

Queering Education: Pedagogy, Curriculum, Policy

Introduction

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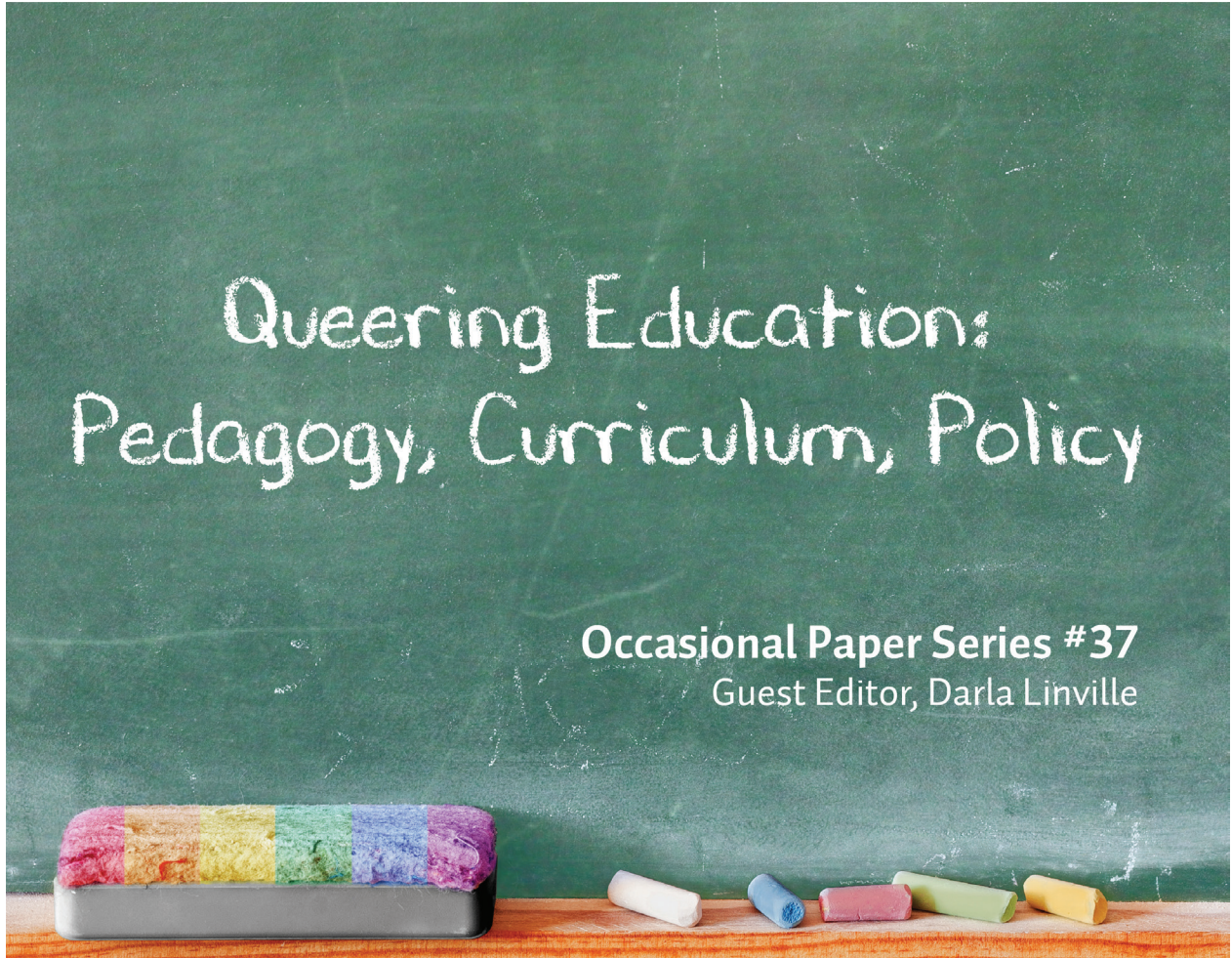
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Occasional Paper Series #37
Guest Editor, Darla Linville



Introduction

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Darla Linville, Guest Editor

Over the last two decades, much has changed for people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer (LGBTQ+), and for others who don't identify with these terms but fall somewhere outside of heterosexuality or binary gender. During this time, legal protections for and recognition of LGBTQ+ people have grown, including civil unions, first in Vermont in 2000; then same-sex marriage in Massachusetts in 2004 and in all states in 2015; the striking down of sodomy laws in 2003; and the recognition of LGBT people by the military, including full equality in benefits; and in late 2016, the lift of the ban on transgender in the military. There are now more civil rights protections for LGBT employees in more states, and protections for students in schools.

These changes have been widely understood as progress or advances, and as improving the lives of LGBTQ adults and children, as well as of the children who live with LGBTQ adults or those perceived as not conforming to gender expectations. Those of us who work to make schools more welcoming places for LGBTQ+ youth have celebrated these victories, even while continuing to push schools and society to do more to decenter heteronormativity and the gender binary and make schools safer places for all students.

At the same time, many people have questions about these achievements. Some resist the normativity of legal gains that give LGBTQ+ people access to problematic institutions such as marriage and the military. The conservative nature of these institutions, the gender norms embedded in them, and the ways they work to uphold other systems of oppression along class and race lines defy the goals of reformers concerned with creating a more just society for all. Those who ask these questions push people who identify as LGBTQ+ to remain queer, in the sense of not being normalized within conservative and conforming institutions.

There is also resistance from more conservative people on the political spectrum who are concerned that the social and legal changes allowing acceptance and acknowledgment of LGBTQ+ people are

moving too fast. Some of these resisters believe that schools should not have to change to make LGBTQ+ students more comfortable, that accepting LGBTQ+ people is an endorsement of an immoral way of living, and that the best approach would be to encourage children not to be LGBTQ+. Therefore, at the same time that some legal protections for LGBTQ+ people have been won, these gains remain tenuous and contested.

The call for proposals for this special issue of the Occasional Paper Series (OPS) was conceived in a moment of possibility and hope among advocates for LGBTQ+ youth during the summer of 2015, when the Supreme Court had just decided the case that allowed same-sex marriage to be recognized in all 50 states and at the federal level. This move led LGBTQ+ people, especially those in more conservative regions of the country or outside of large urban areas, to believe that they could call on legal powers to protect their families, jobs, housing, or relationships. They hoped that the random, bureaucratic violence and harassment they sometimes encountered might be avoided. And they looked forward to proudly announcing their existence, knowing that they could not be legally turned away. The OPS Call for Papers asked authors to imagine what might happen in schools now if a basic legal acknowledgment of LGBTQ+ equality was written into law.

What might it mean to make education more queer? Queerness is not a unitary identity (as is no identity) and queer is not a single way of thinking or being. Sometimes queer is opposition to outness, or resistance to acceptance, and exists in order to disrupt and discomfit. This, too, is queer. How might educators work to make schools more welcoming of queer bodies and identifications, queer the binary categories that define social life, and disrupt the differential privileging of those who claim normative identities?

Queering Education

Ten years ago I wrote:

How does queer theory help explain the narratives of high school students, both LGBTQ and heterosexual-identified, and the contradictions and counter-narratives they expose in the policies, practices, and pedagogies of their schools? Do queer theory's prescriptions resonate with students' wishes for their schools? [Is there] a "best way" for schools to make their hallways and classrooms more welcoming environments for LGBTQ students? (Linville, 2008)

Then, as now, educational researchers and theorists wrote about ways that queer theory could change educational practices, including curriculum, pedagogy, and structures of schools (Bertram, Crowley, & Massey, 2010; Birden, 2005; Driver, 2007, 2008; Killoran & Pendleton Jimenez, 2007; Rasmussen, 2006; Smith, 2005). These articles, books, dissertations, and curricula wanted to change the discussion about queer possibilities in schools: exploding binary categories; telling stories with un-foreclosed endings; questioning simplistic morality, psychology, or biology; promoting contested conversations (Banks & Alexander, 2016).

These ideas don't mesh well with demands for standardization, high-stakes assessment, or even zero-tolerance bullying mandates. Those of us engaged in social justice conversations must ask for experimentation, openness, and unclear lines amid concerns about queer desire and contested truths (Ruffalo, 2007). This is particularly true in the elementary grades, where gendered behavior organizes demarcations of proper and improper, damaged and healthy, and within/without. If we are charged with teaching students correct sexualized and gendered behavior with one another, if we must address their actions in their bodies, how can we do that without boxing them into limiting categories that reify binaries and ideas about normal and deviant (Boas, 2012)?

Queer theory (Rodriguez & Pinar, 2007; Rasmussen, Rofes, & Talburt, 2004; Talburt & Steinberg, 2000), in conjunction with feminist theory and pedagogy, anti-racist pedagogy, critical race theories, and critical disability studies, has demanded that educational theorists and researchers reframe their questions away from deficits in students to look at structural impediments that keep students from succeeding, "attending to the conditions that allow normalcy its hold" (Britzman, 2000).

