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Studying gender and sexuality in school health education: an exploration of the intersection between the official curriculum and student-led activism

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ABSTRACT

In response to their experiences of heteronormative and cisnormative cultures in school contexts, some young people undertake various forms of action within their schools with the intention of changing practices, school environments, or school policies. This student-led action can be understood as a form of activism but it may also be seen as the enactment of sexual citizenship. Both activism and sexual citizenship usually sit outside of the formal curriculum in schools. So, what happens when activism and sexual citizenship are recognised in official curriculum policy and are formally studied as part of school programmes in senior high school? In this article, we draw on findings from two ethnographic projects conducted in two different school sites in Aotearoa New Zealand to explore the intersection between official curriculum practices in relationships and sexuality education (RSE) and student-led activism. We wonder what emerges at the intersection of activist approaches and sexual citizenship when these are domesticated by official technologies for curriculum design and assessment.

Introduction

In many places, the formal study of gender and sexuality holds a tentative place in the formal school curriculum. The study of sex or sexuality education is often seen as separate from – or even in opposition to – student-led action and activism connected to sex, gender and sexuality diversity in schools (Elliott 2016; Mayo 2013), or activism is seen as something students undertake to advocate for better curriculum (Gilbert 2018). Recent moves internationally to contest teaching about gender in schools have created further tensions for relationships and sexuality education (RSE) curriculum. Venegas (2022, 482) argues that because the 'RSE curriculum concretises key issues related to feminist and LGBTQI+ struggles for equality, diversity, human rights, citizenship', its place in schools is at risk with a return to conservative politics in many countries.

In Aotearoa New Zealand (Aotearoa hereon), RSE has a formal place in national curriculum policy including at the senior high school level in national qualifications. The New Zealand Curriculum (the official national curriculum in Aotearoa) – and its related

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senior high school assessment system – include explicit curriculum content enabling students to study sex, gender and sexuality diversity (SGSD) and to engage in actions to enhance inclusion in schools. This is situated in the study of the subject health education. Through such means, official curriculum policy and assessment in health education provides opportunities for students to gain greater understandings of SGSD, and to engage in public actions in their school environments.

In this article, we explore the intersection between official curriculum practices in RSE in Aotearoa, and student-led action. Drawing on two ethnographic projects conducted in two school sites, we use Foucauldian theory to interrogate how students in these schools engaged in studying SGSD and how doing so intersected with student-led activism. Implicated in this exploration is how formal learning in health education classes impacts the possibilities for activism and how curriculum – as formal state-sanctioned policy – can both constrain and allow student agency and create possibilities for sexual citizenship.

We begin by discussing the connection between student activism and sexual citizenship and explore research related to student action in schools internationally before looking at how these same notions are represented in official curriculum policy and assessment in Aotearoa. We then outline the methodology and present ethnographic materials from two schools that show the complex relationship between curriculum and student action.

Student activism through sexual citizenship

The increased visibility of SGSD in some places is perhaps creating more productive contexts for youth activism in schools, online and in communities (Lozano-Verduzco et al. 2021; Scheadler et al. 2023). Definitions of activism typically assume a position against, or in response to, social norms constricting identity possibilities. In many instances, activism can thus be thought of as in direct tension with official school curriculum and policy. The notion of sexual citizenship and Foucault's (1980) understanding of power are useful for thinking about how the power and agency of young people and official curricula intersect in schools. Talburt (2019, 298) notes that 'young people engage formal and informal sexual citizenship amidst a proliferation of venues and discourses about sexuality that often seem to embrace them as subjects of rights but also govern the logics of their possibilities for action'. Such governance, of course, extends to formal curriculum and assessment. Working with a Foucauldian notion of power, we assume here that students are entangled in how curriculum and schools frame and govern subjectivities. Students employ various forms of power even while their subjectivities are produced through and by the curriculum and schooling environments, but also in and by wider social and cultural discourse.

