

Negotiating the Discomfort of Art Education

Dr Jennifer Elsden-Clifton
RMIT University
jennifer.elsden-clifton@rmit.edu.au

Abstract

The visual arts has a long tradition of providing a space for disruptive practices such as, challenging what is known, questioning and exploiting cultural codes, and providing alternative social practices. This paper however, is interested in how visual arts students take up these disruptive possibilities within schooling; a space historically characterised by hierarchal power, surveillance and institutionalised structure. I will argue that because of the social and cultural structures that influence school settings, students' art that is characterised as disruptive is often seen as 'dangerous', 'messy' and 'difficult'. This paper draws upon interviews with art teachers to explore two narratives that illustrate the potential for students to disrupt traditional notions of sexualities and bodies in the visual arts. Utilising a poststructuralist framework, this paper explores how students, teachers and the general school community negotiate the tension, fear and anxiety that can arise from 'disruptive' art created by students and the difficult classroom discussions and issues that can arise in visual arts education.

Introduction

According to hooks (1995) '[a]rt should be...a place where boundaries can be transgressed, where visionary insights can be revealed within the context of the everyday, the familiar, the mundane' (p, 138). Elsewhere I have explored how visual arts education has the potential to provide a space for students to take up the possibilities that hooks (1995) outlines. I have argued that visual arts education can differ to other discipline area in terms of space, curriculum scope and teacher/students relationships (Elsden-Clifton, 2004). As a result, for some students the art classroom is one of the few schooling spaces that allow them to take up particular lines of flight into 'difficult' territories (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 277). Nevertheless, the art classroom still exists within school settings, which is defined by specific social and cultural structures, and therefore, as this paper illustrates, when students use the visual arts to disrupt, it is often seen as 'dangerous', 'messy' and 'difficult'. Utilising a poststructuralist framework, this paper explores how students, teachers and the general school community negotiate the discomfort, fear and anxiety that can arise from students' art, classroom discussions and issues in visual arts education.

As a poststructuralist researcher and educator, it is important for me to acknowledge that 'difficult' art does arise and that it can be a part of the disruptive process. This paper draws upon interviews with art teachers about students' art to examine the tension around the issues of bodies, sexualities and emotions in the education spaces. To illustrate this process, I focus on two particular narratives related to students disrupting normalised notions of sexualities and bodies, which were signalled by the teachers in my research to be problematic within their schooling context. First, I explore an incident in which a Eloni, a male student was 'othered' as homosexual due to his interest in 'feminine' art forms. Through the teacher's recollection of the incident, I outline how he was othered by his passion for fashion and costumes and placed in oppositions to his brother's 'ideal' or 'normal' model of masculinity and heterosexuality. Secondly, I discuss Francesca's art that explored the flows and intensities of female bodies. However, as I outline, such a public display of excessive female bodies and sexualities caused chaos and controversy within the art classroom; as it blurred the public/private boundary where female bodies are usually positioned and it disrupted the traditional power relations between teachers and students. The

purpose of doing so is twofold, firstly, to highlight the potential of the visual arts as a space within education to disrupt, challenge and seek alternative ways of seeing, but also to acknowledge the difficulty of doing so.

The Disruptive Possibilities of Arts Education

The visual arts... call to our attention the seemingly trivial aspects of our experience, thus enabling us to find new value in them. The artist's eye finds delight and significance in the suggestive subtlety of the reminiscences and places of our existence. The work of art displays these insights, makes them vivid, and reawakens our awareness to what we have learned not to see. Thus, art is the archenemy of the humdrum, the mundane. (Eisner 1972, p. 16)

As noted by Eisner (1972), disruption, in terms of challenging what is known, seeing things in new ways and questioning the mundane is a key characteristic of the arts. Indeed, throughout art history, there are many examples of artists and art movements that have sought to use the visual arts as a means of protest and activism, to question and exploit cultural codes, and to mobilise and promote alternative social practices. For instance, the political artist Alfredo Jaar epitomises this tradition when he states '[s]ometimes art is less a thing to look at than a way to see (Jaar, 2003, n.p.). As he explains:

I think as artists we are privileged, and we should use that privilege. Who out there is asking questions? Who questions the systems of our lives, and how? (Jaar, 1998, cited in Bricker Balken, 1999, p. 39)

These disruptive possibilities also transfer into visual arts education. Using art as a medium for disruption has been brought to the fore by many recent researchers such as Eisner (2001) and Freedman (2003), however, one of the earlier and more notable contributions to this field is John Dewey (1934) in *Art as Experience*. Dewey (1934) believed that art is a form of experience that vivifies life and can contribute to an individual's sense of self and emotional fulfillment. For Dewey (1934), art is intrinsically valuable namely because it is an effective form of communication that 'breaks through the barriers that divide human beings, which are impermeable in ordinary association' (p. 244).

