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'Getting the seat of your pants dirty': space and place in ethnographic educational research

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Abstract

In this paper I consider the importance of space and place in ethnographic educational research. The paper draws on research that took place at Educational Video Center (EVC), a non-profit media education centre in New York City (NYC). In this paper I articulate EVC as a place imbued with meaning from the pedagogical practices that take place within and regarding it and argue for a consideration of spatiality in ethnographic educational research. I consider the role of the city landscape in order to identify how knowledge is emplaced and represented through digital, visual technology and conclude by outlining the criticality of spatialising our ethnographic practices.

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Introduction

In this paper I consider the importance of space and place in ethnographic educational research. The paper is informed by ethnographic research at Educational Video Center (EVC), a non-profit media education centre in New York City (NYC). Here the research focussed on how young people engaged with digital technology (the creative and educational potential of these tools, and how technology was adopted to frame a narrative of transformation) and the use of digital technology in ethnography, a practice I defined as ethnography 2.0 (XXXX, XXX). In this research I utilised a range of research processes in order to learn more about EVC and those who attended their programmes and to investigate how digital technology might be used in ethnographic educational research. The research was longitudinal and the material of the research: still images, digital video and quotations, correspondence and other written and digital texts are drawn from periods of 'proper ethnography … done by living with the people being studied, watching them work and play, thinking carefully about what is seen, interpreting it and talking to the actors to check emerging interpretations' (Delamont, 2004, 206).

At the start of the research process I travelled to NYC to investigate the 'social world' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983, 16) of EVC spending one academic semester at EVC and returning for five subsequent visits (each lasting between three and eight weeks) over the course of following three years. As a participant observer my aim was to understand the everyday experience of participants 'spending long periods watching people, coupled with talking to them about what they [were] doing thinking and saying, designed to see how they understand the world' (Delamont, 2004, p.218). In my analysis I came to recognise the importance of the urban context, its economies, diversity of cultures and traditions and how the allocation of resources led to inequalities. In this research the city context plays a key role in shaping how participants view themselves, their experiences and their lives. And of course, the same is also true for the ethnographer who is geographically located in their practice and in research that is bound by time and space. In this research, my methodological claim is that to understand and engage with a groups pedagogical and production practices, to understand what is happening and its significance in time and space and over multiple sites we must fully participate in the activities of the group and *be in place.* To get to know a city and to engage with the experience of research Professor

Robert Park, a co-leader of the Chicago School, directed his students to immerse themselves in urban contexts; both the familiar and unknown and to 'go get the seats of your pants dirty in real research' (McKinney, 1966, 21). In this research through my participation in an EVC credit bearing programme targeting high school students and the relationships I developed, like Whyte (1955) 'I learned answers to questions that I would not even have the sense to ask' (303).

In this paper I return to NYC in order to articulate EVC as a place imbued with meaning from the pedagogical practices that take place within and regarding it and argue for 'a focus on social and political processes of place making' as 'embodie[d] practices that shape identities and enable resistances' (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997, 6). I engage with the concepts of space, place and place-making to theoretically position the research and explore a practice of ethnography concerned with understanding the theoretical and methodological possibilities of visual knowledge production and the experience and representation of ethnographic educational research with young people.

In popular discourse the terms space and place are often used interchangeably and sometimes metaphorically to define physical locations and social relations, structured by and structuring social practice (Giddens, 1984; Lefebvre, 1991; Meyrowitz, 1985; Massey, 2005). As Tuan (1979) notes both terms 'are familiar words denoting common experiences' yet when we seek to understand how these terms are used in research 'they may assume unexpected meanings and raise questions we had not thought to ask' (1979, 3). In the social sciences both terms are used as organizing concepts (Valentine, 2001) and are often defined by discipline and theoretical perspective (Agnew, 2011).   While there are many texts devoted to defining both terms (cf. Cresswell 2015; Hubbard and Kitchin, 2011), here, as in much educational research, space is never simply a metaphor 'rather it is a conceptualisation of the co-construction of the social-cultural and the material in everyday life' (Thomson et al. 2010). In considering the spatial, temporal, material and social practices of EVC and of ethnographic practice I draw on the spatial theories of Lefebvre (1974, 1991) and Soja (1989, 2010) and of social geographers writing about space and place from sometimes contradictory and often intersecting positions. In this research space is socially constructed as well as material (metaphoric and discursive) and embodied and thinking spatiality is a way to understand and experience EVC; of being, researching, writing and retelling knowledge production.