Aggleton et al. (2019, 2) argue that schooling is part of a wider system of relationships that help ensure young people 'establish a respectful – and respectable – relationship not only with their parents and elders but with the state, imbibing its customs, beliefs and traditions, preparing for participation in the workforce and practising self-responsibility and control'. The formal school curriculum is a powerful tool in this process and holds an almost unquestionable authority about what knowledges are officially sanctioned and what knowledges are left out, marginalised or deemed unworthy of formal study and assessment. While RSE holds a marginal place in the curriculum in many nation states,

young people do also actively advocate – often through online spaces – for their rights as sexual citizens, for increased visibility of fluid sexual and gender subjectivities, and for greater socio-political inclusion and engagement with SGSD (Aggleton et al. 2019; Weeks 2019). Schools, however, seem slow to change. McBride and Neary (2021, 1) argue that:

> Cisnormativity permeates all aspects of school life. It is continuously reproduced through the binary, oppositional division of gender within schools and the assumption that a person's assigned birth gender corresponds with a mutually exclusive set of masculine or feminine attributes, aptitudes, abilities, and desires….. Institutionalised cisnormativity within schools privileges cisgender young people who identify with their assigned birth gender and fosters restrictive ideas about gender expression.

Despite such exclusion, many young people in schools do participate in forms of resistance and activism (see also McGlashan and Fitzpatrick 2018; Jones and Hillier 2013).

Activism may be framed in different ways but is typically seen as action or advocacy for change; it tends to work against, and seeks to contest, the dominant norms of schooling. lisahunter (2019, 4) notes that student activism can include educating teachers as well as 'engaging with resistant students to reflect on . . . heterosexism . . . facilitating the visibility or inclusivity of LGBT and queer issues in public schools . . . '. In parallel, Aggleton et al. (2019, 4) argue that sexual citizenship, 'considers both the intimate and sexual aspect of a person, together with aspects of their identity, in their participation – or lack thereof – in the rights and responsibilities of being a citizen'. Seen this way, young people can take up advocacy, exploration, debate and agency in relation to sexuality, not only 'against' norms – in an oppositional dynamic – but also with and through them. Rasmussen et al. (2016, 74) have argued that:

> Sexual citizenship is often associated with people's capacity for participation and belonging as these pertain to gender, sex and sexuality. For instance, sexual citizenship may be perceived as being related to young people's capacity to self-identify in a particular way at school, or to advocate for the rights of a particular group of students to be recognized in curriculum documents and in policy.

In many settings, curriculum policy and practice are in tension with notions of student sexual citizenship and LGBTQI+[1] identities and rights. Preston (2019) notes that teachers feel these tensions directly and may perceive themselves at risk if they go beyond the official curriculum in sexuality education classes. So, what happens when these rights *are* recognised in official curriculum policy and are studied as part of a school programme? What happens when students not only study SGSD in schools but also engage in action and activism as part of classroom practice and credentialed assessments? Curriculum and assessment in health education in Aotearoa require young people in senior high school to study SGSD, and to 'take action' to improve wellbeing (MOE 2007; NCEA: https://www.nzqa.govt.nz/ncea/subjects/health/levels/). In some schools, these aspects of the curriculum and assessment are combined.

Ethnographic research on sexuality and gender in schools

A number of ethnographic studies have highlighted the disruptive potential of LGBTQI+ subjectivities in schools (e.g. Youdell 2005; Pascoe 2007; Fields 2008; Quinlivan 2013, 2015). For example, both Youdell (2005) and Pascoe (2007) have demonstrated the

tensions and intersections that emerge when young people disrupt and contest and reinforce gender and sexuality norms at school, but these tend to be outside of formal curriculum spaces. Fields (2008) in-depth ethnographic study into sexuality education in the USA demonstrated that the sex education curriculum can be 'relevant, pleasurable and engaging'(4) for all students. Fields argues that 'Social inequalities consistently and insistently shape classroom interactions, but within a critical model of teaching and learning, teachers and students might approach their work together differently and commit to a transformation' (3). In the Beyond Bullying Project, Fields and Gilbert (Fields et al. 2014, 2019; Gilbert 2018) employed storytelling to engage students in reframing victim narratives 'towards recognising the ordinary and conflicted renderings of membership, belonging, and LGBTQ sexuality and gender that circulate in schools' (Fields et al. 2019, 137). The resulting narratives highlighted student resistance to the limitations of labels, binaries and others' expectations. This resistance, alongside the project's focus on re-storying risk-oriented and deficit-focussed discourses of LGBTQ subjectivities created an alternative curriculum space outside of the formal and official sex education curriculum.

