'subject teachers', from messy personal

bodily matters is marked in the organisation of the curriculum of secondary

schooling. Most school teachers do not include sex and relationships education in

their understanding of their role as teachers (Alldred, 2007; Paechter, 2004). In one

sense, this frees young people (in Johnson & Epstein's words) 'to make their own

identities in their own sexual cultures' but at the same time it leads to an emphasis on

the 'otherness' of sex and intensifies the invisibility and silence attributed to lesbian,

gay, bisexual and otherwise queer sexual experience. So 'sex' is dealt with by school

nurses, by PHSE Departments or by youth workers, and 'relationships' are probably

not dealt with at all (Alldred, 2007).

In contrast to the situation in schools, youth work has, in cities at least, been a

profession which has offered a relatively open space to lesbians and also, though to a

lesser extent, gay men. Indeed many who are drawn to youth work relate this to their

experience of difficulties in mainstream schooling. An early reaction to the silence in

mainstream schools about homophobia (following decriminalisation and then the

AIDS Crisis and Section 28) was the establishment of lesbian and gay youth groups.

LGYM Manchester was one of the first such groups to be established in 1978. Its

meetings were held in the Gay Centre near the then Manchester Polytechnic (now

Manchester Metropolitan University), just up the road from the room above a record

shop in which the more 'secretive' early young lesbian and gay groups established themselves. The conditions for the coming into existence of such a lesbian and gay youth group included the presence of adult gay community space, but also the ability to distance itself from schooling and also other 'mainstream' youth provision which silenced the existence of same-sex relationships. Such informal community-based space offered and continues to offer alternative stories and practices to young people

who are then often empowered to return to school settings and to engage with initiatives such as 'Exceeding Expectations'. Educational practices construct possibilities and spaces for identity projects, and informal community-based educational initiatives have been documented as working very effectively to create spaces for openness (Allan et al., 2008).

LGYM goes to school: the informal educator's role in schools

Exceeding Expectations started as a project based in Theatre in Education. The Hope Theatre Company based in Salford produced a play which told the story of a young person coming out in school. The workshops which accompanied the play focused on two themes: the use of the word 'gay' as an insult and young people's attitudes to same sex relationships. The initial scheme was then developed through the involvement of LGYM to include 'witness statements' by young lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans young people who talked about their experience of 'coming out' and who joined in with small group discussions with pupils. The initiative continues at the date of writing, now run by the Healthy Schools Team in Manchester. According to Amelia, the young women's worker at LGYM:

I think our involvement pushed the Exceeding Expectations project to a more

participatory approach involving young people in the programme of work and pushing

the boundaries to include bisexual and trans as well as lesbian and gay young people.

Youth work in recent years has been dominated by a discourse of 'participation' and user voice (e.g. Podd, 2010; Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2010) and therefore the intervention of LGYM to bring young people's direct experience into the Exceeding Expectations project was consonant with such preoccupations.

The schools which participated in Exceeding Expectations did so voluntarily.

Only one of the schools was faith-based, and this absence re-inforced the constructions of faith discourses as actively hostile to same-sex relationships:

When the invitation which was sent to schools to participate in this work, there was one

reply from a headteacher querying the invitation and asking whether they would be invited to a conference to discuss sex with animals. And that was from a faith school. (Interview with staff member, LGYM)

Thus, the riskiness of the space is signalled and an existing boundary of silence reinforced,

through the designation of and not so covert invitation to disgust. It is such active practice of silencing (rather than, as is sometimes assumed for example, adherence to essentialist notions of identity) that makes the 'coming out' narrative central to both Exceeding Expectations and to the LGBT Quality Standards initiative.

Recognising the long-standing reluctance of schools to become involved led staff at LGYM to become involved in a regional and national campaign to address

schools and teacher culture. Through the North West Consortium of Lesbian and Gay Youth Groups, they became involved with the promotion of Quality Standards for work with lesbian and gay young people, with the aim of making same-sex relationships a safer issue for teachers and others in the children's workforce to explore.