Freedman (2000) extends this view and outlines that 'students make art to express not only things about themselves, but about their surroundings, their social context, the things that act upon them' (p. 323). From this perspective, art can be a disruptive medium within education as it can provide spaces for students to challenge, question and explore their social and cultural worlds. In doing so, students may use imagination and creativity as a means of exploring new possibilities and ways of being. Elsewhere, I have discussed how students have taken up these possibilities in their art to question and exploit cultural codes, challenge traditional or stereotypical assumptions of identity or subjectivity, and promote alternative discourses that work towards the acknowledgement of difference (Elsden-Clifton, 2006). However, in this paper I want to explore the tension around students taking up these disruptive possibilities within schools; a space historically characterised by hierarchic power, surveillance and institutionalised structure.

Foucault's (1977) observations of schools noted that they were constructed by relations of power, control and resistance played out within a hierarchical structure that polices bodies, behaviours and identities. These power struggles/relationships have been constructed through a myriad of binaries that places students as the unruly, negative term in need of control and regulation, and the teacher/system as the position of power. The aim of these disciplinary mechanisms is the attempt to generate 'docile bodies': a notion that Foucault (1977) defines as a body 'that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved' (p. 136). Within schooling contexts, the body is a site of manipulation and control. For instance, this can be seen in the struggle over the body through mechanisms such as uniforms, movement and desk arrangements. However, rather than seeing

the 'disciplined body' as passive, docile or having little agency; Foucault provides a more active view. He believes that bodies have the potential to protest, rebel, critique and take up alternative becoming because of the shifting points resistance.

Nevertheless, resistance and participating in disruptive practices can be difficult and risky (Grosz, 1994). As challenging an established set of values and conventions that have been internalised and institutionalised takes a great deal of support, collaboration and negotiation, and students, teachers and schools all have different investments in maintaining these dominant discourses. Thus, I turn to feminist poststructuralist theory as a means of exploring the tension that is evoked when students resist and disrupt the dominant discourses of bodies and sexualities in schooling spaces.

Poststructuralist Perspectives

In line with the framework's theoretical premise of multiple truths, there is no one 'true' or fixed definition of poststructuralism. In my research, I have used Builema and Smelik's (1993) notion of poststructuralism which 'rejects the structuralist view that unchanging, fundamental and universal structures lie at the basis of the world of phenomena, texts, social systems' and instead 'focuses on problematising structures by studying their discursive construction, their function and their power' (p, 193). In this paper I focus on two key aspects that are taken up in this paper, by specifically looking at how bodies and sexuality are positioned and constructed, and secondly, the potential of Boler's (1999) framework of a *Pedagogy of Discomfort* to acknowledge, and frame, the difficulties around disruption within schooling spaces.

Seeing the body as a text, which emits signs, is a feature of post-structuralism (Grosz, 1994). Indeed, for Foucault, the body was central to the understanding of self, because subjectivities are 'classified in terms of their bodies and their bodily function' (Danaher, Schirato & Webb, 2000, p. 124). This view is also supported by Grosz (1994) who believes that all the effects of subjectivity and all the significant facets and complexities of subjects, can be adequately explained using the subject's body as a framework (Grosz, 1994, p. vii). From this perspective, bodies can be understood as texts involved in power relations that invest them, mark them, train them, torture them, force them to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies and to emit signs (Foucault, 1977). In other words, bodies have been inscribed socially with a language that determines our hierarchal positions, our subjectivities, and lived experiences (Grosz 1994).