Queer straight alliances and activism in schools

International research suggests that student-led action (sometimes called advocacy or activism) around LGBTQI+ issues in schools is often connected to queer-straight alliances (QSA) or gay-straight alliance groups. Research on QSAs suggests that these groups vary considerably in their makeup and intention but that they are commonly extracurricular, student-centred (or led) groups in which LGBTQI+ students, along with their heterosexual and questioning allies, come together for conversation, learning activities, mutual support and the production of advocacy and activism in the wider school (Freitag 2013; Quinlivan, Goulter, and Caldwell 2010). Stonefish and Lafreniere (2015) argue that QSAs play an important dual role in schools: providing educational benefits in areas of civics, health, and sexuality and relationships education, and enabling opportunities for student activism and community service.

The above-cited research however suggests that, while some schools have made a place for LGBTQI+ students, many QSAs are tolerated rather than celebrated by school leaders, and some exist 'under the radar' of official school practices and sit outside classroom practice and official curriculum activities. In Aotearoa, the creation of QSAs is explicitly encouraged in official RSE policy documents, and SGSD issues are part of the official curriculum, including in high-stakes assessment regimes in senior high school (MOE 2020a, 2020b, NCEA).

Official curriculum policy and assessment in Aotearoa

Jones and Hillier (2012) argue that policies to protect sex, gender and sexuality diverse youth make a significant difference to the experiences of young people in schools, including potentially decreasing bullying, suicide and self-harm risk, increasing feelings of safety, and increasing the likelihood that sexuality education classes are inclusive. The curriculum policy for RSE in Aotearoa explicitly aims to enhance inclusion and acknowledges SGSD (Riggs and Bartholomaeus 2018). The New Zealand Ministry of Education

(MOE) has undertaken a significant re-write of RSE curriculum policy in the last 7 years, providing two updates for schools, both of which provide explicit guidance to ensure LGBTQI+ rights (MOE 2015; MOE 2020a, 2020b). In addition, these RSE curriculum documents encourage schools to support student-led QSA groups, include SGSD in the curriculum, and address exclusionary practices connected to school uniforms, toilets and sports teams. We were both involved in the writing of the current RSE curriculum policy and explain the research underpinnings of that document in full elsewhere (see Fitzpatrick and May 2022). We maintain that the policy 'explicitly values diversity, promotes inclusive school environments and approaches sexuality education as an area of study (rather than a health promotion intervention)' (Fitzpatrick 2018, 1). Graham, Treharne, and Nairn (2017) also note that the 'New Zealand sexuality education curriculum draws on holistic meanings of sexual health with objectives that aim to teach young people to critically examine gender and sexuality within society' (5). The policy itself recommends that schools take a 'whole-school approach' to creating and maintaining an inclusive school culture, and actively 'question gender stereotypes and assumptions about sexuality' (MOE 2020a, 22). It also suggests that schools support student-or teacher-led diversity groups, such as QSA's and student activist groups (MOE 2020a).

Sexuality education and senior high school qualifications

The RSE curriculum policy mentioned above informs the programmes delivered in Aotearoa schools and students can choose to study health education[2] as a formal qualifications-level subject in the final three years of high school[3] (Dixon 2020). Students who choose to study health education in this way typically complete assessments related to the NCEA (National Certificate of Educational Achievement). The NCEA is a standards-based system in which students gain and accrue 'credits' by completing achievement standards at levels 1, 2 and 3 (level 3 is the exit qualification). In health education, there are specific achievement standards in the area of gender and sexuality education. For example, at level 2 the standard requires students to 'Analyse issues related to sexuality and gender to develop strategies for addressing the issues'.[4] This involves engaging critically with the evidence to explain: 'how recommended strategies to address issues reflect the values of social justice', and explain 'the interrelationships between the personal, interpersonal and societal aspects'. Such learning is underpinned by sociological analyses and a critical approach to issues of gender, sexuality and identity, positioning these as related to issues of social justice and equity. In the remainder of this article, we explore how formal learning in health education classes (particularly in the achievement standards discussed above) impacted the possibilities for activism and engaged sexual citizenship in two school sites.

Methodology: two critical ethnographies of schooling

The two ethnographic studies we focus on here were undertaken in two co-educational ethnically-diverse state schools in Auckland, Aotearoa during the 2016 school year. KF undertook her study at Patiki College.[5] The fieldwork undertaken at Patiki was part of a larger study of four different schools with a focus on health

education. KF spent one year attending lessons, recording fieldnotes, interviewing teachers and students, and collecting examples of student work, as well as participating in and recording pedagogical practices in health education classes with senior students (16–18 year olds). HM conducted her study at Kahukura High School. It involved an exploration of how a queer support and activist group (the Rainbow group) operated in the school and supported students, as well as the tensions and issues that it created for students and teachers. HM also attended health education classes, interviewed students and participated in student-led events organised across one school year (see McGlashan 2021).