The telling of non-heterosexual identity stories is potentially affirming for all participants, both the young people who take part as members of LGYM and the young people in the participant schools. LGYM members reported that the participation of bisexual and trans young people opened up discussions of fluid and complex identifications and of the possibilities of change in identities over time. This work is connected with anti-bullying agendas in schools and aims to challenge institutionalised forms of homophobia. It is institutionalised homophobia which leads, for example, to PE becoming a deeply troubled space:

During the project young people told stories of boys and girls who have come out being

asked to use the disabled toilet for getting changed. One girl was asked to use the boys

changing room 'because you don't fancy them, do you?' (Interview with LGYM staff member)

Because PE has been a space of stigma and fear for many non-heterosexual young people LGYM have actively developed an event called the Lesbian and Gay Youth Games, to open up opportunities for sport to their members who have all too understandably avoided PE and therefore missed out on an important opportunity. The showers, the toilets and the changing rooms of school PE have become the places

of boundary marking and exclusion and bodily, visceral and emotional responses are being used to construct space which excludes homosexual bodies. In turn, these spaces themselves (the toilets in schools _ always the toilets in schools) become signs

of a wider abjection and marginalisation:

Schooling is troubled by the presence of sex among teenagers in any event but this troubling is further caught in a dangerous loop by the sexualising of LGBT identifications (Richardson, 1996).

Peer educators from LGYM went into schools and engaged with young people about the meanings of the word 'gay'. They then spoke frankly about their own experience in schools, which included examples of serious bullying and harassment. In doing this they offered, through the rehearsal of those dangerous memories, a present and surviving connection with a successful adult identity as lesbian or gay. In turn, this strengthens the peer educator's identity potentially repairing some of the earlier damage experienced in school. Such lifestory-telling also means that the plurality and complexity of identities is made visible:

Our peer educators were male, female, trans, Catholic, Jewish, of Jamaican heritage,

from the North, from the South. They talked about these complexities in the workshops

and showed that being gay isn't the only thing about you or even the most important things sometimes. (Interview with staff member LGYM)

Following the example of the national Schools Out project (Sanders, 2008), the Quality Standards initiative has encouraged feedback to teachers with the aim of creating LGBT affirmative space, using postcards to former teachers, beginning with

the phrases: 'It would have helped if [. . .] or 'Thank you for [. . .]' (www.schoolsout. org.uk). The exclusionary and silencing lines drawn around spaces shift by the telling and re-telling of stories and the modification of scripts. Story lines and boundary lines are deeply implicated with one another.

The NWConsortium of LGBT Youth Groups has recognised the importance of developing a safe space in schools and has developed the Quality Standards Exercise to make same-sex relationships a safe topic for teachers to explore. This initiative seeks to engage with initial teacher training and continuing professional development. Making a safe space for teachers appears to mean, to these young activists, making the work boring, bureaucratic, depersonalised with achievable targets. To quote one of the women who designed the package: 'It makes it safe and boring and so addresses teachers' cultures and is a vehicle for change' (Staff member LGYM).

The emphasis on checklists and paper work, targets and deadlines effectively desexualises the subject of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans identifications. The development of 'targets' and 'outcomes' in youth work has threatened to reshape the spaces of practice in community settings, just as it has in other educational contexts (Davies & Merton, 2009). The Consortium also offers a range of services: a training package for teachers and others in the children's workforce; action planning with a variety of groups: support to whole school approaches; support to specialist projects and dedicated LGBT work; offering ways of challenging heteronormativity. In so doing, they are themselves caught in a technocratic approach, following an established road of 'raise awareness, train, deliver outcomes'. [Whether this does in fact deliver change is at the very least questionable, resting as it does on a behaviour

modification model of education (Frankham & Smears, 2012).] It also can be seen to be complicit in a rewriting of the purpose and practice of informal education in youth work as a means of addressing the targets of social policy rather than as a vehicle of open, democratic education and enquiry (Batsleer & Davies, 2010).