For many ethnographers an understanding of and an engagement with the location of study is used to establish the authenticity of the project and the authority of the researcher (Coleman and Collins, 2006). Like Pink (2009) who draws on the work of Massey (2005) and Ingold (2008), I am using spatiality as a framework for thinking about the ethnographic research process and 'the situatedness of the ethnographer, as a multi sensory concern.' (Pink, 2009, 29). I hope that by the end of this paper it will be clear why space and place matter in ethnographic educational research - at EVC a space where place and place-making contributes to a unique pedagogical practice that celebrates a transformational educational experience and for the ethnographer working to understand others and reflexively seeking to understand her own emplacement (Pink, 2008).

Like Weis and Fine (2000), I recognise that 'learning takes place in varying spaces' (xi) and in this research challenge the counter position of formal and informal education, complex organisational categories that are used to describe a variety of educational spaces, places and practices. Language dualisms such as these falsely represent the

Cartesian separation between mind and body and construct binary oppositions with 'an obsessive fatal attraction' (Giroux, 2005, 15). While the research discussed here is concerned with and located within an education framework, it is informed by multiple theoretical approaches including anthropology, cultural studies and media studies, which as key disciplines establish the conceptual frame for the project, providing a theoretical core and guiding the experience of the research. Each of these disciplines share an interest in issues of representation, interpretation and reflexivity and although driven by their own epistemological and empirical agendas (all highly contested areas), are central this research.

I begin this paper by locating the research, mapping both the theoretical and physical locations of the work before going on to analyse how meaning is made through a complex series of pedagogical processes in order to argue for the importance of space, place and place-making in educational ethnographic research. I go on to consider the role of the city landscape in order to identify how knowledge is emplaced and represented through digital, visual technology and conclude by outlining the criticality of spatialising our ethnographic practices.

Mapping the field, describing EVC

This section starts with a description of EVC; its location, the theoretical and physical or geographical space it occupies and other important contextual information. First impressions of a research site are particularly valuable in identifying insights and new questions (Collier and Collier 1986), and I include detail from my initial field-notes and extracts from my research journal as well as drafted considerations of EVC. Those initial field-notes provide surface details that are often the framework for ascertaining deeper levels of significance and meaning, and prompting new questions. Looking around an unfamiliar location as I did on my first day I made notes about the groupings of objects and the use of physical space considering that it might reflect the values and beliefs of the organisation and that any later changes might reflect changed priorities. I observed the layout of the office; where staff worked and the material artefacts on display[1]; a graffiti logo produced by an alumnus of EVC emphasising the city location, and the certificates and awards that hung in frames on the wall. Positioned at the entrance to the office, the graffiti references both the city location and youth interaction and the claiming or 'tagging' of space. Historically regarded as a spatially disruptive practice (Lachlan, 1988), here the material environment is a discursive practice and is read as a visual text reclaiming or perhaps re-presenting the city as a social learning space. Graffiti, as Lachlan asserts 'can challenge hegemony by drawing on particular experiences and customs of ... communities, ethnic groups and age cohorts, thereby demonstrating that social life can be constructed in ways different from the dominant conceptions of reality' (ibid., 231-32).

Located in midtown Manhattan in a building used by one of the city's alternative[2] high schools, EVC, is a non-profit educational media centre with a mission 'dedicated to the

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[1] The wall display shows a sign created by an alumnus and certificates awarded in recognition of film festival success. The awards are a visual and physical reminder of the real audiences who view youth produced documentaries and of student achievement.

[2] While the philosophical origins of *alternative* education can be traced back to Dewey (1916), and Steiner (1907), the term itself refers to that which is not traditional or conformist. The development of alternative schools in NYC began in the 1970s as a response to changing educational need and today describes 'any junior high school, high school, or secondary school having a special curriculum offering a more flexible program of study than a traditional school' (Weinstein, 1986). Unlike a *magnet* school

creative and community-based use of video and multi-media as tools for social change' (EVC mission). Founded in 1984, EVC has grown from a single video class into an educational centre with an international reputation which offers young people, who travel from public schools[3] located throughout the five boroughs which make up New York City, the opportunity to critically reflect on the world around them through the lens of a digital video camera and to meet and work with young people from other schools and neighbourhoods in the city. In the internship programme EVC employs professional media artists and certified NYC high school teachers[4] to work with students 'who may not have previously experienced academic success' (EVC staff member) and 'produce documentaries that explore a social or cultural issue of direct relevance to them' (Goodman, 2003, 19).