We each used critical ethnography as the overarching methodology for the study. Critical ethnography is an approach to ethnographic research that pays particular attention to issues of equity, power and politics (Madison 2012). It relies on forming meaningful relationships and engaging in a context over time in order to understand the complex interplay between people and other actors within school environments. Relationships, reciprocity and reflexive ethical engagement with those in the field are also crucial. We each spent significant time developing relationships with staff and students in schools so as to understand how our projects intersected with relations of power. Madison (2012) argues that 'critical ethnography begins with an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice' (5). Fitzpatrick and May (2022, 14) argue that:

> Critical work in education draws on a wide range of traditions, including work that is concerned with interrogating and critiquing social and political contexts and examining the related articulations of power. Some of this work aims not only to critique but also to insist on urgent social change. The latter tends toward more activist approaches, while the former may refuse arguments for particular kinds of change in favour of critique.

Participants

Participants in KF's study at Patiki college were students of health education in years 12 and 13 (aged 16–18 years). The class was ethnically diverse, with students identifying as one or more of a range of ethnicities, including Māori, Samoan, Tongan, Indian, Chinese and Pākehā (European or white New Zealander). Participants in HM's study at Kahukura high school were members of the school Rainbow (QSA) group and some had also chosen to study health education in years 12 and 13.[6] Students identified with a range of ethnicities including Māori, Samoan, Tongan, Cook Islands, Indian, Chinese and Pākehā.

Learning gender and sexuality in the curriculum

At Patiki College, students who chose health education in Year 12 studied SGSD as part of the curriculum and completed an assessment in this area for national qualifications. The assessment and tasks they engaged with were connected to the following health education achievement standard: 'Analyse issues related to sexuality and gender to develop strategies for addressing the issues'. Students spent about 20 lessons on learning for this part of the programme. Lessons included researching gender norms, engaging with 'coming out' stories, considering the diversity of gender identities, and interrogating

intersections between gender binaries and commercial items (such as children's toys, clothing designs and colours etc).

As part of the study, students gave permission for KF to access their assessment tasks. The samples focused on reflect the kind of learning that students had undertaken and which they were formally assessed on. The assessment task (Table 1) required students to explore 'influences' on gender identity and on sexuality identity, and then describe strategies for responding to such influences.

Table 1. Assessment task.

	Gender identity	Sexual identity
What influence have you chosen from section 1?		
Describe a scenario that has occurred where people are treated unfairly, are discriminated against, or excluded.		
Make sure the scenario is related to your chosen influence.		
Describe an *alternative* scenario where people were being treated fairly, were being included, or were not being discriminated against.		
Recommend a **societal strategy** that a community could support:		
• **Describe** what it is		
• **Explain** how/why it could achieve the alternative situation		
• **Explain** how it would encourage social justice		
Recommend an **interpersonal action**		
people could use when communicating with or supporting each other:		
• **Describe** what it is		
• **Explain** how/why it would contribute to your societal strategy		
• **Explain** how it would encourage social justice		
Recommend a **personal action** people could be responsible for:		
• **Describe** what it is		
• **Explain** how/why it would contribute to your societal strategy		
• **Explain** how it would encourage social justice		
Explain how all of these strategies and actions interrelate (work together) to encourage social justice.		

Analyse issues related to sexuality and gender to develop strategies for addressing the issue.

In the task, students could choose from a list of contexts that were framed as 'influences'. The list included: Parents and Family, Advertising, Hobbies and/or Sporting Options, Music Videos + Lyrics, TV Shows, Disabilities, Career Options, Parents and Family. In her analysis of gender identity, Soneha (16 years old, identified as Indian New Zealander) chose parents and family and music videos + lyrics as her influences. In the assessment task, under parents and family, she argued that:

> Parents and family are influenced by buying toys for their kids that are according to the gender colours such as boys' colours are blue and, for girls', colours are pink. The effect that these influences have on people's gender identity is that parents and family see that in society boys and girls always have things such as toys, clothes etc according to their gender, which impacts the child's upbringing and it effects their behaviour and who they are as a person it also effects their preferences too.