These demands have required that schools, society, and teachers rethink the category "deserving student" and restructure the social and academic atmosphere of educational institutions to be accessible to all students. Queer theorists have demanded that education discuss and encourage learning about those who are oppressed for who they are perceived to be, regardless of their own identifications, and that education acknowledge the categorization of identities created by traditional curriculum and pedagogical practices (Kumashiro, 2001).

Queer theory asks educators to consider desire as a force that compels us to acquire knowledge and engage with others. It drives us to know and connect with one another, with ideas, and with the complexity of the unknown and unknowable (Britzman, 2000). Recognizing the contingency of knowledge and the artificiality of epistemological categories, queer theorists, along with poststructuralists more generally,

hold that what is known and what can be known is limited to the society within which we live. Binaries appear normal and natural when they are in fact constructed and context-specific. The authors in this special issue of Bank Street's Occasional Paper Series have taken up these queer ideas in ways that let us view classrooms and curriculum through new lenses. By asking us to question what is taken for granted, natural, and normal, they ask us to see new possibilities and potentialities for ourselves and our students.

The Transformative Potential of Love

Looking beyond what is expected, attending to the needs and desires of the present interaction, and challenging traditions that limit access to educational experiences are common elements of Benjamin Lee Hicks' and Denise Snyder's essays. Bookending the issue, these authors invite us to remember the very personal stories of the children and adults inhabiting the roles of teacher, student, parent, and administrator working for educational justice.

In these essays, trans bodies confound schools because of the ways that schools are organized by gendered categories. In order to use bathrooms, take certain classes, register for events, be placed in rooms for overnight trips, get invited to parties, and sign up for graduation, one must be assigned to a gender, and preferably one that conforms to one's body parts. This match, and the possibility that others may detect some unexpected combination, can leave a student or teacher feeling unwelcome.

As both Hicks and Snyder point out, gender is in some ways the most minor and inconsequential of things to know about a person. If we can look past that—to interests, pains, and joys—and form relationships with one another not predicated on gender, then we can engage more meaningfully with one another. Although gender is woven into the fabric of schools, if we can imagine organizing students without drawing on gender we can begin to create more welcoming environments for more bodies. As a side benefit, we may stop a significant part of gender-based sexual harassment and bullying.

Creating Dangerous Queer Bodies in Schools

Three authors in this OPS issue take on the specter of the dangerous queer body in schools and the ways that the real experiences of students defy the simplified categories of good/bad, in/out, right/wrong that school discipline policies and regulations expect. They examine the ways that the queer body is welcomed and hidden in schools, the ghostly appearance of the birth name that haunts trans

students, and the complexity of intersectional identities that make queer youth susceptible to racism, classism, and school policing. In these essays we see that school administrators, teachers, teacher candidates, and community members may be challenged to understand the best ways to teach and discipline when queer bodies show up in schools.

All the authors encourage readers to view the situation through multiple perspectives. We are able to see the impact of the policy regulation or rule and hear the perspective of the person whose experience is denied, overlooked, or invalidated through the normative expectations of the school. What is dangerous about these LGBTQ+ bodies is that they deny us the possibility of making easy, definitive statements about what will be right for all students in this situation. They demand that we see students as individuals with complex identifications, differing needs and wants, and differing desires for education.

The stories depicted in these essays say that we need to listen to parents, students, and teachers when they say that the solution proposed by the policy does not meet their needs, and that they would like the school community to respond in a different way. As Stearns suggests, listening may lead to conflict that we need to resolve or learn to live with.

Telling Queer Stories/Queering Straight Stories

The remaining three essays in this OPS issue talk about stories that include queer and trans lives as they are represented in teaching materials or recreational reading for students. Although there is some research in this area, these papers offer new readings of stories, with audiences that we don't always think of when we think of queer and trans storylines, and with connections to popular culture and the Common Core State Standards.

These essays offer important lessons in adding elements of queer (including queering binary gender) into existing curriculum and classroom practices at all levels of education. Rather than recommending waiting until the political climate is receptive to overturning normative structures in schools, these essays promote using subversion in small doses, in ways that plant seeds of doubt about certainties and fixed categories.

Many of the texts presented in this section offer opportunities for more normative readings, as well as for more queered readings. These opportunities are pointed out by the authors as ways to invite readers

into the texts and then move them to queerer reading/interpreting possibilities. The categories of texts presented by Lin and the statistics provided by Sullivan and Urraro provide critical lenses through which to view the stories presented to young children, as well as a guide for examining new texts that offer representations of LGBTQ+ lives.

Sweet and Carlson [link] queer ideas about creating curriculum by asking writers for the television show, *Transparent*, produced by Amazon, to suggest scenes that would make for engaging curriculum. This outside sourcing of curriculum ideas, from creators of a public curricular medium (television), upends expectations. Using Miller's Queer Literacy Framework (2016), Sweet and Carlson ground the lessons in queer readings of the scenes, and also in the Common Core State Standards for high school English.

Queering Practices

LGBTQ+ bodies and stories still appear strange and frightening in many places in the United States, and especially in elementary classrooms. There are regions where prayers are recited over the loudspeaker, religious groups organize the afterschool programming, and prom is for boy/girl couples only. In these places, mentioning the word queer induces shudders and alarm: queer is a bad word, and nothing good can come from mentioning it.

At the same time, teachers in many parts of the U.S. and other nations are comfortable and confident about welcoming queer and trans youth and/or parents into their classrooms, and queer and trans teachers are finding ways to speak about their identities and existence in relation to their professional lives. Knowledge, awareness, and welcome have grown since the 1990s, when a scandal was created by the Rainbow Curriculum in New York City and the inclusion of *Heather Has Two Mommies* in elementary reading materials (Casper, Curraro, Schultz, Silin, & Wilkens, 1996).

In the changed landscape since the 2016 election, now we are awaiting the effects of the new Secretary of Education, as it has been announced that she and the new Attorney General Jeff Sessions would like to remove all protections for transgender people, including in schools. The campaign of the U.S. president gave voice to hate directed at groups for their identities, including race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, national origin, and religion. There is newly encouraged resistance to queerness and a new insistence on normative structures. Whiteness, Christianity, masculinity (and the right to dominate/use women's bodies), heterosexuality, gender normativity and roles, ability—physical normativity that

discounts contributions of those who are differently abled—are all receiving the message that they deserve the privilege they have received in the past. Conversations about contesting unearned privilege are framed as unrealistic, frivolous whining.

By contrast, these essays are queer in the broadest sense, offering visions of love and hope. Queer that reminds us to keep looking at what voices from other perspectives tell us, to keep interrogating what we work toward (inclusion, hospitality, welcome, representation, awareness). We also question what those representations and access points reify and foreclose. All of the essays offer practical visions of what can happen in classrooms, and lead the way toward more queerness in education.

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The Gift of Hindsight: A Parent Learns about Educating Trans Youth

Denise Snyder



I began to put pen to paper for this series on the same day last January that my husband, Vann, and I dropped off our daughter, Ella, at a semester program at the Oxbow School in Napa, California. We live on the East Coast, in Boston. Ella is our one and only. She was not yet 17 years old at the time. And she is transgender. As her mom, letting Ella go was not easy, but it was the right thing to do. My story here is about the parent experience, about raising a transgender child through an interesting—and maybe fortuitous—time in our society, where we have moved from fear of the word transgender to questioning, to some understanding, where there are allies and peers, even among the youngest individuals.

If you had asked me five years ago if I thought we would ever agree to send our teenage daughter to art school on the other side of the country, I would have said, “Hell, no.” I would have said that there were too many risks, that given her trans status, it would not be a wise or safe move. Yet, five short years later, that’s exactly what we did. We helped her move into a dorm, took a tour of a place we had never been before, met faculty members and roommates, kissed her goodbye, crossed the Golden Gate Bridge, and boarded a flight home to Massachusetts.

I shed a lot of tears during that process, but I also could not have been more proud of—or happy for—my child. We moved from the impossible to the possible in just a handful of years. How did we get here? Back in 2011, Ella was just beginning a social transition, and the country’s awareness about, and support for, transgender youth seemed nonexistent. Everything from social acceptance to health care coverage seemed like a fantasy.

Not that I don’t have concerns about my daughter’s safety or well-being now; I definitely do. However, I used to worry all of the time. I worried when she was at preschool and she was the only boy to play with dolls and put on princess dresses in the dramatic play area. I worried in kindergarten when she

insisted on bringing her American Girl doll to show-and-tell. I worried when she refused to wear pants purchased from the “boys’ department,” and we had to search heaven and earth for flat-front, girls’ pants that didn’t have sparkles, pink trim, or other telltale signs that they were, in fact, “girls’ pants.”



I worried when she told her father during bath time that, “I know I’m supposed to like who I am, but I don’t like what I am.” She was four years old at the time, and it broke my heart. It also broke my heart to tell her she could only play dress-up at home. That she probably shouldn’t choose the Belle lunch box. That she couldn’t be a Girl Scout. That the Hannah Montana-themed sleepover was just for girls. That she had to line up at school with the boys. That she could join ballet, but she could not wear a tutu. It broke my heart to be a part of breaking her spirit. Every damn day.