Many of us have been introduced to NYC; we might recognise the location as one of the most familiar cities in the world, indeed we may even know much of the landscape through popular culture and if we have visited we are likely to have a memory or an attachment from our experience. This familiarity covers the three aspects outlined by Agnew (1987) when defining place as a meaningful location - the location, the locale or material setting for social relations and the attachments we have, what Agnew call *a sense of place*. While all three aspects, found across the different disciplines and theoretical positions, are helpful in defining place and go some way to explaining why place matters, in this paper my aim is to articulate the three approaches to place suggested by Cresswell (2015, 56): a descriptive approach which narrates the characteristics and uniqueness of a location; a social constructionist approach explaining the uniqueness through a consideration of structural conditions and a phenomenological approach which 'seeks to define the essence of human existence as one that is necessarily and importantly "in-place" ' (ibid.). Like Cresswell and Hoskins' (2008) I consider that social constructionist and phenomenological approaches include elements of materiality, in that a place exists in a tangible form manifested by topography and the built environment and a more philosophical meaning, related to what people do, say and feel about a specific location and an experience.

Crossing borders, defining boundaries

> *Walking to the reception I spoke with a school police officer who asked for photographic identification and telephoned EVC before directing me into the building (later Ivana would introduce us and when I became a familiar face we would chat about the weather or our weekend plans). On that first day I entered the lift ('that's cute it's the elevator') and was confused to discover that there was not a button for the seventh floor where I had been told to go and where the EVC offices were located. On the sixth floor classrooms and the noise of a school surrounded me and I wandered through the corridors*

(set up to *attract* students from outside the immediate area and reduce racial segregation) where there is a distinctive curriculum or pedagogical approach, an alternative school delivers the traditional curriculum (as set by the state board) but employs non-traditional (alternative) means of meeting those curriculum aims. While many students choose an alternative school rather than attend a large over subscribed city high school, others are sent to one as a 'second' or 'last chance' (Lange, 1998).

[3] In the USA public schools are those owned and managed by the State.

[4] At the time of this research, Documentary Workshop was part funded by the Department of Education in New York City. It was a condition of this funding that NYC certified teachers deliver the programme.

4

concerned that I was missing an obvious sign before finding stairs
that would lead me to EVC.

While Atkinson (1996), would describe this as the arrival story (and it does describe
the moment I first entered the physical space of EVC), the spatial confusion I felt
represented an insecurity about my research role and might be more accurately be
described as part of my search for a border crossing (Giroux, 2005), and an eventual
awareness and acceptance of multiple identities: student, researcher, teacher and
participant (Foucault, 1997). While Giroux (2005), uses the concept of a border
crossing 'as a resource for theoretical competency and critical understanding' (6),
borders and boundaries (Wenger, McDermott and Snyder, 2002), involve going into
unfamiliar places and are often points of difficulty and a time to reassess identity. My
search for a border crossing was a search for a place where borders of space,
disciplines (and their associated theories), and identities could coexist. The location of
EVC, an office at the top of a building accessed only by stairs at the rear of the
building and borrowed use of classrooms might be considered to reflect the marginal
status of media education and of critical pedagogical practice. While the school (and
EVC) are geographically located in the centre of Manhattan and easily accessible by
public transport many of the young people who attend the programmes travel from
spaces of exclusion – schools for new immigrants, second (and final) chance schools
and schools, often within specialized spaces where an 'alternative' curriculum is
employed to support educational success. In a British study, Reay (2007) argues that
schools in many urban, working class areas are pathologised spaces and while I am
mindful of the need to avoid homogenizing the participants in this study, their social
class, economic status or other defining characteristics, the programmes offered by
EVC target 'urban, low income, minority students' (Goodman, 2003). While the
participants constitute a diverse group defined by their differences and multiple
experiences many did describe negative spatial experiences, fear of crime and issues of
poverty in relation to where they live.

It is hard to recall now how I felt standing in the office for the first time. In my field-
notes I wrote about the layout of the space and the details of what I saw and heard,
restricting myself to the level of description (Spradley, 1980; LeCompte and Preissle,
1993), and to lists of plans for the future, questions to ask and things to find out about.
I *took pictures* as I planned to engage with images and video for documentation,
representation, collaboration and reflection. While it is not unusual for ethnographers
to use photography and other visual media in representing their practice in this
research I purposefully sought out multiple modes and multiple media in recognition
of the pedagogical practice of EVC and to develop a participatory visual and digital
method. In this research the invisible research narrative is made visible in part
through technology and the use of visual and digital methods, but also due to the
research ethics which are informed and inform theory - the emic perspective which
researches *with*, the collaborative nature of the representational texts and my reflexive
stance (XXXX, XXX).