She went on to explain that:

> . . . parents and family buy this stuff for their children so they don't get judged. I've look[ed] at the websites of toy shops like Warehouse or Toyco; in there they have categorised their toys for boys in one heading such as racing cars, sports balls and Lego . . . For girls . . . dolls, doll

houses and shopping games and so when you clicked into those all the pictures of the toys are coloured pink . . .

This example was a typical analysis completed by the students discussing how gender binaries are reinforced and reproduced within families and through the sale of products aimed at families and children. Dallas (16 years old, identified as Māori) also chose parents and family.

He wrote:

> Parents and family impact a person's gender identity big time. Your family members and parents can either accept what you identify yourself as, or completely cut you out because of it. Parents can choose to cut their child out because of their gender identification for many reasons, religion, because of how they were brought up etc. This being said, if you were born a girl but dressed like a boy and identified yourself as a boy, and your family doesn't approve, this could impact your decision on who you identify yourself as, as you might not want to upset your family or bring shame to them if that's how they see it. After talking to a friend about gender identity in his family, he told me that his parents were raised to hate trans-genders, gays and people who didn't identify themselves as their gender at birth. This lead to him not feeling like he could have a choice on who he could be and forced him to play with manly things such as building toys and get into hobbies like sport without being offered the chance for a decision of his own.

In both of these examples, Soneha and Dallas focus on the role of the family in framing what is possible for children in relation to gender choices. Both of them position families as heteronormative spaces that reinforce cisgender norms. In Soneha's example, she suggests that families tend to accept the gendering of toys in advertising and they buy these toys so they don't get judged. Dallas' analysis engages the example of a family not accepting a young person's gender identity when it differs from cisheteronorms.

What is notable about both examples is that this assessment task engaged these students in imagining and critiquing the impacts of gendered contexts, gender binaries and heteronormativity at something of a distance. Their examples were not related to their school or necessarily their own communities or families. These were not calls to action or activism but, rather, attempts to engage students in thinking about exclusion and social norms. In the second part of this task when asked about personal, interpersonal and societal actions that people can take to enhance 'social justice', Dallas suggested that the young person in his scenario could be open with their parents and that the school and community all have a role in supporting the family. Dallas wrote:

> The person in this scenario could come out to his family while the parents should accept him for who they are and fully support this child. If they are having trouble supporting them the parents could go look for help from communities such as Rainbow youth support for people of all sexualities. They could also go to the deans or support groups at school. The dean could reach out to the others in the school . . . This could create a support group where everyone can talk about their feelings.

The assessment task that Dallas and Soneha completed positioned them in certain ways as experts and advisors. It invites them to think like sexual citizens rather than positioning them as activists. Fields (2008, 19) notes that 'All youth confront the hierarchies that result from adultism, institutionalized beliefs and practices that cast young people as categorically less able, less intelligent, and less responsible than adults'. In this specific assessment

task, Dallas and Soneha are rather positioned as the experts who are called on to analyse, critique and suggest alternatives in fairly specific family situations related to gender.

Aggleton et al. (2019, 3) argue that young people are simultaneously subject to discourses holding them back from full participation and citizenship, and others insisting that they 'become full consumers in their own right (of ideas, things and selves) that the modern-day economy requires'. The assessment task described above suggests the latter but the context of this student writing is important to note. The analyses that Dallas and Soneha offer here were structured by a state-sanctioned high-stakes assessment task in which they will be graded against standards and given a mark. These assessments, of course, are a gateway to official qualifications and, therefore, future career and study options post-school. These pieces of writing then are manufactured through the technology of assessment regimes. Thus, the state-sanctioned task creates a particular kind of sexual citizenship, one that is explicitly critiquing cisheteronorms and related forms of exclusion related to SGSD. The use of the term 'influences' in this task specifically creates distance, assuming separation between the body and culture so that norms are positioned as cultural artefacts 'out there' impacting families and young people in direct ways, rather than inexplicably interwoven with cultural practices and possibilities. The students' answers are notably distant, rather than personal. They appear to be making suggestions for other families, imagined exclusionary families, not their own. This distancing is helpful in the sense that it produces gender and sexuality as topics worthy of study and assessable in school assessment regimes; students are not required to share or confess their own stories or critique their own families. At the same time, this distancing creates a separation between students own experiences and the curriculum and perhaps reinforces families (other families) as problematic. In the next example from a different school, the assessment task was much more aligned with activism.