In my research, the body of students and teachers in schooling spaces can be seen not as passive but as actively shaped by (as well as shapers of) a system of meaning, signification and representation (Grosz 1994). However, this fluidity of bodies and sexualities can also be problematic for education. Indeed, traditionally bodies, sexualities and education share a volatile, controversial and highly politicised relationship (Epstein & Johnson, 1998). This somewhat limiting relationship is driven by education's need to control, regulate and police sexualities and bodies into appropriate positions or models. To enforce these traditional positions, the education system has developed strategies and mechanisms to discipline bodies and to silence particular forms of sexuality. As such, bodies and sexualities within schools become a site of control, and, therefore, when students disrupt these control mechanisms it has been traditionally fraught with controversy, or met with resounding silences or condemnation (Epstein & Johnson, 1998).

Despite these mechanisms of discipline, sexuality and bodies are able to seep through these domains of control into the conversations, interactions, art classrooms, art pieces, visual diaries and other educational spaces. Sexuality has this ability to do so, as according to Grosz (1994), it is fluid, excessive and uncontrollable and refuses to stay within its predesignated regions (p. viii). In this paper, I explore students' art, conversations and teacher narratives that encounter this 'excessive' notion of sexuality and bodies that seeks out alternative regions and crosses boundaries. However, as I demonstrate, in disrupting these redesigned regions and established

values, it can be a difficult and risky space for teachers and students. It is therefore, productive to frame this discussion through Boler's (1999) *Pedagogy of Discomfort*.

A pedagogy of discomfort suggests educators and students need to engage with the poststructural premise of critical inquiry regarding values and our modes of seeing and thinking, but also calls for action and change. This two pronged approach resonates with a feminist poststructural approach. Within feminist poststructuralism there is a commitment to the dual focus of firstly, the 'serious questioning of patriarchal adherence to the following: universal concepts of truth and methods of verifying truth; objectivity; a disembodied, rational sexually indifferent subject and the explanation of women's specificity in terms that are inherently masculine' (Grosz, 1986, cited in Wearing, 1996, p. 37). Secondly, transforming these sites to assemble and mobilise counterdiscourses that may problematise power, value difference and promote marginalised narratives.

This dual structure is also a feature in Boler's (1999) framework for exploring and transforming the education field which she refers to as a 'pedagogy of discomfort' (p. 175). The first stage of the pedagogy of discomfort involves 'inviting educators and students to engage in critical inquiry regarding values and cherished beliefs and to examine constructed self-images in relation to how one has learned to perceive others' (Boler, 1999, p. 176f.). In other words, a pedagogy of discomfort 'aims to invite students and educators to examine how our modes of seeing have been shaped specifically by the dominant culture of the historical moment' (Boler, 1999, p. 179). As well as questioning the dominant modes of thinking and seeing, a pedagogy of discomfort calls for action and change (Boler, 1999).

In this paper, I have used the terms 'disruption' and 'discomfort' as a way of describing and exploring how students and teachers: move past the dominant discourses circulating in education that attempt to control and discipline subjectivity; consider the social and historical construction of their subjectivities; critically discuss the construction of their subjectivities by power relations; and mobilise spaces for alternative discourses that promote otherwise marginalised narratives in education (Boler, 1999).

Within this framework, however, Boler (1999) acknowledges educators who take up these possibilities as agents of change 'undoubtedly faces the treacherous ghosts of the other's fears and terrors, which in turn evoke one's own demons' (1999). As I will demonstrate in later sections of this paper, sexualities and bodies that disrupted normalised notions in schools often resulted in teachers and students experiencing 'defensive anger, fear of change, and fears of losing our personal and cultural identities' (p. 176). Albers (1999) reinforces this view of discomfort but specifically locates it within visual arts education:

[e]ducators must not ignore the propensity of the visual arts to make visible ideologies that position some groups as more privileged than others. By acknowledging that 'difficult' art-works will arise, we can begin to openly discuss such issues . . . we can forward art as a powerful way to instigate changes in students' beliefs about themselves and others. (p. 11)

Therefore, in my discussion of the two narratives, I have adopted a poststructuralist premise, as it allows my research to explore how students have used bodies and sexualities as a means of disruption. Also through the work of Boler (1999) I am able to examine the tension, ambiguity and discomfort that this creates within a schooling setting.