While much of what is written about the process of *traditional* ethnographic fieldwork
refers to foreign countries and unknown cultures (cf. Freilich, 1970; Glazer, 1972 and
Spindler, 1970), this was not true in this research. The location for this research is
important in that the main fieldwork was carried out in New York City, a city one
might consider as *foreign* as I live in London, but not exotic or unknown as has been
the case historically with much ethnographic research. Like many ethnographers I
gained access and later trust and cooperation through developing personal
relationships with gatekeepers (Burgess, 1991; Fieldman, Bell & Berger, 2003). I made

contact with EVC after meeting the founder and executive director at a research conference and reading his book.

In *Teaching Youth Media: A critical guide to literacy, video production and social change* (Goodman, 2003), I read about (and later participated in) the pedagogical processes of Documentary Workshop and with young people who were encouraged to use their own lived experiences as a starting point for learning and reflection. Drawing on the philosophies of Dewey (1949), Freire (1970), Giroux, (1988), and Fine (1991), Goodman (2003), describes young people who learn *with* rather than *from* teachers and a pedagogy that acknowledge the relationship between youth, media and identity and the possibility of education beyond the dichotomy of formal and informal.   Like the experience of ethnographic research *Teaching Youth Media: A critical guide to literacy, video production and social change* (Goodman, 2003), asks questions about pedagogy and identity and considers that the *translation* (Heath, 1983), from student to teacher, familiar to unfamiliar, and community to school is complex, multidirectional and sometimes contradictory. While Goodman (2003), focuses on young people developing media literacy and critical literacy through documentary production processes, throughout the fieldwork I understood young people to engage knowledge as border crossers; moving between what is said and what is written, home and school, community and self and identified a pedagogy that conceptualised youth voice as 'not merely an opportunity to speak, but to engage critically with ideology and substance of speech, writing, and other forms of cultural production' (Giroux, 2005, 109).

In the United States students graduate from high school and are awarded a high school diploma once they have achieved the required number of course credits. The promotional materials distributed by EVC to schools emphasise earning high school credit and learning the skills of documentary production ('Get internship credit and learn how to make a documentary!'). This focus on high school credit, like the certificates hung on the office wall, gives the programme educational value[5] and status (Moss, 2001), and the description of production skills 'that will let you do well in almost any other media field (including music production, television broadcasting, newspaper and magazine journalism, photography …)' (Promotional flyer produced for high school display, EVC), attract young people who are interested in a career in film and apply to EVC because 'I've really had this hunger to learn about film…' (Danielle) and 'because I was always interested in filmmaking and I thought that this could help me a little bit about what I was interested in and it would help me know if I really like it or not' (Chelsea). Commenting on the educational value of EVC a teacher from Brooklyn International High School[6] said '… kids love coming to EVC but without credit bearing we just wouldn't be able to offer the *placement* (my emphasis)… our kids need high school credit to graduate and for some internships are important just for that…'.

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[5] See Sefton-Green (2013), for a discussion of the value of out of school education.

[6] Brooklyn International High School (BIHS), a member of the International Schools Partnership and Center for Collaborative Education, is a small school for recently arrived immigrants. Classes are in English (with many teachers trained in English as a foreign language), although students are encouraged to use their native language to support their learning of English. The curriculum is based on written projects and oral reports called 'portfolios' although students must sit Regents exams to graduate.

6

As one would expect there was not one single reason for young people to attend EVC[7]. EVC staff members consider that young people attended Documentary Workshop[8] for a number of possible reasons: that 'kids are interested in technology ... and the idea of a camera is interesting to a kid'; that 'they come to get credit'; and that 'their advisors influence them to attend'. While many young people attend because of the 'draw of video', throughout the research it was also asserted that 'being *out of school* is always a draw' (original emphasis). Emily, who attended a City-As-School where students learn through internships and experiential learning, considered EVC to be 'just like school' and in discussion shared her surprise at 'actually' that is physically, being in a high school and in 'classrooms ... that I want to escape'. At the start of the programme she outlined the differences she saw between the advanced and beginners groups and articulated an aspiration to get a 'place with YO-TV' (a year-long paid internship) and 'away from these kids'.

Emily, who had chosen and travelled from another alternative high school where the curriculum engages with 'New York City's businesses and resources' was a spatially mobile student whose experience of learning was not bounded or contained by a single location. When asserting her adult status (when she talks about viewing adult films and the 'kids' that she had been placed with) Emily is rejecting the *young person* identity assigned by EVC and in my writing of this ethnographic account. Entrikin (1991,13) suggests that '[P]lace serves as an important component of our sense of identity' and for Emily the physical location of EVC (in a school building) and Ivana's pedagogical place-making (described below) affirm her belief that 'school is restricting [and I] can't wait to go to college and do something' (Emily).