Student activism as curriculum/assessment

In Kahukura High School, the Year 12 students who studied health education as a NCEA subject also completed the achievement standard: 'Analyse issues related to sexuality and gender to develop strategies for addressing the issues'. This achievement standard was, however, taught alongside another health education assessment: 'Take action to enhance an aspect of people's well-being within the school or wider community'. During this learning, the class studied content and activities similar to those at Patiki College. Following the students' critical analysis of issues related to SGSD they worked in groups to undertake school-based initiatives aimed at enhancing the well-being of individuals or groups in relation to SGSD.

For the assessment, students were provided with the following information:

This assessment requires you to take *comprehensive action* to enhance an aspect of people's well-being in our school by providing detailed planning that includes actions that are critical for addressing the well-being issue associated with sex, gender and sexuality; and by implementing and critically evaluating a workable plan for health promotion focused on providing opportunities for young people in our school to participate in.

Many of the groups chose to implement their initiative during the school's annual 'Health Week', which was organised jointly with the school's counselling and health team (counsellors, doctor, physiotherapist, and nurses) and involved a series of student and teacher-led activities and an expo day. Student-led groups such as Peer Sexuality Support Programme (PSSP)[6] and the Rainbow group assisted in the organisation of the week as well as running stalls during the expo day.

Here, we draw on the experiences of two of the students in relation to this assessment task: Issy (bisexual, New Zealand Chinese) and Vinny (trans man, Pākehā). Issy was a member of the school's PSSP and decided to combine her action with the work the group were doing. The PSSP stand focused on raising awareness and inclusion of SGSD within the school by displaying rainbow inclusive resources and interactive activities (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Photo of the PSSP stand at the expo day during Health Week at Kahukura high school.

The stand gained a lot of interest from the students visiting the expo, especially because the activities offered. There was a condom jar, and students had to guess how many condoms there were in it, in order to win a prize. The stand also had a sign encouraging students to 'Ask any question you like about gender and sexuality and win a prize', and balloons with quirky sayings on them. Examples of the sayings included:

- Don't be a fool, wrap your tool
- Don't be silly, wrap your willy
- Don't be a whiner, protect your vagina and,
- Gay is OK.

To put these sayings on the balloons in such a public space was a bold act especially for those who identified as gender and sexuality diverse. HM spoke to Issy about this:

Hayley: Do you feel comfortable standing behind this stand?

Issy: I do with the PSSP group, but that is why I asked to work with them rather than the health class.

Hayley: What do you mean by that?

Issy: Well, I knew that we had to be 'out there' about sexuality stuff, and I know that most of us in PSSP group are rainbow, so it feels more comfortable, I guess more possible to be open and honest in front of them.

Hayley: Ah, I see. So, in your health class are you able to open about your sexuality?

Issy: Not so much. Like, I guess people know, but I don't talk about it – I mean I don't talk about me, but I talk lots when we have scenarios or activities about other people. I like the [achievement] standard because it is me, like I know it well because it's my life and I'm good at it! And Miss must know because she always asks me questions and she let me do the stand with PSSP, so I'm pretty sure she gets it.

Unlike the examples from Patiki college, students at Kahukura such as Issy, had to publicly perform aspects of sexuality and gender to complete their assessment. It is evident from Issy's account that it was risky for her to do this in relation to health education curriculum and so she sought support from the student-led PSSP group. She navigated this by engaging with the activist group as part of her assessment task. For Issy, curriculum-based learning around SGSD was enjoyable and she felt confident in her health education class and the teacher saw her as an expert. Issy's final comment above suggests that health education 'scenarios or activities about other people' also created the possibility for a more distanced critique of gender and sexuality while in class. However, the assessment also required her to be part of the public sexuality stall at the expo. In this more public space, students were positioned as activists and were required to answer questions about sexuality.

This assessment then set up a difficult situation for Issy, which was also evident for another health education student, Vinny. For their assessment, Vinny's group focused on body shaming with a specific emphasis on inclusive understandings of trans bodies. Vinny's group created three different posters that had messages on them such as 'Let's Stop Body Shaming', alongside pictures of diverse individuals and body types. The posters were placed around the school on the Monday of health week and were then used on the stall on the Thursday (Figure 2).