Research Spaces

This research stems from a larger project which involved collecting and analysing the art and visual journals created by 126 senior art students (year 11 and 12) across three Queensland secondary schools in Australia (Elsden-Clifton, 2004). The three schools were chosen based on representing a variety of locations across the state (rural and metropolitan) and different contexts (state and

religious affiliated schools, large and small schools). I also conducted interviews with the three senior art teachers about their personal philosophies to teaching art education. As a means of providing further context for these texts, I spent one term in the schools undertaking observations of the school and classrooms.

This paper however, focuses on the interviews that I conducted with the three female secondary art teachers, Amy, Beth and Charlotte who were teaching secondary senior art within these schools at the time. Each of these teachers had varying experiences and worked in different contexts. Amy had been teaching for nine years and taught at a state school in the outer suburbs of a large metropolitan city. This school had a large student population of almost 1400, with over 100 teachers. The school is situated on a major train line and many of the students travel to this school from outlying areas or other suburbs. This school predominantly services students from low socio-economic areas. The second teacher I worked with was Beth, who was a relatively new teacher; she had been teaching for two years in a rural Catholic affiliated school that caters for approximately 350 students, who reside in the predominately mining township or surrounding farming areas. The final teacher I worked with was Charlotte, who taught secondary art, in a preschool to year 12 catholic school in a suburb of a major metropolitan city.

The students referred to in this study were in Year 11 and 12 (approximately 16-18 years old). Pseudonyms were used in this paper to protect their identities. In the Queensland school system, students in these year levels are usually sixteen to seventeen years old. The students in the study were working within the board registered Visual Arts Senior Syllabus (board registered art counts towards an Overall Position – a final school exit score – which has more of a theoretical focus than non-board registered art). Elsewhere, I have drawn upon students' art work and visual journals as a way of exploring the possibilities of art education and students' engagement with transformative processes (Elsden-Clifton, 2004) as I find this a productive way of including students' voices and lived experiences into my research. In this paper however, I am only using the teacher interviews as they were recalling narratives relating to former students.

Discourse Analysis

To analyse the teachers' interviews and students' art, I adopted the poststructuralist tool of discourses analysis. Within poststructuralism, the term 'discourse' encapsulates more than just linguistic meaning: it is a social practice through which people are inducted into ways of valuing, stances and points of view which reflect and produce the interests of a group (Morgan, 2002). As such, the value of discourse analysis is that it makes available 'to educators a more fluid and complex understanding of the ways in which students are constructed' (Baxter, 2002, p. 6) in different classroom contexts. From this perspective, in my research the teachers, students and schools were situated within an array of intersections, networks, relations of power and discourses. In undertaking my discourse analysis, I focused on my specific research interests of investigating: how do students use bodies and sexualities as a medium for disruption? What are the possibilities for using disruptive pedagogy to explore multiple discourses of bodies and sexualities? What emotions are evoked around disruption? How do the visual arts provide a space for students to take up difficult lines of flight? How does the schooling community react to students disrupting traditional discourses of schooling?

Volatile Bodies and Sexualities

The teachers in my research worked in utilised the pedagogical tool of disruption in various ways in their classrooms. From my observations of their classes and curriculum documents, the teachers (to different extents and in different contexts) worked to challenge the dominant discourses within art education, fostered difference in the art classroom and encouraged students to explore notions of subjectivity, society and culture. These characteristics emerged in the interviews, for instance, Charlotte noted 'I try to purposely look at artworks that will confront them and provoke comment' (School C) as a way of questioning and challenging students' beliefs and viewpoints.

Disruption was also evident in the curriculum documents that framed the art classroom. The teachers had created learning experiences that specifically encouraged students to question and instigate a search for meaning and understanding about themselves and their subjectivities. For instance in School B, students in Year 12 complete a unit of work titled *Looking Beyond the Self*. In this unit students are 'required to find new sources for inspiration that go beyond their current understandings of the world around them' (School B, 2002, p. 11). Through this unit students are to 'push their notions of artistic practice' and to continue to explore the nature of art as a 'powerful mode of communication' and strategy of transformation (School B, 2002, p. 11).