While discussions about the physical and ideological location of EVC reveal the speakers' view of education and point to the value they assign to it they also remind us of the spatial metaphors used to talk about and describe education and the spatial temporal processes.

> One reason [for an internship] is for English practice and interactions
> with native speakers and of course it's a motivating factor. Our
> school pushes students to go *beyond* school, having a learning
> experience *out of the classroom* (my emphasis*)*. Internships are
> popular – kids love it ... they do better than *in* (original emphasis)
> school.
> (Extract from interview with BIHS teacher).

This view of EVC as offering 'a learning experience out of the classroom' (ibid.), is articulated by EVC staff members who assert that '[the experience of EVC] isn't anything like what happens in schools', and by young people who describe EVC as 'very different from school, like I thought it would be kind-of similar but it's not like in school...' (James). The spatial and temporal positioning of EVC identifies the challenge of defining where the experience fits in an educational framework:

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[7] Youth responses to 'why did you apply to attend EVC?' can be grouped into three categories: to gain high school credit, to learn about video editing or an interest in film, and to learn outside of school.

[8] Documentary Workshop is divided into a 'beginners' and an 'advanced' group. Young people in the advanced group are likely to have completed 'beginners doc' as it is known and/or are seniors in high school.

7

> We're not quite an afterschool program because kids are served
> during the school day and they get school credit for their work. Are
> we a technical program, a jobs program, an arts program, a literacy
> program, a social change program? Should we become a school
> ourselves?

While Heath and McLaughlin (1993), suggest that effective youth organisations do not define themselves in relation to school, the dialogue around the naming and defining of what happens at EVC is important because naming is one of the ways a place is given meaning. The dialogue of definition facilitates reflection, embraces change and goes to the heart of the EVC mission. Freire (1970) believed that 'education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers *and* students' (53, original emphasis). At EVC freedom from a formal *imposed* curriculum and Freire's concept of dialogue provides the foundation for a re-imagining of the teacher-student relationship in a new, liminal or *third* space.

Conceptualising EVC as a third space

Third space theory (sometimes referred to as hybrid theory) has been used in a variety of different disciplines to explore the space 'in-between' (Bhabha, 1994, 1), two or more discourses and a move beyond the binary categories of first and second spaces and literacies (Soja, 1996). Moje et al. (2004, 43-45), offer three views of third space, firstly as a way to build bridges from knowledges and Discourses[9] 'often marginalised in schools settings', secondly as a navigational space where students can cross into different discourse communities in order to succeed and finally as a space of 'cultural, social and epistemological change in which the competing knowledges and Discourses of different spaces are brought into "conversation" to challenge and reshape both academic content literacy practices and the knowledges and discourse of youths' everyday lives' (ibid. 43-44).

In this research the third space is conceptualised as an epistemological position between the binaries of formal and informal education, self and other, teacher and student, and as a geographical metaphor; a site of praxis where theory and practice meet. The third space is used literally to describe a place that is not a site of formal (school), or informal (not school), education and a site of:

> ... invention and transformational encounters, a dynamic in-
> between space that is imbued with the traces, relays, ambivalence,
> ambiguities and contradictions, with the feelings and practices of
> both sites, to fashion something different, unexpected.
> (Bhabha, 1994, 1).

EVC's methodology of media education unites a student centred approach to learning with community social action. Working on documentaries young people are supported to 'find their own voice' (EVC staff member), learning to understand and challenge mainstream media representations of youth through collaborative production and to 'express themselves and explore issues that are deeply relevant to their lives' (EVC Curriculum Guide, 2005, Introduction). Young people who take part

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[9] Gee (1999), distinguishes between 'Big D' and 'little d' using Discourses as 'language *plus* 'other stuff'' (p.17).

in a Documentary Workshop internship choose and make decisions about their documentary topic as part of a process of critical thinking (Goodman, 2003), and in recognition of an anthropological notion of culture (Freire, 1973); that what young people bring, their knowledge and culture is of great value in the learning process:

> Creative practices place youth in conversation with others and thus offer opportunities for young people to address the sedimented social discourses and cultural practices that shape their experiences (Poyntz and Hoechsmann, 2011, 307).