Vinny and his group engaged groups of staff and students during lunchtime and handed out badges with messages on them specific to trans bodies such as: 'It is not your business what is between my legs', and 'My business is not your business'. HM observed some of the group engagement that took place one lunchtime. HM noticed that, when talking to known members of the Rainbow group, Vinny led the discussion and focused on trans bodies and the cisnormative policies and practices within the school. This changed when other students approached (non Rainbow group members). The discussion then focussed on differently shaped bodies or dis/abled bodies and the stigma and shame associated with such. I later discussed this with Vinny:

Hayley: I noticed that you only talked to those in the Rainbow group about trans bodies when you were moving around the school. Did you and your group plan this?
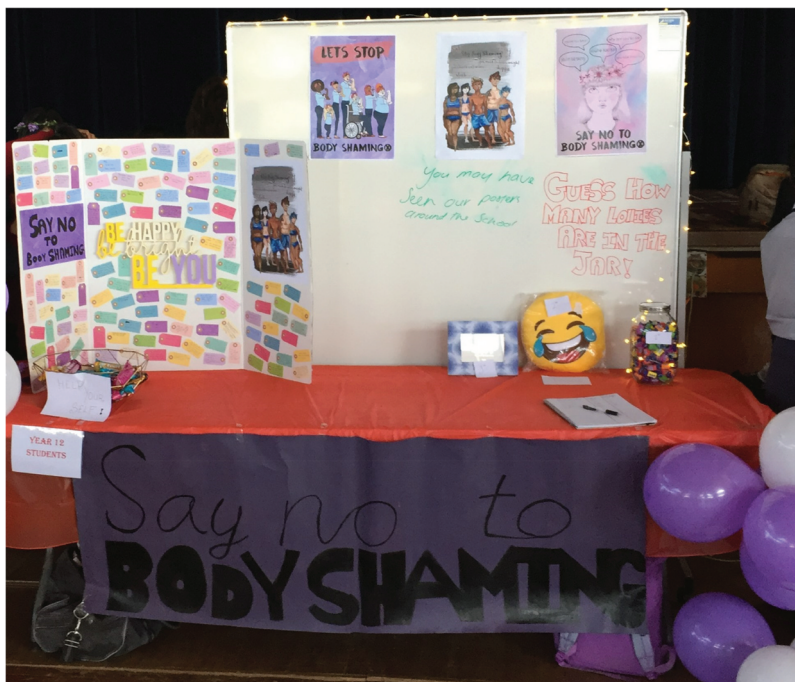
Figure 2. Photo of the 'say no to body-shaming' stand at the expo day during health week at kahukura high school.

> *Vinny*: Haha, yes, we planned it, well actually I just asked if I could just talk to Rainbow students.
>
> *Hayley*: Cool, so why did you do this?
>
> *Vinny*: Well, of course, I am not going to feel comfortable talking to just anyone about my body and the way it is policed by cisnorms.
>
> *Hayley*: What do you mean by this? Has your body ever been 'policed' at school?
>
> *Vinny*: Yeah, that is how we came up with the idea of the badge message. When I was wearing the 'male' school uniform, one guy said to me 'why are you wearing those shorts, don't you have a vagina?'
>
> *Hayley*: And, what did you say?
>
> *Vinny*: Nothing! I just walked away! We had a Rainbow group meeting that day though, and I told my friends what happened and then we came up with the saying – 'my business is not your business', meaning you know, 'what's between my legs is not your business'. And then yeah, that is how I came up with the badge and poster idea in health class.

It is clear from Vinny's discussion that walking around the school with activist body-related messages raised issues of safety and risk. Vinny was inspired by the health education assessment task – and by his own experience – to create t-shirts and slogans challenging gender and body image norms. However, the reality of undertaking this activism in the school required specific strategies to ensure Vinny was not

personally 'policed' both for his body and the messages. The fact that this activist initiative was part of an assessment task created a form of coercion for Vinny and intensified his visibility in the school.

For both Issy and Vinny, their willingness to engage in student activism was therefore dependent on feelings of safety and inclusion. The health education classes provided a space for them to engage in learning and assessment that was inclusive and relevant for them. It was moreover seen by both Issy and Vinny as achievable because, as Issy said, they were 'good at it'. The public form of activism that students also engaged in, however, meant that they were caught between the promise of formal assessment grades and their desire to raise awareness and challenge gender and sexuality norms in their school.