However, the teachers also acknowledged that by disrupting the visual arts space, it can also evoke uncomfortable emotions and discomfort. As Beth (School B) outlined, 'I think in art you do give the kids opportunities to explore how they are feeling, even if that is depressed and dark and strung out and on the edge kind of thing'. This was reinforced by Amy who noted:

Sometimes people will say that [students' art] is really depressing and that is because the emotions of a teenager are traditionally up and down, all over the place and they get caught up in relationships. Primarily because they are finding their way and so an adult will come along and see all of these doom and gloom pictures and say 'Oh that's really depressing'. Whereas art teachers are used to it so we know, we don't worry about it at all as we know it is kids just expressing their ideas. (Amy, School A)

Although the art teacher felt this was 'kids just expressing their ideas'; this disruption sits within the wider schooling space, and thus, discomfort and controversy can arise. In this section therefore, I explore two narratives related to sexualities and bodies that evoked resistance, fear and anger (Boler, 1999).

Bodies that Challenge

Within the educational context, the mechanisms of discipline, structure and binaristic thought have constructed a centre and a margin, which influence the definitions of normalcy in behaviour, dress, bodies and sexuality. Within this framework, there are defined roles of masculinity that are assigned to male bodies such as conflict, hardness and competition (Denborough, 1996). This model of masculinity also has implications for male sexuality which is constructed as heterosexual, active and a source of power (Denborough, 1996). When male sexed bodies do not meet this definition of masculinity, they are labeled and marginalised — such as the case of Eloni.

When asked about art that has addressed issues such as sexuality, Charlotte recalled Eloni's art, which explored the female form. As she explains:

We had a kid, Eloni, who was an Islander kid. He had an older brother who was a football player. The kids loved [Eloni's brother] . . . and he was a bit of a player, a bit of a ladies' man. And Eloni was just totally different again. People would meet him and say he's definitely homosexual, but he just didn't think about it. . . [h]e created the most beautiful costumes from feathers and beads and traditional Samoan costumes – the boys in the class did not bat an eyelid, that was just Eloni. Whereas other people said 'What's Eloni making that for?' you know 'Eloni's brother was a footy player, what's Eloni making this for?' 'What would Eloni's brother think?' and that came from the male members of staff. Again like mostly the PE [physical education] people that had a lot to do with his brother. His work provoked a lot of comment in terms of that. (Charlotte, School C)

In Charlotte's recollection, she explains how, although Eloni does not identify himself as homosexual, he is positioned this way as he does not meet the dominant reading of masculinity. As such, his non-macho behaviour is seen as a 'weakness, softness and inferiority' and used it as

evidence of Eloni's homosexuality (Lees, 1987, cited in Epstein & Johnson, 1998, p. 168). As such, these judgemental comments about Eloni's non-masculine behaviour were a way of controlling and policing his sexuality and the models of masculinity he was likely to adopt.

The process of marginalising the bodies and sexualities that do not fit the dominant model is also influenced by the binary of sameness/difference, and generated related categories of difference and otherness. In this example, Eloni's difference and positioning as Other are reinforced by the comparison between him and his brother. In other words, Eloni becomes the Other against which the 'normal' is defined. In this case the 'normal' sexual and gender roles for males are defined and demonstrated by his brother who was a 'football player', popular and a 'bit of a ladies' man'. These were used to illustrate how 'abnormal' Eloni was through his interest in 'beautiful costumes' made from 'feathers and beads' and his interest in fashion (Charlotte, School C). As such, Eloni's performance of masculinity falls outside the 'charmed circle' which his brother represents (Epstein & Johnson, 1998, p. 36). Instead, Eloni's sexuality and sexed body are unrecognised or misrecognised as homosexual and othered. Indeed, Eloni's divergence from these traditional gender and sexual norms has been treated negatively and divisively by the teaching staff — in this case male physical education teachers.

Through his art, Eloni challenged some of the cherished assumptions held by these teachers. In doing so, these teachers may have felt a threat to their own sexual identity, or a need to defend their investments in the values of the dominant masculine and active culture, evoking resistance, fear and anger. Thus, in a need to control or rein in the excessive and to reinforce the dominant, the teachers judged, policed and critiqued Eloni's alternative version of masculinity as a way of addressing their discomfort and confusion caused by the Other in the classroom. However, it is not only the male body that can cause discomfort in the classroom — female bodies can also create controversy and argument.