For years we straddled two worlds, mostly conforming to a stereotypical male world outside our house, but letting our “son” enjoy dolls, dressing up, and playing “shoe shop” at home. All the while, we tried to send a message that we loved and supported her, that there was nothing wrong with her. When she was little, I think she just assumed that it was normal to do things one way at school and another way at home. But over time, how could she not question her differences or the way she was treated for them? Looking back, it’s easy to say we didn’t know what we didn’t know. And while I would make some different choices now, a dozen years ago it was hard to find help for what we were going through. We wanted to be supportive, and we wanted to make our child happy. But we also worried that if we gave in to all her desires, we would “steer” her in a direction that maybe wasn’t the correct one. Or we would “break” her. We were not sure when we were helping and when we were hurting her.



Between the ages of two and ten, we knew there was a strong possibility Ella could be transgender, but we hoped for something less hard for her. So we hoped she was an effeminate male or maybe metrosexual. We hoped she was gay. (It turns out that this is a pretty common hope among parents who begin to suspect their child may be transgender. When faced with the road less traveled, it’s common to choose the path someone else has already paved for you.)

We worked with her pediatrician and went through three therapists before finding one that had solid experience. We also found our way to the Gender Management Clinic at Children’s Hospital. Collectively, they gave us hope. They helped us navigate our journey. We felt very much like pioneers

and, until then, we had felt very much alone. With their help, we found we weren't alone, and we found support for us and for our child.

I won't go into the trials of soccer, coed birthday parties, and gender-neutral clothing options, but suffice it to say that our therapist pushed us to keep our child open while at the same time making space for her to enjoy the things that truly made her happy. All of the experiments were failures in the best sense of the word. They were building a case.

Finally, at age 11, Ella went to a sleepaway camp for transgender and gender-nonconforming youth. It changed her world and confirmed what we already knew. Our child, who was born with male genitalia was, is, and always will be a girl, and she needed to live her life as one—as soon as possible. The need was urgent, but it was August, and she would be starting sixth grade in a couple of very short weeks. We made our child the biggest request I think a parent could make of an 11-year-old who has just had a complete breakthrough: Could she wait a year? That may seem cruel or unsupportive to some, but it was not.

We were ready to do what needed to be done. We let her know that we were completely on board, but with only two weeks before school started, I was pretty sure we could not get everything lined up: we had to navigate school district policies, gain the principal's support, map out school procedures, change names and pronouns, get a whole new wardrobe. Everything needed to be set up so that we did not fail in this effort, and the time was just too short. Rather, we promised to spend the coming 12 months making progress toward that goal, especially since she would be starting a new school the following year. In addition to taking on school policy challenges, we would find ways for her to present as a female more often; we'd also begin using female pronouns at home, do a legal name change, and map out the transition so she could begin seventh grade as her true self.

One of the most amazing (if not most scary) things we did in this process was to host a June meeting with other parents and students from her current school—more than 30 kids—who would be attending the same new school for seventh grade in September. We worked with both the sending and receiving schools and our therapist to set up the meeting. The current school's principal was not very supportive, but Ella's receiving school was helpful, and the head of guidance there attended the meeting to share expectations around inclusion and acceptance at the new school.

Ella's therapist asked her to prepare an art project in which Ella took a paper bag and, on the outside, drew herself as she thought she appeared to others. On the inside of the bag, she placed items that represented who she really was. The therapist walked the kids through the bag exercise and asked whether everyone should be able to have their inside match their outside. It was a powerful moment, as all the kids agreed that this was a basic right. While not everyone accepted our invitation to this meeting, none of those who did were negative. Many parents thanked us for sharing and entrusting them with this information.

So Ella spent seventh and eighth grade at Boston Latin School presenting in her identified gender. Despite nearly three dozen students knowing about the transition, she chose to be stealth at the school and, while I did not agree with that choice, her dad and I fully supported her. As one might imagine, rumors began to spread before long, and although our daughter told us at the time that things were fine, bit by bit we learned that her experience was more difficult than we knew. There was a whisper campaign (which we assumed), but there were also threats, including a time when a boy she didn't know tweeted that he would "find her, knock her out, and pull down her pants" to prove she was a boy. Because the boy didn't go to her school, there was nothing her school could do to protect her or to punish him.

As Ella approached high school, she decided to "come out" and also to transfer to a new school, one that focused on the arts and that was known for an accepting climate. Two and a half years later, she is now a junior at Boston Arts Academy (BAA) and spending a semester studying in California. Her experience at BAA has been amazing, full of support and encouragement—not just for her—but for all the students in the school. When I pause to think about why this community works, it seems that it's made up of all the kids who may not have "fit in" elsewhere. There are no jocks, no "cool" kids, no one who is there against their will. It's high school, with all the typical ups and downs, but all the students choose to be there (it's a free, public school, but there is an audition process). Equally important, all the teachers choose to be there as well. Ella is thriving. She's accepted. She's happy, productive, and expanding her own horizons every day.

We've traveled many miles on our journey thus far. And what have we learned? The experience—and the gift of hindsight—has left me with lots of knowledge and a level of courage I wish I could step back in time to apply. If I could:

1. I would, from early on, let my child express herself more freely in and outside of our home. I'd have let her wear the sparkly shoes to school, the princess dress to Disney, the

fairy wings to the grocery store. It just didn't matter. She was already ostracized by most of the boys. She had enough social cues about what it meant to be a boy, and she consciously decided to ignore them. Supporting her choices would not have made a difference to anyone except to her—and that's what really mattered.

2. I'd push the school harder to examine the practices that hurt her the most. At the time, I thought the issues were ours to deal with. I advocated for her, but only to a point, only within a socially safe space. Now I know that changes in practice would benefit everyone: If we didn't socialize our kids to be girly girls or manly boys, we would find that our kids are all over the map when it comes to their gender, and that's okay. We would learn that on the spectrum of gender, there's a deep pink at one end and a dark blue at the other, and all kinds of crazy shades of purple in the middle. With regard to changes:
 - a. I would work harder to ensure that the adults in schools understand what it means to be transgender. They need to have myths unraveled. With understanding comes empathy and a larger desire to provide necessary supports.
 - b. I would advocate to eliminate lining up by gender. What does this practice accomplish? During elementary school this was one of the most uncomfortable times of the day for my child. It was obvious that our son had to leave his girl friends to get in line with the boys. He stood there with almost nothing to contribute as they chattered about trucks, basketball, and Spiderman. He felt lost in that line. Order is necessary in school, but lines could easily be formed by name or number, or table grouping (the Dolphins, followed by the Lions, and then the Bears).
 - c. I would recommend that show-and-tell be topical, aligning with what kids are learning in school, or maybe be eliminated altogether. I can't even recall the benefits of show-and-tell, if there are any; I just remember the high stakes of bringing in special things that other kids would like—and the worry I felt about what would happen if kids thought my son was weird for bringing a doll.
 - d. I would encourage lesson plans that promote building character and empathy, as our child's amazing second-grade teacher did. We told Ms. Mason early on about our son's interest in dolls and in spending time with the girls, and that we were okay with this behavior at school. She responded by making a point of reading books to the students about girls who liked building forts and boys who liked to cook or play dress-up. She supported our needs, but she also supported the needs of other families who were navigating their own unique paths. She saw

everything that happened in her classroom as a learning opportunity, including the fact that there was no shame in marching to your own drummer.

- e. I'd push to get rid of seating assignments at lunch. For 30 minutes a day, every day in grades four, five, and six, my child sat with boys who barely spoke to him, who called him "UGG" boy (for his pre-Tom Brady fashion trend), and who called him gay. There is simply nothing to gain by mandating that boys sit with boys and vice versa. Moreover, lunch is a great opportunity to give kids voice about how they spend their limited free time at school.
- f. I would say that we should design schools and classrooms with the same creative thinking we employ when we consider students with special needs, using the theory of Universal Design. To that end, we might strip labels such as girl and boy out of our classroom and seek out identifiers that associate with students' interests, cultures, or special abilities. We might encourage children to explore all the activity centers in our early education classrooms, reducing the ostracism of those who don't "fit" in the construction or dress-up area; we might minimize the stereotypical use of pink and blue and purposefully weave in the use of these colors where they are least expected; we might include a more diverse array of books in the reading centers. We would spend more time accounting for children in the margins—whether these students are differently abled, or homeless, or transgender—understanding that those who live in the center will securely be swept up in our best practices. For when we meet the needs of those with the least access, do we not ensure access for everyone?

Maybe that's the whole point. We no longer treat children with disabilities as though they have—or are—a problem. It's time we come to the realization that all our children (truly, all of us) have unique needs and perspectives, and none of these should be seen in a negative light. Rather, how do we use this uniqueness to build a better experience?