This research acknowledges that young people engage with different Discourses in different contexts (Gee, 2000; Moje et al., 2004). EVC is considered a 'transformative space' (Gutierrez, 2008, p. 152), 'discursive space' (Gutierrez and Stone, 2000, 157) where young people make sense of their emplacement in the world through the acknowledgment and collaboration of multiple funds of knowledge (Moll, Veléz-Ibañéz and Greenberg, 1989; Moll, Amanti, Neff and Gonzalez, 1992), Discourses (Gee, 1996, 1999), and through the production of digital video texts, a process of visual knowledge production.

The critical pedagogical approaches and the positioning of EVC as different to school (McLaren, 1995; Giroux, 1988), is made explicit by Ivana, the Documentary Workshop co-director, in the first session:

> ... we expect you to be professional, to be on time and let us know if something comes up and you'll be late. This *isn't* like school where someone else can give you notes *you* need to be here and take part. (original emphasis)

While it would not be appropriate to detail all of the fieldwork experience I will now focus on selected pedagogical practices of Documentary Workshop as examples of a critical pedagogy of place before going on to explore how EVC is constituted by its emplacement in the city. The first session begins with a welcome from Ivana who positions herself at the front of the room. There is silence as she talks, and her physical position in the room and her reference to the 'advanced class' might suggest that this will be an experience very much like school:

> I'm so happy to see you... I've invited the advanced class to join us so we can talk more about what it is we do at EVC and the work you will be involved in.

Miriam, the other co-director, leads the advanced group into the room and Ivana asks for someone to explain what EVC is. The questions 'what do you learn?' and 'how do you learn?' are also asked and young people from the advanced group, most of whom completed the beginners programme the previous semester provide detailed answers describing visual practices and 'forms of experimentation and social exploration that are generally not characteristic of educational institutions' (Ito et al., 2008, 2).

After sharing their experiences for twenty minutes the advanced group leave and Ivana returns to the front of the room beside the television and in front of the whiteboard. To further describe the work that young people do at EVC Ivana shows extracts from three EVC documentaries. She asks the group to think about the topic ('what is the documentary about?') and why the producers choose this particular topic ('why have young people chosen to make this documentary?'). Watching Ivana move

and return *into place* at the front of the classroom, I see how 'relations of power and discipline are inscribed into the apparent innocent spatiality of social life' (Soja, 1989, 6). In this and subsequent documentary viewing sessions Ivana positions herself in the powerful *action zone* (Cruickshank, et al. 2009) where she has access to the technology and the ability to see and be seen by young people. Even when others present their work and young people manage their own feedback sessions Ivana can be seen 'in-place' (Cresswell, 1996). Her pedagogical emplacement provides a bridge between the spaces of formal and informal education, school and not-school and her practice supports young people to understand digital video texts 'as moments in a process of meaning production' (Goldfarb, 2002, 75).

The extracts are from *Tough on Crime, Tough on Our Kind* (2001), *Through the Eyes of Immigrants* (2004), and *Home Sweet Gone* (1993); documentaries that focus on inequalities in the criminal justice system, the experience of undocumented youth and housing conditions for poor communities in NYC. When you watch an EVC documentary it only takes a few minutes to make sense of the message being communicated by the youth producers but understanding the process of production is much more complex because it 'is not simply a matter of spontaneous 'self-expression' but something that occurs within – and indeed depends on – particular social contexts and cultural conventions' (Buckingham, 2009, 235).

After viewing all three extracts Ivana re-asks the questions and as is familiar to any school teacher a few hands are raised to offer answers. Emily notes that 'they [the documentaries] are addressing immediate issues' and there is a short discussion about what the social issues are, how they are communicated to the audience and how each project was 'relevant to the group [that made them] and presents a youth voice' (Ivana). Mario asks 'where will we [go to] film?' and Chelsea suggests Brooklyn explaining that 'poor people have to live in the *bad* neighbourhoods' (original emphasis) and offers to find people to interview. Ivana thanking Chelsea for her suggestion, restates that the documentary topic will be chosen by the group and that they can film anywhere in the city.

Space, place and the city

'What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value ...' (Tuan, 1977,6).