One participant in the Exceeding Expectations programme suggested that there was evidence that fear of Section 28 was still being used in schools to control speaking about homosexuality, some years after its removal from the statute books. The 2009 requirement for all schools in England and Wales to teach sex and relationship education does nothing to suggest that faith (or other) schools will be required to speak positively on the matter of same sex relationships. The role of the informal educator _ here the peer educator _ is therefore to be 'the other' to the hegemonic norms of schooling, speaking what is usually not spoken, as a guest or stranger invited by the 'host' in school. The work of Exceeding Expectations challenged the establishment of 'gay (and straight) enclaves' with school as bydefinition

straight and 'outside school' as the only available gay space. It affirms identity claims and enables peer educators to experience positive identifications as non-straight in a space which has hitherto been experienced as unsupportive at best and hostile at worst, thus potentially transforming that space. This challenges the boundaries of silence set by schools:

It was brilliant going into school and talking about being gay when I'd been bullied about it myself at school. (LGYM Member and participant Exceeding Expectations)

In so doing, lesbian and gay peer educators fulfil many of the roles expected of the emergent gay citizen and therefore can be seen as strongly conforming even in the

manner and space of their challenge. This gay citizen is, as Sullivan (1996) suggested,

'virtually normal', bringing to the good city the civic virtues of style, irony, childlessness and therefore an enormous capacity for volunteering, community commitment and contribution to cultural and entrepreneurial regeneration, all leavened with just a streak of rebelliousness.

The model of 'coming out' with which the Exceeding Expectations project has worked is certainly amenable to this discourse of 'good citizen gay' who will take part and participate in the formation of an inclusive civic culture, above all by participation in the market place. The 'autonomous' self who 'comes out' is also of course the self-governing, chastening psyche of capitalist democracies. This assimilationist

figure of the 'good gay' (it has been argued, influentially, by among others Bell and Binnie, 1998) is a creation of the most recent period of capitalist urban development in which 'difference' has become marketable, a feature of consumption. How rapidly it is noted, the 'gay areas' have become available for marketing and promotion as an essential feature of cosmopolitan space. The 'danger within' of the Thatcher years has become a marketing opportunity, and the emerging gay citizen is above all a consumer. 'Multicultures can be made corporate through essentialising of difference' as a highly influential paper about Manchester's gay village argues (Binnie & Skeggs, 2006). It is no surprise then that one of the boyswho had come out at school and contacted LGYM complained of being under pressure: 'Every-one wants me to go shopping with them' (LGYM member; participant in Exceeding Expectations).

This making of lifeworlds into 'experiences' for shoppers and therefore corporate and marketable through the construction of new 'essential differences' further marks the new urban spaces such as 'the gay village' by class and by the ability to consume

(Binnie & Skeggs, 2006). It is through money and through the appearance and practice of pro-social responsibility that sexual citizenship is conferred, thus creating another boundary. This then positions the 'good gays' against the 'bad queers' on 'the other side of the street', and it is 'on the other side of the street' that the second project discussed here happens.

Looking from the other side of the street: The Blue Room _ informal educators responses to stigmatised identities

The Blue Room is an arts-based initiative (initially linked to Theatre in Prisons Programme, TIPP) bridging the worlds of creativity, applied arts and social care. It was created in 2007 by Graeme Urlwin and Kate McCoy, arts practitioners with applied theatre training. The project uses drama, photography, storytelling, animation and music and, it is increasingly recognised, youth work. As the project evolved, roles for staff were demarcated: visiting artists, visiting social care project workers and Blue Room workers. Blue Room workers undertook outreach work and group work and ran a drop-in session. The aims of The Blue Room are to engage young men (who may be 'renting' or selling sex) in a range of creative activities, including public performance and presentation of their work.

Urlwin set up The Blue Room as part of a long engagement with issues facing vulnerable young men, which he had first been made aware of through his work with The Albert Kennedy Trust, a then Manchester-based agency named after a young man who died falling from the roof in Chorlton Street Car Park in what has now

become 'Manchester's Gay Village'. Albert Kennedy had run away from a care home.