We should set our sights on an educational environment that welcomes differences, maybe one that even treats differences as gifts. For many years, our family lived in fear that our child would be a social outcast and that she would be physically harmed for her differences. Education would look markedly different in a setting where each stakeholder viewed differences as an opportunity to contribute a varied and important perspective. Imagine if we raised all our kids, at home and in school, in this way. It took our family a long time to get to where we are now, longer than I wish it had. Certainly, I have

moments of regret, but I also have moments of pride—and I am able to recognize more moments of growth than I can count. Our experience can be an opportunity for others. As a society, we don't have to keep making the same mistakes.

From bathrooms to book selections, lunch lines to curriculum choices, it is time we rethink the education experience for our children. Whether it's through home visits, high-quality parent-teacher conferences, or some other forum, educators need to get to know their students and plan the school experience to address unique needs and assets. Rather than steering away from “difficult” issues, turn towards them, learn about them, and use the teachable moments to develop empathy and understanding in our kids today—and in the next generation of educators, community leaders, business people, and health and human service providers.

Finally, I want to acknowledge my brother-in-law, Jon Snyder, a former Bank Street College faculty member and an unwavering fan of my daughter, for introducing me to the people responsible for this series. I also want to thank my husband, Vann, whose love for our daughter is as fierce as my own, and most importantly, Ella, for openly and honestly sharing her amazing self with us, and for allowing me to share what is really her story.



As assistant superintendent for the public school district in Lawrence, Massachusetts, **Denise M. Snyder** has oversight for community, family, and student engagement. Prior to this role, she led enrollment and school transition activities in Boston Public Schools. Denise earned her bachelor's degree in public administration from the University of Saint Joseph and completed her graduate studies at Boston College. She is the mother to a transgender child, who transitioned while a student in Boston Public Schools.

Changing the Shape of the Landscape: Sexual Diversity Frameworks and the Promise of Queer Literacy Pedagogy in the Elementary Classroom

Cammie Kim Lin

Describing how she became a queer-inclusive teacher—even while working in a conservative community—Jennifer, a veteran English teacher, said:

At the time I don't think I was aware of what was happening, other than to say that, eventually, cracks of light were coming into a space they hadn't been in before. And I just think once you have one crack and another crack and then light, it starts changing the shape of the landscape.

The landscape Jennifer describes started with clear boundaries demarcating sexual and gender identities and experiences: “normal” meant heterosexual and gender conforming. Everything else was deviant, yet still easy to categorize and essentialize. As a young woman struggling to understand her own sexuality and pushing back against her socially conservative upbringing and education, cracks of light—her growing understanding of the intricacies of sexuality, identity, and experience—began to change the shape of that landscape. Over time, she developed a commitment to providing an education that, unlike her own, creates the conditions for exploring the depth and complexity of the landscape.

Jennifer is a teacher I had the honor of knowing while conducting a qualitative research study of teachers who make their classrooms inclusive of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer or questioning (LGBTQ) issues and content. Growing out of that study, as well as work in a range of other educational contexts, this article focuses on elementary education and children's literature. It aims to engage in a conversation not only about the value of including LGBTQ content in the classroom, but *queering* pedagogy in a way that disrupts narrow understandings and beliefs about sexual and gender identity and experience.

Queer-Inclusive Education

Queer-inclusive education can be described as teaching that demonstrates a commitment to acknowledging sexual and gender identities other than those present in traditional classrooms and curriculum (the heteronormative, gender-normative status quo). At its best, it moves well beyond LGBTQ-inclusive education (intended to benefit children who may be LGBTQ-identified or from families with an LGBTQ-identified family member) toward an inclusive, critical education for *all* children. Thankfully, the twenty-first century has ushered in a period where many people working with children—teachers, counselors, parents, and others—articulate a commitment to addressing LGBTQ issues. What is needed now is a commitment to examine the underpinnings and implications of that work, including its goals and effects.

A significant finding in my research study was that educators sometimes include LGBTQ content in ways that essentialize queer identities and further entrench heteronormativity, if not homophobia. By working to critically examine the theoretical underpinnings and implications of queer-inclusive practices, educators can make better-informed choices about what and how we teach. The following overview of several sexual diversity frameworks, based on the different practices and perspectives of queer-inclusive educators, aims to serve as a tool for such an examination.

Sexual Diversity Frameworks

Each of the frameworks can be understood as a worldview, a way of describing a stance that, implicitly or explicitly, is conveyed to students through literature, curriculum, and instruction. Conscious or not, one or more of these frameworks informs every educator's pedagogy. This typology of frameworks shares some characteristics with Goldstein, Russell, & Daley's (2007) analysis of anti-homophobia education practices, which they describe as "safe moments," which promote tolerance of LGBTQ individuals; "positive moments," which seek to increase visibility of and social justice for LGBTQ individuals; and "queering moments," which disrupt heteronormativity.

My research revealed that in many cases, teachers' personal worldviews and pedagogical commitments don't match their practices. For example, a teacher (or any other adult engaged with young people) may feel philosophically and pedagogically committed to teaching in a way that respects and normalizes a full range of sexual and gender identities (or fluid identities), yet engage in practices that reinforce heteronormativity and the gender binary (the reduction of gender to strict male/female expressions).

This is unsurprising considering the heterosexist—if not homophobic and transphobic—environment in which we all live.

So pervasive are heterosexist ideals and assumptions that a commitment to respecting and normalizing sexual diversity is not enough. What it illustrates is the importance of the Freirian concept of praxis (Freire, 1970), the continual act of action and transformation that results from critical reflection. By critically examining our practices, we can better understand whether they match our commitments. And when they don't, we can seek to strengthen the theoretical underpinnings that ground our pedagogies and develop practices to match.

To that end, I present the following sexual diversity frameworks. For each, I begin with an overview, followed by a brief discussion of literature that fits the framework, and then a description of related pedagogy. It is important to note that there is overlap between the frameworks, and not all worldviews, texts, or practices fit neatly into just one. It is also important to note that texts and pedagogies are not locked together. A heterosexist text, even a homophobic one, can be effectively used in a queer framework. Just as a racist novel can be read critically, so can a heterosexist children's book. The nuances of this should become clearer in the pedagogy sections in each framework.

1. *Homophobic/Heterosexist Framework*

A homophobic/heterosexist framework supports the belief that the only “normal” sexual identity is heterosexual and gender expressions are feminine female and masculine male. Anything else is considered a deviation from the norm, and therefore abnormal. Expressions of this belief are called heteronormative. Assumptions of heteronormativity and privileging heterosexual expressions and experiences is called heterosexism. This is the traditional framework undergirding most American education.

Homophobic/heterosexist literature. Literature that largely, if not completely, neglects the existence of LGBTQ people and experiences is heterosexist. That which derides characters who do not conform to gender or sexuality binaries is homophobic (and/or transphobic). The vast majority of children's literature is heterosexist. A popular argument rationalizing the genre's heterosexism is that young children have no sense of sexuality yet, so to expose them to LGBTQ content or characters is inappropriate. This argument neglects the fact that children are already in contact with people who are LGBTQ—they (or we) just may not be aware of it.

More to the point, nearly all literature has sexuality embedded in it; when that sexuality is hetero, it's assumed normalcy renders it invisible. For example, any children's book in which a character has two parents, one daddy and one mommy, or where a prince seeks his princess, or a maid serves her master and mistress of the house, or where mother duck and father duck seek a safe home for their ducklings, reinforces the normalcy of heterosexuality and established gender roles. Individually, any such book may be unproblematic. Collectively, however—when an entire reading list is full of heteronormative titles—the effect is troubling.

Homophobic/heterosexist pedagogy. Homophobic/heterosexist pedagogy may restrict curriculum to heteronormative texts (as is the norm) and operate as if the whole world is heterosexual and gender conforming. A 2012 national survey of elementary schools by the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) reveals that only 18% of students report having “learned about families with gay or lesbian parents (families that have two dads or two moms)” (p. xx). Among K-2nd grade teachers, only 6% report including representations of families with gay, lesbian, or bisexual parents. Among 5th – 6th grade teachers, 22% do (p. 96).

In addition to blind neglect of queer issues, homophobic/heterosexist pedagogy may present itself in the seemingly benign language of educators. If a math problem asks, for example, how many roses Billy bought for Jasmine if he gave her two every day of the week, but never asks how many Janie brought for Delilah, heterosexism is at play. When literature discussions center on the feelings of girls and the actions of boys, gender stereotypes are reinforced. And when homophobia is glossed over—when a homophobic joke or comment comes up in class, when a student uses “gay” as a negative term, or when there's a more subtle “that's kind of weird” comment about a character who doesn't adhere to gender norms—heterosexism, homophobia, and/or transphobia are reinforced. In these ways and more, homophobic/heterosexist pedagogy is pervasive and insidious.