The Flows and Intensities of Female Bodies

In Eloni's example, the blurring of binaries such as masculine/feminine, active/passive and heterosexual/homosexual led to the othering and marginalisation of the multiplicities of his subjectivities. In a similar instance, Francesca's art blurred the binaries that attempt to contain and control female bodies (public/private, active/passive) and, in doing so, also created controversy and comment by students and other teachers.

Francesca's art is interesting in light of Grosz's (1994) theory, which she outlined in *Volatile Bodies*. The premise of this theory was to outline the ways that female bodies are positioned into limiting and marginalised spaces, as they are seen as: fluid and excessive; made up of intensities and flows; out of control; constructed by matter, substances and inscriptions; and plagued by leakages, weaknesses and changes (p. 203). From this perspective, female bodies are in opposition to the clean and proper body: the obedient, law abiding, social body (Grosz, 1994). However, in Grosz's theory, she sets out to explore how these traditionally limiting notions can be reconceptualised to transform the construction of female bodies and subjectivities.

This is a similar premise adopted by Francesca's art that explored the specificities of the female body. In this art piece, Francesca explores many of the traditionally negative aspects assigned to the female body including blood, hair, breasts, a connection to earth and dirt, changes and fluidity (Grosz, 1994). This was seen in Amy's explanation of the painting:

Well, it's massive and it's blue, it has mountains and in between the mountains there are three torn away images of her torso – her neck to her stomach. With her hands in two covering her breasts and the other one I think is just covering her stomach. And then there's a figure down at the bottom that's lying down under the mountain — it's almost integrated into the mountains; you have to look really, really hard to see it. (Amy, School A)

In Francesca's art she explored the various cycles of bodily flow and in doing so illustrated the uncontrollable and fluid nature of the female body. From this perspective, the female body is able to flow with and in the breeze and seep beyond the outside of the body and integrate with the mountains. As such, it represents a body 'outside' its designated areas. This art piece also displays the specificities of female bodies such as blood, breasts and bodies in a classroom space (a space which seeks to edit out and control these characteristics). Indeed, this public display of these normally silenced issues caused discomfort and controversy, as seen in Amy's comments about other students' reactions to this painting:

Francesca's painting had three photos of her breasts on it, which the kids, the Year 9 boys in particular, couldn't cope with, and in the end we had to turn the painting around they were making that much — you know, stress about it. And it wasn't even a sexual painting, it was basically a self-portrait really. (Amy, School A)

Further Amy outlined that Francesca's art piece:

. . . definitely sparked some comment from other kids and teachers. Negative in terms of 'What the hell is she trying to say?' and you just say, 'Well look at the painting for more than two seconds before you say that, like really look at it' and it's massive and it does take a while to get around the whole thing. But positive in terms of 'Wow, she must feel very comfortable with herself to do that, to put herself out there, to express herself in this way'. (Amy, School A)

This painting highlights many of the concerns or discomforts surrounding female bodies. For instance, it explores the disgust of the unknown female body: 'What the hell is she trying to say?' (Amy, School A). It also seeks to represent what Grosz (1994) refers to as the 'unspecifiable that permeates, lurks, lingers, and at times leaks out of the body' (p. 194) through the display of a student's unshaved (and, therefore, unclean) body. Further, the female breast is also controversial; Grosz (1994) believes that this is because the breast represents the fluidity and indeterminacy of the female body, which needs to be confined, constrained and solidified. As noted by the teacher, when the female body seeps through the domains of control it can cause concern, conflict and controversy in the classroom. In this example, the female body on display was so confronting and difficult in a schooling space that 'in the end [the teacher] had to turn the painting around' (Amy, School A).

There are a number of other issues about female bodies that are emphasised in this art piece that students, teachers and other viewers could find difficult — in particular, the connection between female bodies and body fluid such as blood. This was highlighted in Amy's explanation of the painting:

[T]here's a big red window frame with big black night sky out with a red, very textured, very thickly textured red curtain coming in, blowing in the breeze. And that to me just represents blood for some reason, obviously, because it's red probably. (Amy, School A)

For the teacher, the flow of the red rich curtains represented the flow of blood from the female body. However, the association with blood is not traditionally seen as positive. As Grosz (1994) argues, menstruation is associated with blood, an injury or wound, and a mess that does not dry invisibly, but leaks and is uncontrollable. Indeed, the 'idea of soiling oneself, of dirt, of the very dirt produced by the body itself, staining the subject' (Grosz, 1994, p. 205) is an uncomfortable and negative notion towards female bodies.