It is believed by some people that he had become involved in 'renting' or selling sex before his death. The 20-year period since Albert Kennedy's death has seen the transformation of the space occupied by the gay community in the life of Manchester. A number of 'civil society' organisations are well established and contribute to the cultural life of the city, particularly through Pride, the annual August Bank Holiday weekend Parade and Festival. The City Council seeks the inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans perspectives in the development of public

services. Positive initiatives in health care, policing and education in Manchester are all to be credited to the confident development of gay or 'LGBT' community organisations during this period and to the City Council's openness to dialogue with them (Cooper, 2004).

Whereas the work of LGYM with Exceeding Expectations and the Quality Standards Initiative positions the youth worker/informal educator as one who, as an invited guest in schools, challenges the invisibility of same-sex relations, and thereby extends the space of citizenship, promoting the recognition of sexual citizenship and the identity of lesbian and gay citizens, the role of the youth workers in The Blue Room is one in which the inherent ambivalence of care and control is more evidently at work. As the new social construction of the 'out and proud' gay citizen in turn produces a new boundary, it constructs the boys who participate in The Blue Room as the 'outsiders' whose presence may appear, because of their engagement in vice, anti-social behaviour and unhealthy practices, to undermine the contribution of Manchester's gay village to the civic culture. Whilst 'Pride' received a 'tourism'

award, boys using The Blue Room feel themselves, in their own words, to be regarded

as 'scum' and 'shit'.

In general, it can be said that policy on the sex industry, focused as it is on the

prevention of crime, speaks a language of control and regulation which, even as it

seeks to reduce exploitation, seeks first to address the presence and visibility of

street

prostitutes. Their presence is seen to be problematic for the safety and quality of life

of

those (non-prostitute) communities with whose lifeworlds they intersect.

Paradoxically

policy initiatives to tackle prostitution end up preferring to make it 'unseen and

unheard'. This is a major aspect of policy with which The Blue Room is in tension.

A second way of seeing sex work and prostitution is through the veil of sexual

shame and of stigma. The language of 'sex workers' (as distinct from 'prostitute' or

'rent boy') was a 1970s West Coast American coinage in the context of the liberation

movements of that period. It sought to de-stigmatise involvement in the sex industry

and at the same time to emphasise that as 'workers' those involved in the sex

industry also had rights: they were not, by virtue of their involvement in the most

despised and 'low' activities, thereby available for rape or other forms of abuse; they

were not to have their health and well-being disregarded; and they were not to be

regarded as incapable of speaking for themselves or of having their own perspective

on

the work. The Blue Room has chosen at times to use the designation 'sex worker' to

emphasise this 'rights-based' ethic. However, the 'whore stigma' remains and is (for

reasons that there is no space to explore here) unlikely to disappear in the lifetime of

The Blue Room. Alongside the controlling directions implicit in public policy, this

'whore stigma' is the second major silencer with which The Blue Room must grapple.

The border pedagogy (Coburn, 2010) of youth work of necessity works very

differently here than it does or can in schools. Although there is in each case a

commitment to 'safe space', what is required of that safe-enough space is very

different.

Rather than challenging an enclave approach, as the work in schools does, The Blue

Room makes an enclave for vulnerable young men to investigate their

circumstances.

There is a need for the creation of a specific space, and this can be described in a

variety

of ways: for young men, for young men 'in the city centre', . . ., for 'young men who

are

vulnerable to sexual exploitation'. And sometimes _ but only sometimes _ 'for young

men who sell sex'. The forms of address to and about the client group indicate the

reasons why safe space is needed. These forms of address construct the subject

positions for participation in an enabling pedagogy whose boundaries must be

secure if

the young men are to be enabled to explore issues that matter. So, it is by definition

an

exclusive rather than an inclusive space. It is exclusive of women, of punters, of

tourists,

. . ., and, ideally, of boys who are not 'on the game'.