2. Tolerance/Visibility Framework

A tolerance/visibility framework is one in which the existence of gay, lesbian, and sometimes transgender people, culture, and content is acknowledged. Methods might include brief acknowledgment of a gay or lesbian author's or historical figure's sexual identity or of prominent gay/lesbian political or historical events; the inclusion of books with gay, lesbian, or transgender characters in the classroom library; and reprimanding students for overtly anti-gay or anti-trans expressions. The motivation for these methods may include a desire to let gay, lesbian, trans,

or questioning students (or students with gay or lesbian parents) see themselves represented in the classroom, if not the curriculum. It may accompany a caveat that the inclusion of such content neither promotes nor condemns such “lifestyles,” but that everyone deserves respect. It may be seen as the “safest” framework for teachers who fear controversy.

Tolerance/visibility literature. A classic example of tolerance/visibility literature is *Heather Has Two Mommies* (Newman & Souza, 1989/2009). The intent of such books is to teach students that there are children who have same-sex parents, and moreover, that they are just like children with typical families. They go to the park when it’s sunny and stay inside and bake cookies when it’s rainy. The message, in effect: no matter how different we may seem sometimes, really, we are all the same.

Since the controversial publication of *Heather Has Two Mommies*, the LGBTQ tolerance/visibility genre has grown to include titles such as *Daddy, Papa, and Me* (Newman & Thompson, 2009), *Oh, The Things Mommies Do!: What Could Be Better Than Having Two?* (Thompkins & Evans, 2009), *Zak’s Safari: a Story about Donor-Conceived Kids of Two-Mom Families* (Tyner & Ciaee, 2014), *Jacob’s New Dress* (Hoffman & Hoffman, 2014), and *My Princess Boy* (Kilodavis & DeSimone, 2010). The titles themselves reveal the function of the books: to promote tolerance and awareness of LGBTQ people and their families.

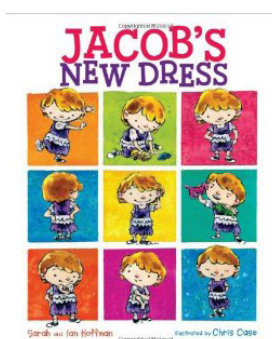
The description for *A Tale of Two Daddies* (Oelschlagel & Blackwood, 2010) demonstrates the lack of commitment required by such books: it “introduces a type of family increasingly visible in our society. Neither favoring nor condemning, this book reflects a child’s practical and innocent look at the adults who nurture and love her” (Amazon.com, 2016).

Books, however, do not always have the intended effect. An interesting book to consider in terms of this framework is the beloved children’s book, *William’s Doll* (Zolotow, 1972). Credited for inspiring the best-selling song, *Free to Be... You and Me* (Rodgers & Harnick, 1972), it has generally been described as liberating boys from gender stereotypes. At the same time, the book depicts homophobia (William is called a “sissy” and a “creep,” and his father discourages William’s desire for a doll)—and may actually introduce young readers to these concepts for the first time.

One question, then, is whether the book promotes tolerance or, despite its best efforts, homophobia. The first time I read it to my own children, the dialogue certainly gave me pause. (I hesitate to admit, I edited as I read!) Had they read it on their own, I worry that they might have absorbed the idea that most of the people around William think he is a creep because he wants a doll—rather than the idea that a boy’s desire for a doll is healthy (a belief encouraged by William’s grandmother). If my son had played with a doll before reading the book, would he suddenly be aware that others might see it as creepy? How much of his reading would be dependent upon our conversations? Entertaining these questions, *William’s Doll* serves as a reminder that texts are not locked into one framework, but rather, that the pedagogy at work when reading or teaching the text is just as, if not more, vital.

Among those intended for upper-elementary students, most queer-inclusive titles fit more squarely in the social justice, or even queer, frameworks. Nancy Garden, pioneering author of the lesbian young adult novel *Annie on My Mind* (1982), has written a middle grades series called the *Candlestone Inn Mysteries* (2004; 2010), featuring a family—two kids and their two moms—who encounter mysteries at the inn they run. These novels, as well as the titles in the queer framework described below, can serve as tolerance/visibility literature, and indeed, one might assume that is why Garden wrote them. At the same time, taken as just part of a whole body of literature that includes LGBTQ content and characters, the *Candlestone Inn Mysteries* could also fit in the queer framework, as I will explain shortly.

Tolerance/visibility pedagogy. Closely parallel to traditional multicultural education, tolerance/visibility pedagogy may look like a traditional pedagogy that includes a sprinkling of queer-inclusive content for the sake of representation. It is often positioned as for students who may have LGBTQ family members or who may themselves identify as LGBTQ. In this sense, it is less a pedagogy than a curricular addition.



Sometimes people operating within a tolerance/visibility framework address homophobia by suggesting we should accept LGBTQ people because they are just like straight people, as if to say, “Look, Heather has two mommies, and they aren’t harmful or weird. They are just like straight people.” Or it is believed that merely adding or “representing” people who are “different” is valuable. Kumashiro (2002) notes:

There are a number of problems with adding differences to the curriculum, not the least of which is the recognition that the very act of naming and including difference could operate in contradictory ways. ...[T]he focus on difference fails to change that which is not different—namely, the norm (pp. 55-57).

To change the norm—to challenge heteronormativity—we need to look beyond a tolerance/visibility framework.

3. *Social Justice Frameworks*

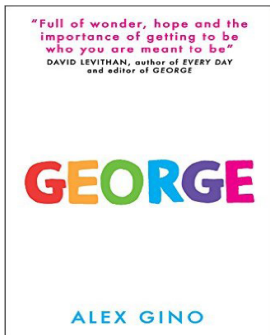
Several related frameworks fit into this category. Because they are closely related and often work in unison, it is useful to consider them together. An anti-homophobia framework implies a social justice approach, with the explicit goal of reducing homophobia. This framework generally assumes LGBTQ students are experiencing social and personal struggles about their sexual identity, and also may assume that straight students (and many LGBTQ students themselves) are homophobic. It encourages empathy for, if not acceptance of, LGBTQ people.

An anti-heterosexist framework also implies social justice commitments, but the emphasis is on disrupting the assumption that heterosexuality is the ideal and “normal” sexual identity (whereas an anti-homophobia framework emphasizes teaching that LGBTQ people should be treated well, regardless of whether one sees them as “normal”). Students are taught to deconstruct the homophobia and heterosexism that exist in society—as seen in the classroom, in literature, culture, history, politics, and so forth.

An anti-heterosexist framework seeks to convey an understanding (and critique) of the ways our society privileges heterosexuality and renders LGBTQ identities inferior or invisible. Methods include teaching numerous books with LGBTQ content; comprehensively including gay/lesbian history; calling students’ attention to authors’ and characters’ sexual identities, even when they are straight; and encouraging students to recognize the heterosexism that exists around us—and to see LGBTQ identities as normal, not different.

Social justice literature. While the majority of queer-inclusive children’s picture books tend to stay safely in the realm of tolerance/visibility literature, a few straddle the tolerance/visibility and social justice frameworks. For example, *In Our Mothers’ House* (2009), by Patricia Polacco, focuses on celebrating same-sex parents Marmee and Meema and depicting their family as

just like any other on the block. But they also depict some homophobic neighbors. When one neighbor points her finger in Marmee and Meema’s faces, snarling, “I don’t appreciate what you two are!” (n.p.), Meema explains that her homophobia grows out of fear and misunderstanding. Other neighbors band around the family to show their love and support.



Queer-inclusive upper elementary titles (the numbers of which are increasing steadily, if slowly) tend to include more direct social justice commitments. For example, *George*, a middle grades novel by Alex Gino (2015), is a transgender coming-out story in which the protagonist, a transgender girl named George, struggles to get others, including her family, to accept her gender identity. It illustrates struggle, but also joy, and is as compelling as it is, ultimately, hopeful.



The Misfits (2003), a middle grades novel by James Howe, features four friends—one of whom is openly gay—who are all targets of name-calling. The friends successfully stand up to bullying as they seek to transform the culture of their school. The story has a strong no-name-calling and anti-homophobia theme—so strong that it inspired GLSEN’s national No-Name-Calling-Week program. Howe also wrote companion novels featuring three of the friends: *Totally Joe*, about the openly gay character, *Addie on the Inside*, and *Also Known as Elvis*.

Social justice pedagogy emphasizes the injustices experienced by LGBTQ people, seeking to interrupt hate. Methods might include prohibiting overtly homophobic language, teaching literature that has an overtly anti-homophobic theme, teaching about the ways LGBTQ people have been discriminated against, or conducting lessons intended to convey an understanding of the impact homophobia has on LGBTQ students. A primary objective of social justice pedagogy is to teach that LGBTQ people ought to be treated the same as straight people. GLSEN is well known for supporting social justice education, particularly as it applies to LGBTQ issues. In addition to conducting important research and providing professional development, the GLSEN website offers numerous curricular resources, including lesson and unit plans. For better and for worse (as I will explain), social justice education often works as a stand-alone addition to existing curricula.