At break a number of young people stay in the classroom and I overhear a discussion about the location of their schools, the places and the subway lines, they have travelled from. Here young people are engaged in identity work, sharing 'my neighbourhood, that's who I am' (Max), and identifying common experiences. The study of neighborhoods and city life is a familiar ethnographic practice. From a street corner in Boston (Whyte, 1955), to a London suburb (Wallman, 1982) and a Chicago housing project (Venkatesh, 2008) ethnographers have long focused on life in the city and the diversity of cultures, inequalities and economic challenges that are produced and located – physically, metaphorically, historically and discursively - in order to explore how the built environment and our interaction and construction of it informs social relations, and ultimately understand how people live. As Morris (2008, 225) notes '[p]lace contextualizes us - it provides a grounding for where we come from, where we have had profound experiences, and what communities we identify ourselves to be from.' The conversations about school also indicate the need for young people to define EVC. Having spent such a short period of time with Ivana and with each other it is not yet clear how EVC might be positioned and when I carried out

the first interviews young people were unsure where EVC was positioned in their education ecology (if at all) or how it might be described with many discussions returning to the importance of 'travelling outside my neighbourhood', 'coming to mid-town on the subway' and 'looking forward to seeing the city and making films'.

After break Ivana has connected the digital video camera to the television and instructs everyone to stand up and push the tables back so that they are in a large circle and facing each other. She explains that 'shots are like words, people don't use them randomly, you can learn to say something' and says that to learn more about how to use a camera and understand the different shot types everyone will have the opportunity to record and frame another person:

> You're going to ask three questions and we're going to see them [the person being recorded] at the same time. So start thinking of three questions that you want to ask and make sure that the other person says their name so that we can get to know names.

The digital video camera is passed around the group and everyone asks their questions to another member of the group. In common with a Freirian approach young people choose the questions they want to ask and the activity focuses on questions and not answers ('Think of three questions'). The questions asked range from 'what's your favourite ice cream?' and 'where did you go to middle school?' to much more personal questions which asked for personal disclosure. Adora asked Emily 'what ethnic background would you say you were from?' and Mateo asked Rebecca about a tattoo 'I notice some nice tattoo that you got, why did you choose, you know, to get a tattoo?'

This activity is lesson two in the EVC curriculum (2006), and the stated objectives are to 'become familiar with the basic functions of a digital video camera', 'to shoot video footage' and 'to teach each other how to handle the equipment' (6). On the first day of Documentary Workshop young people are introduced to 'progressive pedagogical strategies' (Goodman, 2003, 18), and to digital video technology as a communication tool. In this session young people see themselves framed on a television screen and learn to value their own questions (Shor, 1992). In her pedagogical approach Ivana models dialogue and reflection and young people begin to develop some of the skills they will need to develop and function as a group (Davis, 1993).

The next production activity is focused on how different shot types change the audiences Point of View and how meaning is constructed. Ivana asks for volunteers and goes on to ask questions which are answered when the camera is used to frame young people and communicate a particular meaning: 'how can we make Max look weak and insecure? ... how do we follow someone?... how can Rebecca appear large and powerful?...'. This activity makes explicit that meaning is visually constructed when using digital video production processes and that such production experiences are more than 'merely playing around with the latest technological gadgets' (Buckingham, 2007, 98). In this first session young people attend they experience how media can be used to negotiate identity (Dyson, 1997; Fisherkeller, 2002), and that their real world experiences, as film and television viewers, in their communities and as learners, has value (Buckingham, 1996; Goodman, 2003; Kist, 2005; Tyner, 1998). The place-making pedagogical process - of video analysis and production, of reading and writing is important because it encourages reflection and reflexivity. As Jewitt notes 'how teachers and students use gaze, body posture, and the distribution of space and resources produces silent discourses in the classroom' (2008, 262) which are named through visual knowledge production.

11

As a place EVC becomes meaningful through pedagogical practice and visual knowledge production. But it is also constituted by its emplacement in the city and throughout Documentary Workshop young people travelled by foot and on the subway to film interviews, B-roll and complete the research that enables them to produce a documentary. Journeys in, around and of the city are important place-making practices (Sheller and Urry, 2006) and travel to familiar and unfamiliar locations afforded important research encounters where conversations *in-place* occurred.

In this research mobile methods are used to consider embodied space while participants have the opportunity to view city locations through the lens of a video camera and engage in media production practices, thinking about issues of representation, narrative and ideology 'open up the possibility of new ways of thinking about who we are in relation to others and in relation to place' (Davies, 2009, 5). Throughout the research I accompanied them to film festivals and museums, attended community activist groups and participated in activities that encouraged them to explore their own community links. In this research while '[w]alking around is fundamental to the everyday practice of social life' and 'to much anthropological fieldwork' (Lee and Ingold, 2006, 67), it is also fundamental to understanding and engaging with the pedagogical practice at EVC when young people interact and engage with the city. While it is not uncommon to arrange out of school learning opportunities (Dyson, 1997) at EVC the situatedness of the learning experiences are integral to engagement with visual knowledge production, multiple ways of knowing and the view that young people are 'rooted in temporal-spatial conditions which mark them and which they also mark' (Freire (1970/1995, 90).