Discussion

Aggleton et al. (2019, 3) note that 'young people are trained for the exigencies of the state... that, while ostensibly supporting young people's agency and interests, conscript them to serve state interests by training them to be better "democratic subjects"'. Formal curriculum assessments create frameworks to which young people must subscribe to in order to gain the credentials that assessment offers. For students in both schools we discuss in this article, the official curriculum tasks required them to engage in critiques of gender and sexual norms and allowed them to formally study SGSD. The lessons - and the assessment tasks - also created space to explicitly explore cisheteronorms, intimacy and a range of related content.

At Kahukura high school, in contrast to Patiki College, students were also required to engage in public forms of activism directly connected to the assessment. Aggleton et al. (2019, 7) have noted how

> There remain major gaps in understanding how young people articulate their own views of citizenship and belonging (especially in relation to gender and sexuality as identities, self-hoods and life projects), their opinions concerning rights-based discourses and what is most important to them.

Formal curriculum tasks provide one space for such expression and, interestingly, in Aotearoa this is a space that is valued, graded and has official status. Studying SGSD in the formal curriculum creates a degree of distance that may be protective for some young people, when contrasted with activism as assessment. When students are directly engaged in activism, there are potential levels of exposure; and the high stakes of a formal assessment can be coercive if students are required to endure the policing of their gender, bodies or sexualities in public spaces in order to pass. Activist approaches that rely on public expressions of identity can put gender and sexuality diverse young people in a vulnerable position. As Meyer and Leonardi (2018, 454) write, having the 'expectation to be out places an undue burden on children to expose themselves to ignorance, hostility and be responsible for the learning of others'. For students at Kahukura High School, the health education curriculum created possibilities for activism that required levels of visibility that students both welcomed and resisted.

Conclusion

In this article, we have explored what happened in two schools when official curriculum policy created the conditions for students to study and learn about SGSD and take action against forms of discrimination and social exclusion. In a sense, the official curriculum in both schools allowed for, and even required, a certain display of sexual citizenship. Studying gender and sexuality at Kahukura high school brought 'activism' into the normative domain of schooling, domesticating it as formal assessment.

As the school curriculum aims to create certain kinds of sexual citizens, it also tends to reinforce norms about what kinds of actions and activism are 'appropriate' in order to pass assessments. The curriculum at Patiki college required students to identify factors influencing sexual and gender identities and in so doing positioned sexuality as being outside the self, and the body as outside culture. When students at Kahukura were required to demonstrate activism in a public-school space for assessment purposes, this created exposure for students who identified as LGBTQI+. Aggleton et al. (2019) argue that:

> Through activities as diverse as compulsory schooling and community service, state and community powers pull young people's lives into their disciplinary orbit in the hope of moulding these adults-in-waiting into responsible, self-correcting citizens of benefit to future society and country. (2)

In both contexts, student action as part of the curriculum raises questions about what is appropriate in terms of the boundaries of schooling, but it also domesticates activism while formally credentialling it. This is, at least in part, the result of curriculum policy being caught up inextricably in the 'generational conflict' that Weeks (2019) has argued creates a tension between young people and the adults that control the major institutions to which youth are subject. Weeks (2019) sees such generational tensions as playing 'on the dialectic of dangerous agency (embodied in the behaviours and practices of young people) on the one hand and often frenetic attempts at social regulation on the other' (x). Official curriculum policy has long been a site of social regulation and cultural orthodoxy but in the schools we focused on here it was also a space for advocacy against dominant gender and sexuality norms.

When activism and citizenship are part of formal assessment practices in schools, there is potentially increased risk for LGBTQI+ students. While including forms of sexual citizenship and activism in formal school assessments potentially creates a legitimised space for students to learn about and challenge gender and sexuality norms, requiring activism as part of assessment may also constrain the possibilities for students to choose the levels of engagement that are safe for them.

Notes

1. LGBTQI+ is an acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or transsexual, queer, intersex and the + is for any other diverse sex, gender or sexuality identities. We will use a range of terms in this article, including the acronym LGBTQI+ as well as the terms 'queer', 'rainbow', and 'sexuality and gender diverse' to acknowledge the contested terrain of such naming. However, when discussing participants from this research, we use the words they chose to describe their identities.

2. Health Education is an optional subject in NCEA level 1, 2 and 3.
3. In Aotearoa, students are by law required to stay at school until they are 16.
4. These standards are currently undergoing review and change. At the time these studies took place, these NCEA standards were in place and used by the schools in question.
5. The names of schools and students in this paper are pseudonyms.
6. PSSP is a secondary school-based programme delivered throughout the Auckland region and aims to help students make informed decisions about their sexual health.

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