4. *Queer Framework*

A queer framework is anti-heteronormative, rejecting the notion that heterosexuality is “normal.” It calls attention to homophobia and heterosexism, but rather than assert that LGBTQ identities ought to be treated the same as heterosexual identities, a queer framework suggests we examine the beliefs that sexual identity is fixed and LGBTQ people should strive to be viewed and treated the same as straight people. The content might be similar to that of an anti-heterosexism framework, but the emphasis is on troubling the implications and assumptions embedded in the content. Methods include teaching queer theory and asking students to apply a queer lens to their reading of text and the world, and challenging homophobia and heterosexism not only on the grounds that they are hurtful and unjust, but also because they are based on heteronormative understandings of sexual identity.

A queer framework troubles the very idea of “normal.” The goal shifts away from encouraging understanding and tolerance of LGBTQ people and toward developing a critical lens that enables students to understand and accept *all* complexity—in literature, history, their own lives, and the world. This is also a goal for the educator, as possessing a queer lens inevitably results in instruction that is more queer-inclusive.

Queer literature. There are a number of good non-heteronormative children’s books. For the youngest, for example, there is *Everywhere Babies* (Meyers & Frazee, 2001), a simple picture book that begins, “Every day, everywhere, babies are born—fat babies, thin babies, small babies, tall babies, winter and spring babies, summer and fall babies” (n.p.). The story is, quite simply, about the love and care babies receive. The text makes no specific reference to family structure. Frazee’s skillful illustrations depict families of all kinds: interracial, intergenerational, single parent, and same sex.

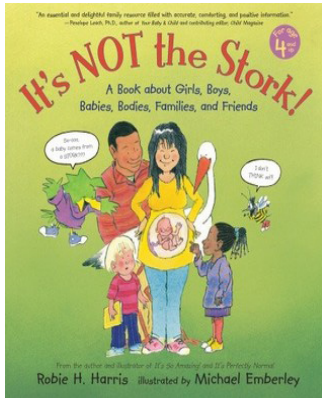
There’s also *Uncle Bobby’s Wedding* (Brannen, 2008), about Chloe, a girl—well, a guinea pig, actually—whose favorite uncle gets married (to another male guinea pig, incidentally). Chloe worries he won’t have as much time for her anymore.

“Mama, I don’t understand. How can Uncle Bobby get married?”

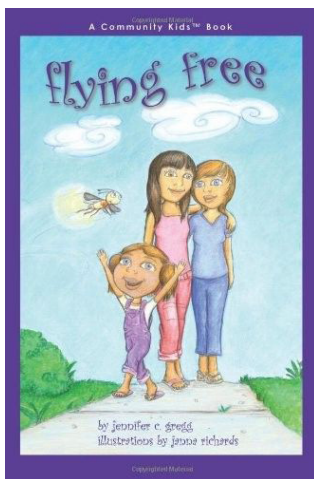
“Bobby and Jamie love each other,” said Mama. “When grown-up people love each other that much, they want to be married.”

“But,” said Chloe, “Bobby is my special uncle. I don’t want him to get married.”

We realize quite quickly that Chloe's concerns have nothing to do with the fact that Bobby is marrying a man, just that she might not get as much attention as she's used to.



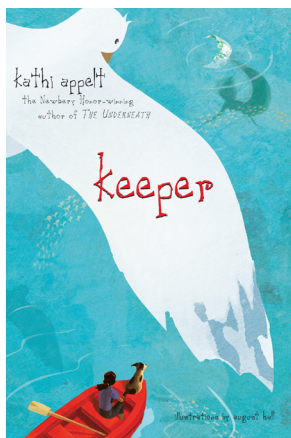
The *It's Not the Stork!* series (Harris & Emberley, 2008, 2014a, 2014b) of body books for kids (three titles, geared to ages four through teen) provides a rare example of non-heteronormative reference books. While most other body books describe only heterosexual feelings and encounters, Harris and Emberley present a full range of experiences, normalizing non-heterosexual feelings and encounters and including multiple means of getting pregnant and becoming a family. The illustrations are exceptionally inclusive, and the text is accessible and matter-of-fact.



In one early reader, *Flying Free* (Gregg & Richards, 2004), Violet, the young protagonist, captures a firefly to keep as a nightlight and pet. Eventually she realizes that to be happy, the firefly can't live in captivity. It needs to fly free in order to shine. Violet's two mommies help her to realize this. It sounds as if it fits within a queer framework: a story about a firefly and a girl who happens to have two mommies. Yet the cover illustration betrays a slightly different orientation: the two moms are displayed prominently on the cover, arms around one another. Named Mama Red and Mommy Blue, they appear on many pages, usually in an affectionate embrace. For a story about a girl and a firefly, Mama Red and Mommy Blue get an inordinate amount of exposure.

Considering the dearth of same-sex parents in children's literature as a whole, there's certainly value in that. However, *Flying Free* doesn't come off as a picture book written in a queer framework. Instead, it presents just the way it is described on Amazon, as "a picture book for children of LGBT and diverse families." In this way, it actually fits better in the tolerance/visibility framework.

For upper elementary children, there are some titles that work to disrupt the assumption that everyone is heterosexual simply by including characters (typically secondary) who are—or



appear to be—in same-sex relationships. In these queer texts, the characters’ sexualities are only important insofar as they are a part of what makes the characters who they are. Sexuality—and struggle over it—is not a focal plot point. For example, Pseudonymous Bosch’s *The Name of the Book is Secret* (2007) includes two male family friends who live together and run an antique shop, and Kathi Appelt’s magical novel, *Keeper* (2012), includes a gay couple. In this way, the Nancy Garden series cited earlier (*Candlestone Inn Mysteries*) could be described as queer, as well.

For further reading to support the analysis of children’s literature in terms of a queer lens, see “Beyond Normalization: An Analysis of Heteronormativity in Children’s Picture Books” (Stafford, 2009), which offers a series of critical questions to ask about literature. For example: “Is homophobia dealt with in a way that shows homophobia as the problem to be challenged as opposed to families with same-sex relationships needing to justify that they are healthy and not damaging their children?” (p. 171).

The term **queer literacy pedagogy** evokes—and is informed by—several fields. It brings to mind queer pedagogy (Britzman, 1995; Bryson & de Castell, 1993; Pinar, 1998; Winans, 2006), which draws from queer theory (Butler, 1990/2006; Foucault, 1976/1998; Sedgwick, 1990; and others) and critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2005, 2011; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997; and others). Queer pedagogy was perhaps first described by Bryson and de Castell (1993) as “a radical form of educative praxis implemented deliberately to interfere with, to intervene in, the production of ‘normalcy’ in schooled subjects” (p. 285). Queer pedagogy has remained largely academic, seldom making its way into the discourse of classroom teachers. And while critical pedagogy does make its way into the discourse of some teacher preparation programs, it seldom gives more than a nod to the commitments of queer pedagogy.

Queer Literacy Pedagogy

The term queer literacy pedagogy also evokes critical literacy, which Ira Shor (1999) describes this way: Critical literacy thus challenges the status quo in an effort to discover alternative paths for self and social development. This kind of literacy—words rethinking worlds, self dissenting in society—connects the political and the personal, the public and the private, the global and the local, the economic and the pedagogical, for rethinking our lives and for promoting justice in

place of inequity. ... Essentially, then, critical literacy is language use that questions the social construction of the self. When we are critically literate, we examine our ongoing development, to reveal the subjective positions from which we make sense of the world and act in it (n.p.).

The more functional nature of critical literacy—its focus on the way language is used to create and re-create selves and worlds—poises it to be a practical tool, shaped by its theoretical foundations. Add the theoretical commitments of queer pedagogy to that tool and you have what I describe as queer literacy pedagogy.

Theoretical Underpinnings

Numerous educators (R. Miller, 2000; Blackburn & Buckley, 2005; DePalma & Atkinson, 2009; Blackburn, 2011; Helmer, 2015) have taken up the task of examining the theoretical and practical implications of queer-inclusive education, particularly focused on secondary classrooms. With upper-elementary students in mind, Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan (2014) examine LGBT-inclusive chapter books through a queer lens, working to “disrupt normative representations of a range of identity categories” (p. 2), complicating representations of homonormativity.

Most recently, the authors included in Darla Linville (the guest editor of this Occasional Paper Series) and David Lee Carlson’s (2016) edited collection, *Beyond Borders: Queer Eros and Ethos (Ethics) in LGBTQ Young Adult Literature*, have grappled with the complexities of teaching queer young adult literature. They explore the queer theory, identities, and representations at work in queer-inclusive literature and offer examples of how queer-inclusive young adult literature can be used in secondary school settings.

Two authors in *Beyond Borders* discuss queer literacy frameworks. Helmer (2016) describes a multidimensional queer literacies framework that draws on critical literacies, anti-oppressive education, and queer pedagogy, using that framework to explore the experience of a teacher and her students, high school juniors and seniors, in a Gay and Lesbian Literature elective. sj Miller (2015, 2016), describes a queer literacy framework (QLF) that can affirm the experiences of queer youth by disrupting normativity and fostering “(a)gender and (a)sexuality self-determination.” Miller outlines practical applications of QLF, including refraining from presumptions about students’ sexuality and gender, understanding gender as performative and flexible, opening space for students to self-define, engaging in social and historical critiques, and advocating for equity.