However, in this painting, Francesca publicly acknowledged the flows and specificities of the body. In doing so, she brought into visibility the flesh and blood of the body and emphasised its materiality. Despite the transformative potential of doing so, it is a very difficult issue for others to

understand or revel within. This was seen in the following comments about other teachers' responses to the painting:

And it's quite funny, because some of the male teachers that come in were very confronted by it, you know, even the other art teacher. She asked her to take photos of her and she refused, she got another kid to take the photos of her. Which in this day and age, you never know, that could have issues or repercussions later on down the track. But I just think that's a bit, I don't know I've never been in that situation. (Charlotte, School C)

As seen in the comments made by Charlotte, viewing 'difficult' art can be an issue. However, in this instance, the viewing of this art piece is complicated by the power relationships which structure the 'gaze'; it raises questions of who is watching and who is being watched and broaches the issue of the power relationship between the observer and the observed. In this case, the gaze is framed by a tension between institutional standards which determines what is appropriate in terms of teachers viewing students' bodies. For teachers — who are bound by professional standards and regulated by a hierarchy of power — the gaze of a student's partly naked public body can be particularly uncomfortable. Interwoven with this complexity, there is also a tension between an educational focus on encouraging students' self-expression and the institutional imperatives in relation to bodies.

Francesca's art piece explores the body's complexity as a leaking, uncontrollable and seeping assemblage. It does so by highlighting the fluidity and indeterminacy of female body parts, such as breasts, and through its blood symbolism. Nevertheless, the fluidity of the body in this image disrupts some viewers as it 'attests to the permeability of the body, its necessary dependence on an outside, its liability to collapse into this outside. . . to the perilous divisions between the body's inside and its outside' (Grosz, 1994, p. 193). For Francesca and Eloni, the visual arts provided a space for them to question, explore and disrupt the dominant specificities of bodies and sexualities. However, in doing so they evoked a mired of discomfort and controversy, as this disruption was situated within a schooling context.

Art as a Disruptive Process

In this paper, I have used teachers' narratives to focus on how students have used bodies and sexualities as a means of disruption, but also through the work of Boler (1999) I am able to examine the tension, ambiguity and discomfort that this creates within a schooling setting. As seen in the overview of the literature, schools can be a limiting space to take up alternative discourses of sexualities of bodies. This is because schools have traditionally operated within a hierarchal structure that seeks to control bodies and sexualities into normalised ideals. As seen through the examples of Francesca and Eloni, when students disrupt these normalised notions it is met with fear, controversy and discomfort. Nevertheless, I agree with Boler (1999, p. 198) that learning to live 'with ambiguity, discomfort, and uncertainty' in our classrooms is a worthy educational ideal. Therefore, this paper drew upon feminist poststructuralist theory as a means of exploring the tension that is evoked when students resist and disrupt the dominant discourses of bodies and sexualities in schooling spaces. Therefore, this paper has explored the potential of the visual arts as a space within education to disrupt, challenge and seek alternative ways of seeing and has set out to acknowledge the difficulty surrounding disruption in a schooling context.

Through this process, my research aims to advocate for arts importance in schools and contribute to the literature that seeks to assist teachers and schools to recognise the impact and role art education has on the ongoing creation and negotiation of identity and subjectivity. It also sets out to acknowledge the difficult work that teachers carry out to encourage students to challenge our values and modes of seeing and thinking, while supporting students in this process. This research also highlights how teachers who take up the difficult task of becoming agents of change, can face

fears, controversy and discomfort. However, as seen through this paper, it is through the actions and support of these teachers, that students were similarly able to disrupt normalised notions of sexualities of bodies in school and more widely society. Therefore, this paper contributes to a continuing dialogue around the disruptive possibilities of education to provide spaces for students and teachers to challenge marginalisation and contest traditional notions of bodies and sexualities, which despite the discomfort and difficulties, I believe are worthy educational goals.

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