Attention to forms of address is constant in the practice of staff in The Blue

Room. Practices of welcome and recognition are fundamental aspects of informal educator's group work practice, in constructing democratic spaces for collaborative enquiry. The Blue Room, like most group work projects, has established various opening rituals including 'the question' which boys who come to the group get to take it in turns to ask: the question can be profound or silly, or sometimes both at once: 'What's the most boring thing you've done today?' and 'What's the worst thing that's happened to you this week?' The significance of 'the question' as an opening ritual is surely that it gives The Blue Room participants a lead in setting the tone and agenda for the session and shares the power in the group work from the opening moments. Paradoxically in the sense that there is an emphasis on secure boundaries for a group which might seem at first glance to support a practice which strengthens identity and belonging, The Blue Room sidelines rather than affirms identity claims. Staff and members at LGYM also argue that the inclusion of bisexual identification and of trans identification as part of their work with Exceeding Expectations makes it harder for the work to be recuperated into the essentialising and commodifying of identities which accompanies emerging gay-sexual citizenship. However, the practice

of evading identity claims in The Blue Room is marked. Young men who regularly sell sex to men quite often wish to assert heterosexuality or else to avoid 'labels'. In any case, most of the labels available for the boys to wear are derogatory and not about to be fashionably reclaimed and even the term 'sex worker' (viewed, in an earlier moment, as a liberatory term) is now questioned, as it potentially turns a practice into an identity and therefore makes the practice harder to contest.

Beyond the issue of forms of address, informal educators must grapple with the capacity of identity claims to solidify what was liquid and open to change, and learn

to explore the moments when claims to identity, however, noble, immediately reinforce the conditions of abject otherness which stigmatised groups do experience. The Blue Room project enables witnessing and testimony but this too is characteristically indirect. Haunting phrases used by a member of The Blue Room about their life at the end of a film made by the project sum up this need for indirection: 'You have to keep your head down and learn to live like a ghost'. Through various creative projects and events Blue Room members have been able to testify to their experience, and arts-based practice of informal education enables this to be done in ways which are provisional, complex, shared and anonymised. A photography exhibition does not bear the names of the artists. A play is a play about Barney, or Charlie and Ronnie. The creation of a character can be either owned or disavowed depending on the audience and context. This practice has enabled forms of compassionate and dialogue between the young men and professionals. 'Developing

self-esteem' (or 'learning to hold your head up') is at the very least an ambivalent project for those who need to learn to keep their heads down to survive. Events such as the 'Down but not Out Conference' (an event facilitated by The Blue Room, using performance and discussion to create dialogue with professionals who work with street homeless people, and people with drug and alcohol issues, and severe mental health problems) have created a challenge to current forms of 'service user involvement'. They are driven by the young people's agendas rather than by the need for consultation on aspects of service delivery. In the Down but Not Out event, professional agendas were challenged with questions such as 'Why don't you try to change things more?' and even 'Why are you wasting my time?'

Whereas staff and peer educatorswho are involved with Exceeding Expectations are

characteristically delighted and proud to be able to declare their identities and tell their

stories, owning their own narratives and being centred in them, the operation of shame

and stigma in relation to sex work means that the fear of exposure among the boyswho

are members of The BlueRoom is great, and informal educators need to be attentive to

this at every point. This includes exposure within the 'community' of homeless and

vulnerable people within the city centre. After the 'Down but not Out' event, whilst

most of the young men felt proud, one of the young men who had been involved in a

theatre production said that he felt more vulnerable because: '250 more people now

know what I do. Well, they won't know, but they'll assume' (Blue Room observation).

The boundaries of the safe space for collaborative enquiry are potentially marked

by shame and stigma and by a prurient curiosity by all those who participate in them.

All of this suggests that the nature of safe or dangerous spaces of sexual

citizenship and the role of educators cannot be specified ahead before an analysis of

how hegemonic boundaries are currently operating. Hegemonic boundaries are those

which sustain the forms of citizenship consonant with current capitalist social

relations. Changes in the processes of accumulation within capitalism accompany

changes in the forms of identification and identity work, and this is significantly

linked to the questioning of the role of the nation-state within global processes. In

writing about dangerous spaces for social justice, the issue of why and for whom, and

in what interests boundaries are constructed, is critical. It is at these borders that some lives become liveable and others are rendered abject. The quest for a liveable life for all is _ and a universal sense of social justice _ is threatened at every border.

Opening up new forms of citizenship and education: who is 'the outsider'?