The term queer literacy pedagogy is used by Walsh (2007) as a “starting point for interrupting discourses of heterosexism and homophobia, as well as other forms of discrimination rampant across textbooks, young adult fiction, and popular media texts.” My own application of the term queer literacy pedagogy attempts to bring together all of these ideas in a way that may be employed in any classroom.

Principles for a Queer Literacy Pedagogy

Here is a set of eight principles that can be used to inform a queer literacy pedagogy.

1. *Employ “queer” as a verb.*

Constantly challenge – or queer—assumptions about what is normal. Support students’ critical literacy skills in a way that develops and sharpens a queer lens for reading and writing the world. In an elementary classroom, this might include encouraging students to question labels and assumptions about people, real or fictional. For example, when students encounter gender stereotypes, encourage the disruption of them, challenging what it means to be a girl or a boy. When heteronormative families are depicted, teach students to challenge the assumption about what is typical.

2. *Employ both social justice education and queer pedagogy.*

Demonstrate a commitment to working for change, to end homophobia and heterosexism, but at the same time, work to disrupt the very foundations upon which homophobia and heterosexism are built. Interrupt heteronormativity, as curriculum theorists Brent Davis and Dennis Sumara (1999) put it.

3. *Build a strong queer-relevant knowledge base.*

Teachers must work to be knowledgeable about LGBTQ issues, politics, and history. In particular, elementary and secondary school English teachers should be familiar with and read a lot of queer children’s and young adult literature.

4. *Work against the representation model.*

Do not speak and teach as though LGBTQ content is representative of a singular experience or static sexual identity. Be clear that stories, for example, are useful for understanding the range of possibilities of human experience, not that they represent a singular experience or identity.

5. *Create conditions for safe, honest exploration and self-reflection.*

This includes making the space to support homophobic students in potential transformation rather than simply shaming or silencing them.

6. *Maintain high expectations.*

Be prepared for, but don't expect, homophobia. Work from the assumption that young people are capable of mature discussion, complex insight, and real transformation.

7. *Expect and respond to changing dynamics.*

Kids grow and adapt and change far more rapidly than adults. Understand that one class, one student, may change far more rapidly than we anticipate.

8. *Advance transformation.*

View education as at once about intellectual, academic, social, and individual growth, and teach in an effort to advance transformation in all of these areas. Position literacy as a tool for this transformation.

Change the Shape of the Landscape

During a workshop at a conference for the National Council of Teachers of English, a participant asked if the four frameworks outlined above represent a linear development, with the goal being a queer framework. My response: linear, no. Queer as a goal, yes, but not simply. To think of the frameworks as representing a linear development would be decidedly un-queer, wouldn't it? Not everyone develops the same way; not everyone sees things the same way.

As long as LGBTQ people and experiences are largely ignored in curriculum, there is value in working toward visibility, although we would be better served by acceptance and embrace than "tolerance." Tolerance alone will never be enough, as it will not advance personal and social transformation.

As long as homophobia, transphobia, and any other queer bigotry and inequity exist, we have a need for explicit social justice work, for making clear that anti-gay language is hurtful and unacceptable. But that will never be enough, either. We need all of that and a commitment to the principles of queer literacy pedagogy if we are to create enough cracks of light to change the shape of the landscape.

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Missing Persons' Report! Where are the Transgender Characters in Children's Picture Books?

Ashley Lauren Sullivan and Laurie Lynne Urraro

When thinking about the factors that impact early childhood education, we invariably reflect on how the curriculum represents (or fails to represent) issues of gender, and specifically how gender is portrayed in classroom picture books. What role does reading curricula play in relation to gender? Does the corpus of books available in the classrooms provide an accurate representation of the gender spectrum? That is, does the elementary classroom book selection include non-heteronormative gender ontologies? What trends or patterns of gender emerge in the picture books selected for the early childhood/elementary education classroom?

These queries drove our research to investigate the holdings of picture books for children ages three to eight that contain characters who exhibit a range of gender identities. We specifically queried what, if any, transgender characters appear in these texts. Because there are 56.6 million Spanish-speaking individuals¹ living in the United States as of 2015 (U.S. Census Bureau), and, 3.4% of Spanish-speaking individuals identify as LGBTQ, we found it imperative to consider the number of texts available in both English and Spanish (Gates & Newport, 2012) and those that are bilingual. Additionally, regarding LGBTQ issues that affect Spanish-speaking individuals, to quote Samantha Rosenthal in *LGBT Hispanics Juggle Heritage and Sexuality*, “According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Spanish-speaking individuals constitute 17 percent of the U.S. population as of July 2013, making them the largest ethnic or racial minority. It is estimated that by the year 2060 that proportion will increase to 31 percent. Among the total population, a report from the UCLA Williams Institute found that an estimated 1.4 million U.S. Spanish-speaking adults—or 4.3 percent—are LGBT.” Our overarching research project seeks to answer the question: In what manner are English- and Spanish-speaking trans characters represented in children's books?

¹ For the purposes of this paper, we shall use the term ‘Spanish-speaking individuals’ instead of ‘Hispanic individuals’, due to the negative impression the latter term often connotes.

LGBTQ Issues in Education

Although there is increasingly more acceptance of LGBTQ issues in educational curricula today, transgender characters continue to escape representation in picture books (Naidoo, 2012). This is the case not only with children's books written in English, but also in Spanish. To date, there are very few trans characters in picture books in English, almost none in Spanish, and no bilingual English-Spanish children's picture books. Research tells us that a lack of representation of minority groups in picture books is harmful to the children who belong to that group (Hamilton, Anderson, Broaddus & Young, 2006).

Our study aims to query this lacuna, in order to describe a phenomenon that we refer to as the "spectral status" of trans characters in children's bilingual picture books. We gathered over 60 English, Spanish, and English-Spanish children's picture books and examined them critically for multiple components, such as instantiations of trans characters, plot arcs, characters' gender identities and expressions, character race, and the function of other characters present in the texts.

This paper discusses our findings with regard to the types of transgender individuals present in children's books, what their roles were within the texts, and what the overarching ramifications of inclusion in these texts were for readers². Our project ultimately seeks to promote understanding of and sensitivity toward multiple gender ontologies, particularly with regard to trans characters, in the hopes of advancing societal acceptance and approval of such gender identities and expressions.

LGBTQ Facts and Statistics

One in 500 children in the U.S. identify as 'transgender' (Brill & Pepper, 2008) and 1.4 million U.S. Spanish-speaking adults identifying as LGBTQ (Gates, 2011). With this upsurge of out LGBTQ individuals, there has been an expressed need for recognition of such individuals in children's books. Research as early as the 1970s (Ashton, 1978) has demonstrated that stereotypical presentations of gender in children's books negatively influence readers' behaviors and attitudes (Ashton, 1978; Schau & Scott, 1984; Anderson & Hamilton, 2005; Hamilton, Anderson, Broaddus, & Young, 2006). Over the last forty years, very little research has been devoted to LGBTQ youth of color, and even less to transgender youth of color (Cahill & Holmes, 2004) indicating that research that identifies such deficiencies and seeks to ameliorate them is a priority.

² The thrust of this paper is to present the data from our findings which pointedly signal certain conclusions when it comes to the make-up of children's picture books that contain non-normative gender ontologies. These findings will be discussed later in this paper.

Theoretical Underpinnings of LGBTQ Ontologies

While society has historically pressured children to arrive at conclusions about their gender, “young children are still actively in the process of constructing these concepts” (Casper & Schultz, 1999). LGBTQ youth have faced a great many obstacles. For example, there is little acknowledgement of trans youth in school curricula and daily education (Singh & Burnes, 2009). LGBTQ youth at school are two times as likely to be bullied than their heterosexual counterparts, often times are more harshly disciplined by schools, and are at increased risk for issues with mental health, truancy, and attaining higher education (GLSEN Survey, 2017). As a result of school-related difficulties, LGBTQ youth are two times as likely to be placed in juvenile detention, with 20% of those in the juvenile delinquent system identifying as LGBTQ and 3.2 million LGBTQ youth at risk for ending up in the juvenile and criminal justice systems (GLSEN Survey, 2017). Transgender children are particularly likely to experience these difficulties due to heterosexist worldviews and the influence of rigid gender role dichotomies that do not allow for gender variations (Baker, 2002; DePalma & Atkinson, 2009).

Nonetheless, with a higher level of societal tolerance than ever before, more young people are able to identify with and embrace identities that are non-normative, non-binary, or queer. One of the theoretical underpinnings that helps to elucidate understanding of a more fluid gender ontology is queer theory. Emerging in the 1990s, queer theory arose from postmodern theory in response to socio-political currents and events in the previous decades as well as psychological and psycho-social studies of the self. From queer theory, we have gained a deeper understanding of the fluidity and socially constructed nature of gender.