Conclusion

So why is space and place important in ethnographic, educational research? At EVC space must be understood as interconnected to the pedagogical and production practices that take place within it. The materiality of EVC is multi layered, worked upon and meaningful and is related to identities, relationships and the pedagogical production practices that take place. At EVC I saw how important visual knowledge production, and a critical pedagogical practice was (cf. Freirie, 1970; Giroux, 1988; Illich, 1971; and McLaren, 1989). Indeed throughout this research EVC staff members shared their commitment to critical education with me, reflecting on 'the importance of involving students in the communities in which they are living' (Hattery and Smith, 2006, 266). Through their investigation of local, community issues and their choice of a documentary topic young people begin to recognize the experience and knowledge they have to draw on and their ability to engage in a practice that can lead to positive social changes in the place specific locations in which they find themselves. As McLaren and Giroux assert 'a critical pedagogy must be a pedagogy of place, that is, it must address the specificities of the experiences, problems, languages, and histories that communities rely upon to construct a narrative of collective identity and possible transformation' (1990, 263).

In this research boundaries, spaces and places, both real and imagined and in particular those that are hybridized, in-between and shaped through the rupturing of boundaries is an attempt to resist binary thinking and a call for overcoming dualistic epistemologies. While there are many who critique

12

Bhabba's work for its level of generality and abstraction (Mitchell, 1997; Moore-Gilbert, 1997; Rose 1995), conceptualizing space as a concern to reimagine the either/or constructions of binary thinking 'forces us to accept the complexity, ambiguity and multidimensionality of identity' (Smith, 1999, 21).

Recognising that Bhabha was writing about a post-colonial space I borrow his term to conceptualise a space between the binaries of formal and informal education, self and other, teacher and student, reading and writing. Like Lefebvre (1991) Soja (1996, 2000) insists on the materiality of space looking beyond oppositional categories to a 'thirdspace' that is 'a fully lived space, a simultaneously real-and-imagined, actual-and-virtual locus of structured individuality and collective experience and agency' (2000, 11). While Goodman (1994) considers media education practices and video production as 'transgressing the boundaries that separate school from community, artist from audience, thought from practice' (47), as a third space EVC is both a geographical metaphor and a site of praxis where theory and practice meet.

At EVC the process of documentary production and the creation of space and place - metaphorical, social and phenomenological - to question issues of difference and inequality become the practice of staff and young people. When Giroux asserts that 'pedagogy works to produce, circulate and confirm particular forms of knowledge' (1999, 110) he reminds us that no educational process (or pedagogy) is neutral. At EVC knowledge is produced and defined by and through the experience of documentary production, a 'collective practice' that when others later view the documentary they can 'cross paths with [it] or retrace it (Foucault, 1991, 38-40). When youth produced documentaries are (re)viewed, as detailed earlier in this paper, place is remade. Scannel (1996) writing about pre-digital recordings describes this as the doubling of place. At EVC place-making happens through pedagogical practice, through visual knowledge production (the making of the documentaries), and each time the documentary is (re)viewed.

But place is also remade through the practice of research and as I worked to understand my own emplacement in ethnographic educational research with young people and its representational texts. Writing about the use of video in ethnographic research Pink (2009) describes the recorded material as 'a representation of a place-making encounter' (106). In this research the practice of ethnography and the production of visual and research materials are place making practices, remade when the materials are later viewed, reviewed and shared.

The concepts of space and place then are used to 'provide an opportunity to move people beyond our historic preoccupation with social divisions – with what holds people apart – and think about what is gained from a discourse of belonging' (Smith, 1999, 21). Moving away from binaries, in this paper I have articulated complex definitions of learning, of knowledge production and of ethnographic practice. I travelled to NYC with a 'sense of place' an expectation of what it would be like to 'be there' that changed throughout the experience of the research. Place then is never complete, it is forever changing and our interpretations are multiple. People, embodied beings who are sometimes defined and certainly differentiated by gender class, age and experience, conceptualise and experience place differently. Yet a consideration of space and place in ethnographic research is critical to understanding the lives and experiences of people. As an ethnographer I worked to be 'in-place',

getting the seat of my pants dirty and through the pedagogical practice of staff and the visual knowledge produced by young people I understood how EVC was defined by its 'thrown togetherness, the unavoidable challenge of negotiating a here-and-now ...' (Massey, 2005, 140), and the challenges and opportunities that brings.

14

Acknowledgements

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18

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