The connection between these accounts of informal education processes and the debate about the new forms of citizenship developing in this period of capitalism is forged through the frequently made claim of informal education to be democratic ducation and education for active citizenship. What if the emerging forms of citizenship are related less to national boundaries than to 'cosmopolis'?

Thinking about 'cosmopolis' has been developed in urban planning (Sandercock, 2003, 2006) and has been the source of much debate. Sandercock has developed an

argument for cosmopolis as a model of a 'good city' based on new civic virtues of hospitality, responsiveness and welcome to 'others', openness to integration, which may be enabling us to imagine new transnational forms of civic virtue. The concept of 'citizenship' is being loosened from its moorings in national belonging. Such transnational forms of citizenship with their characteristic virtues produce affinities between citizens of Manchester and London and Rome and Montreal, for example, that are, at least in the global North, as powerful, it is argued, as the affinities between people who are citizens of the same nation state.

Sandercock's ideas are presented and debated in the collection 'Cosmopolitan Urbanism' (Binnie, Holloway, Millington, & Young, 2006). Kurt Iveson's essay in that collection 'Strangers in Cosmopolis' raises explicit issues of the role of informal educators such as youth workers or community development workers. Like many other

writers in the collection, Iveson highlights the problems of class which seem to haunt

the vision of 'cosmopolis' since historically working-class communities (with their

failures to integrate and celebrate difference) are seen as the 'other' of cosmopolis.

Unlike those who celebrate the new citizenship of openness, diversity and

multiculture,

the white working class are depicted as 'other': narrow-minded, parochial, behind the

times (while, it might be added the Black working class is seen as engaged in the

threatening violence of 'guns and gangs'.) Such difficulties in accepting the embrace

of

cosmopolis also extend to other marginalised and abject groups in the new social

order,

such as the young men who use The Blue Room. They too exhibit an 'enclave

consciousness' which runs counter to the prevailing virtues of cosmopolis.

'If city life is in essence ''lived among strangers'', then attempts to order urban

life which embody ''enclave consciousness'' _ fear of touching, fear of the other, the

desire for community' _ are deemed inherently problematic', says Iveson (2006,

p. 71), repeating the much analysed problematic surrounding the term 'community'.

Every time a community is constructed, an 'other' or an outsider is constructed, and

this challenges the emerging cosmopolitan virtue of openness.

However, even 'cosmopolis' requires regulation and the regulation of prostitution

in city centres is an excellent example of how emerging 'cosmopolitan zones'

support

certain kinds of touching and desiring and regulate and limit others. The closures of

'us' and 'them' (accompanied by regular use of CCTV, surveillance and police

helicopters) is not in this case brought about by the despised white working class
with

their supposed desire for homogeneous communities, but by 'cosmopolis' itself, as

the space of tourism and many other forms of commodity exchange, which

nevertheless explicitly excludes prostitution.

As new forms of education and schooling are emerging which are more

permeable and cosmopolitan, in response to these new conditions within global

capitalism, there is a need to be attentive to the forms of closure not only against the

cosmopolitan project but even within it. Iveson asks of Leonie Sandercock (who sees

hospitality to strangers as an essential civic virtue): 'Who is a stranger?' and
responds

to his own question by arguing that cities need to recognise that everyone who lives
in

them and moves through them is a stranger.

The only basis for the development of civic virtues and forms of democracy then is

the recognition that the relationships of urban life are lived on common ground in the

community of strangers. In order for this community to have life, there need to be

spaces where strangers meet and negotiate in 'reasonable' ways. Such
reasonableness

does not take the formof a debating chamber, but rather suggests spaceswhich are
open

to surprise, change and indeterminacy. It is essential to be alert to the ways in which

attempts to regulate urban space through dialogue become modes of controlwhen
they

completely fail to acknowledge the relative power of participants in dialogue.

Iveson uses the example of responses to graffiti writing to make this point: 'If graffiti writers refuse to put their identities at risk by engaging in a wider dialogue about urban aesthetics with 'outsiders' to their subculture, are they being unreasonable?

