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“Everything really, the universe, oceans and stuff”

Key words

young people, inner city, sensory community,

Abstract

Drawing on fieldwork interviews with young people aged 10-12 years from inner-city Sydney this paper discusses conceptual understandings and sensory experiences of community. Young people in the inner-city are shaped by their urban context, and here, community is marked by change and connection, tradition and new technology, diversity and shared experiences, conflict and negotiation, all conditions of a globalised space. For young people born into the 21st century access beyond the local, is neither new nor strange, social media, online games, Wi-Fi and climate change, are familiar, uncontested and assumed. The social, cultural and political worlds of these young people are marked by everyday interactions and encounters with friends, family and strangers, in real life or online, locally and globally. They talk about connections to places and relationships that are close by and far away, places where they might know people or not. The relationships of their community [ies] are in person, at school, at the shops, at the park, visiting relatives overseas or in the virtual sphere connecting with strangers through Skype or online games, such as Minecraft.

Twelve year old Dave says, '*Community, is a group of people, or animals or anything really, a group that mixes together and works together; everything really, the universe, oceans and stuff. If we think about a group that is mixed together and works together then if one object is unavailable other things adopt responsibilities for it until it is able to do the job.*' At once Dave describes an understanding of community that holds the promise of globalisation, reflecting a complex system of networks and interconnections working together. This community is not bordered or bound by shared values, but operates as reciprocal networks, of care and responsibility, interactions between groups, things, the universe and everything.

By attending to their sensory embodied experiences, the young people describe different communities beyond preconceived notions that are at times, confronting and revealing. Felt in the body, community *sounds like cars* (Tako, MM), and *not screaming* (VHDR, VP), *smells like sausages* (FL, Nicole) *family* (VHDR), and *daisies in a paddock*. Community also *feels safe* (FL). For Dave it *smells like oxygen*, and *sounds like coffee machines and the movement of people preparing food in cafes* and sometimes, *it feels frustrating*. There is for Dave a conflict between his sensory experience and conceptual understanding of community. Others like BP, reject the idea of community being online, as encounters of community need to be *done with your body* and for Nicole must be *local*. Through their descriptions of inner-city Sydney, these young people articulate an understanding of community that is complex, contested and difficult, embraced and rejected, inclusive and bordered, negotiated, local and global.

IDLE, Jan

Based at the Social Policy Research Centre, at the University of New South Wales, Jan is a PhD candidate researching with young people, listening to how they talk about, experience and make community in the inner city. The question of voice and representation for young people in the research process is central to her research project. She has lectured in the areas of design and cultural studies and her interests are, research methodology with young people, the practices of community in contemporary Australia, visual culture, storytelling, Whiteness, Indigenous and settler history. Jan is a research assistant for Prof. Stephen Muecke on his ARC project 'Goolarabooloo Culture of the Western Kimberley'.

Publications

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