Should they be lured or forced into such a dialogue because living together in the city demands it? If the homeless and the addicted fail to participate in a debate about the norms which govern street contacts and begging, are they being unreasonable? Should they be educated or empowered to participate in such a debate because living together in a city demands it?' If not, the police who intervene and remove and punish those unreasonable people, then it is the youth worker, the local government official, or the educator who might step in to impart the capacities to live in the good city (Iveson, 2006, pp. 80_81).

In relation to the indeterminate and open spaces of the city the demand for dialogue with the public authorities becomes a form of regulation. This same dynamic applies to the young men who engage with informal educators in The Blue Room at the point at which The Blue Room becomes an advocacy project, telling stories inviting the drawing of lines and demarcation. The boundary-drawing aspect of the role of educator in relation to reasonable debate is continually made evident and visible in community education contexts. The educator has the power to define the limits of reasonable exchange but also continually hopes to incite to voice experience and understandings which are silenced and excluded in the established fora of reasonableness. This power is always exercised contextually.

The discussion of LGYM and Exceeding Expectations and The Blue Room bears this out, showing that any demand for openness to discussions (whether with head teachers or with city leaders) has a different meaning for weak groups (that is groups

with little access to legitimation and cultural capital) than for those who live in the enclaves of privilege. It is one thing to require a greater openness to same sex relationships in schools and to affirm 'coming out' and self-advocacy, with the full support of the City Council. It is quite another to expect similar patterns of openness from the young men who use The Blue Room, who may depend on professionals, or on artistic representations, to advocate for them rather than risk their own safety through self-advocacy.

Iveson argues that strangeness is a condition shared by everyone. Notions of a purified 'homeground' for any individual are ultimately untenable as we all move through different 'life spaces'. In this vision of the city as a community of strangers, there is nowhere you can go and only be with people like you. Such a view of citizenship as 'strangers sharing common ground' gives us freedom to glimpse our own hybridity, our own contingency and encourages us to recognise, in all civility, that there are no values beyond contestation. The assumptions of 'family values' and the assumptions of 'queer' are each open to question and challenge.

What would an education system look like in which such a sense of difference, otherness, multiplicity, heterogeneity, diversity and plurality prevailed? In order to discover this and to continue to open up spaces for acceptance and understanding of

same-sex relationships, informal educators who work in the space of 'otherness', and

of border pedagogy, at the periphery, have a vital role. The challenge in that role is in recognising its ambivalence and its tendencies to regulate, contain and control even as it opens up to new imaginations.

Working with such ambivalence demands careful attention to the emotions which

mark the boundaries of urban life. Throughout this paper, emotions and affects have been noted: pride and abjection, shame, disgust and fear, amazement, joy and the question of the place of erotic life, of desire. Tentatively, I would suggest that a form of post-emotionalism and flatness of affect characterises the 'marketing of difference' which global capitalism has embraced. Excitement and amazement, as well as fear and disgust, may mark places where this flatness is challenged. Haraway's suggestion

that the boundaries which these emotions mark need careful attention: pleasure in the confusion of boundaries (the sex worker is now an artist; the professional nonsexual

teacher is gay) and responsibility in the construction of them (which means

that CCTV is not enough; and silence is not enough) remains a provocative and challenging starting point for the practice of informal education (Batsleer, 2008).

It appears that the more central a space is to the culture, the less fluidity of identity is permitted, more centred and even essentialised the identity claims. 'Coming out' in school is a central and strategic tactic in affirming same sex relationships. In the case of the still stigmatised identities of the boys who engage with The Blue Room it is a strategy most often avoided.Whilst informal educators in schools are able to work within emerging constructions of space and public memory and narrative to counter homophobic cultures, these same emerging narratives of sexual citizenship and constructions of urban space are challenged by informal education when it happens in more marginalised and stigmatised spaces. The nature of educational spaces in the city, from a non-heterosexual perspective, becomes less

taken for granted, leading in turn to discussion of what might constitute citizenship

in 'cosmopolis' and what diverse forms of education, but both formal and informal, might support this, making every boundary a potential crossing-point at which the shapes of sexual citizenship might be transformed.

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