Postmodernists such as Judith Butler (2006), Monique Wittig (1992), and Kate Bornstein (1994) stress the importance of shifting interest in signification from the middle to the margins, where interstitial gender ontologies are located and negotiated. Such theories of gender have made it possible to explain and argue for non-cisgender subjectivities that do not always subscribe to the heterosexual binaries in society.

For our project, we are especially interested in the tenets of queer theory that view the subject not as biologically predetermined but socially constructed, meaning that bodies are open to social forces and currents that act upon them, and that there is no one definable or static means by which bodies can or should be defined—they are multiple, varied, and diverse.

Actualizing our project: From book collection to data analysis (see Appendix)

In the summer/fall of 2015, we sought to locate all existing Spanish, English, and bilingual Spanish/English picture books for 3- to 8-year-old children containing transgender characters. We began with a search on Amazon.com and a basic Google search. We utilized a list of LGBTQ books located in the *Rainbow Family Collections* text (Naidoo, 2012). From the lists of LGBTQ books, we selected only the picture books that contained transgender characters. We also gathered information about independently published books from transgender support groups on social media.

Upon completion of these searches, we had a short list of texts in English, and none in Spanish. Although we believe that we located all books that exist in English, we acknowledge that there may be books that we did not find. However, if we were unable to locate them with all of our connections and resources, it would probably be even more difficult for a young child or a parent without university resources to find them.

We remained curious about whether any Spanish-language picture books contained transgender characters. As we could not locate any in the United States, we began contacting bookstores and libraries in progressive cities in Spain. This search yielded little, but led us to believe that we had located all books in Spain on this topic.

At the conclusion of our search, we had located 65 texts. We finished our project in October of 2015. Any books published after that date were not included in our study.

Initial Data Collection

Using inductive content analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008), we categorized data from the books using an Excel spreadsheet. We began with basic, demographic categories. These included: title of the book, publication year, author, language in which the text was written, assumed biological sex of main character/s, gender identity of main character/s (i.e., one's internal cognitive and emotive identification with a particular gender), and gender expression of main character/s or the external ways in which characters express their gender.

Identification of Themes

Then we sat together and read the books. We noticed some common plot themes. As these themes emerged, we incorporated associated categories into our data collection. The following areas were examined: whether or not the characters were human; the level of support (supportive, non-supportive, bullying, eventual acceptance) of parents, peers, and siblings; whether the character demonstrated a special talent or saved the day before being accepted; and whether there was a medical professional present to explain the main character's gender transition to others and encourage support for this transition (thus instantiating what we refer to as the 'hero narrative').

Finding a Rainbow: Categorizing the Characters

We acknowledge the richness and complexity of the gender spectrum (Bornstein & Bergman, 2010). Interestingly, the books we analyzed likewise depicted characters occupying different loci on this spectrum of gender. This was surprising, as we had not imagined how varied the characters' genders would be. Four major trends emerged with regard to gender identity of the characters in the 65 books.

We identified one group of characters as "non-binary," referring to a proclivity towards items and/or interests that are usually associated with a gender that is not assigned to them at birth. However, these individuals appear comfortable in their assigned birth gender, as indicated by utilizing names/pronouns/attire typically associated with their birth gender. An example of a text with non-binary characters is In *Christina's Toolbox* by Dianne Homan (1981), in which a young girl, Christina, enjoys making functional objects such as a bird feeder with tools. For example, "Christina loved to work with things in her toolbox. She could lift the smooth wooden lid and see her shiny tools inside ready to help her build things and fix things" (p. 4). Twenty-seven (42%) of the sixty-five books contained non-binary characters.

For the purpose of this article, we have excluded the findings related to only the non-binary texts. While they give us a more complete look at characters across the gender spectrum, we wanted to focus on transgender and gender-creative characters as well as characters whose gender is undisclosed and who, in the larger world, continue to struggle with bullying, lack of access to medical care, and increased rates of suicide (Kosciw, Greytak, Diaz, & Bartkiewicz, 2010).

We termed a second set of characters "gender-creative," that is, those individuals who blur gender boundaries by engaging in activities, wearing attire, or expressing interests in areas usually denoted as

clearly masculine or feminine. These characters may not necessarily wish to transition and also may feel comfortable with the name assigned to them at birth. They may also be gender fluid, not adhering strictly to typical gender bifurcations. An example of a text with gender-creative characters is *My Princess Boy* by Cheryl Kilodavis (2011), in which a young boy (referred to using male pronouns and adjectives) enjoys wearing dresses and looking like a princess. For example, the mother in the story states, “When we go shopping he is the happiest when looking at girls’ clothes” (*My Princess Boy*, para. 7). Gender-creative characters made up 19 (29%) of the books analyzed.

We termed a third group of characters “transgender.” We used this descriptor to discuss the characters that will transition, are in the process of transitioning, or have transitioned from their assigned birth gender to another gender. An example of a text with transgender characters is *I Am Jazz* by Jessica Herthel and Jazz Jennings, in which the main character (Jazz) was assigned male at birth but is in the process of transitioning to female, uses a female name, wears feminine clothing, and has a feminine identity. Quoting the text, “Mom and Dad told me I could start wearing girl clothes to school and growing my hair long. They even let me change my name to Jazz” (*I Am Jazz*, para. 16). Transgender characters were present in only 12 (18%) of the 65 books.

The remaining seven books (11%) contained characters whose gender was undisclosed, or contained multiple characters with varying gendered ontologies.³ For example, in the book *Are You a Boy or Are You a Girl?* (Savage & Fisher, 2015), a friend of the main character Tiny (whose gender is never disclosed) asks: “Tiny, are you a boy or are you a girl?” Tiny responds, “I am me!” (*Are You a Boy or Are You a Girl?*, para. 21, 22). In *All I Want To Be Is Me* (Rothblatt, 2011), multiple characters express the need for acceptance for who they are: “Don’t call me he. Don’t call me she. Please don’t assume who I must be. ‘Cuz I don’t feel like just one of these. I want to be all of me. All I want to be is me” (*All I Want To Be Is Me*, para. 5).

Of the 65 books, the following were available in Spanish: one gender undisclosed book, three gender non-binary books, two gender-creative books, and one transgender book. We did not find any bilingual Spanish-English books containing non-binary, gender-creative, or transgender characters.

³ For the purpose of discussion and ability to compare samples of more similar sizes, the books containing characters with multiple genders and the books containing characters with undisclosed genders are often combined.

Findings: Basic Demographic Information

Demographics of the 12 Transgender Books			
Dates of Publication	10/12 (83%) 2010-2015	2/12 (17%) 2007-2009	
Language	11 English	1 Spanish	0 Bilingual
Perceived Race	1 African-American	1 Spanish-speaking	10 White
Assumed Biological Sex	7 Male	4 Female	1 Undisclosed
Gender Identity	7 Female	4 Male	1 Transgender
Human or Non Human Characters	10 Human	2 Non-Human	

*The above chart reflects the basic demographics of the transgender books only.

Of the 12 books containing transgender characters, only one book was written in Spanish and there were no bilingual texts. The Spanish book is only available in Spain, and it took nearly nine months to obtain a copy, even with the help of Penn State's extensive library system.

There were 19 books with gender-creative characters, two of them in Spanish, and none were bilingual. There were five books with characters whose gender is undisclosed.⁴ One of these books was available in Spanish and no books were bilingual. Two books contained multiple characters (with different gender identities).⁵ No books were written in Spanish or contained bilingual text.

The stark absence of transgender books was startling to us. Over 20,000 children's books are published each year in the United States (American Library Association, 2010). We expected (perhaps hoped) to find more. The books written about transgender characters represented roughly 0.015% of the books published in 2014. Yet, transgender people account for 0.3 % of the population (Gates, 2011).

Publication Dates

There have been transgender people since the beginning of time (Borstein & Bergman, 2010). However,

⁴ Such as *Meet Polkadot*, in which the main character's gender is never specified clearly

⁵ Such as *All I Want To Be Is Me*, that presents multiple characters, each of which possesses a different gender constitution

until quite recently, trans people were unable to find representations of themselves within English and Spanish children's picture books. Of the few books that do exist, most of them were published quite recently. The first book containing a transgender character was published in 2009.

Quality of Books/Accessibility

Of the 12 books that included transgender characters, the majority were published utilizing small, independent, or self-published presses. *I Am Jazz* is the only book that we found to be widely available at mainstream bookstores and libraries in the United States. This is likely due to Jazz Jennings's exposure as a public figure in the media and its association with a reputable press (Herthel, Jennings & McNicholas, 2014). We were surprised that several of the books contained glaring grammar and spelling errors. Several of the books had rudimentary illustrations, much less eye-catching and enticing than those created by artists utilized by large presses. This poor quality of several of the texts is important to note. Perhaps for reasons of content that was deemed controversial, lack of quality, or both, none of the books about transgender characters have won any major children's picture book awards.

The books included in this study were largely inaccessible to children due to limited printing and because libraries, bookstores, schools, and childcare centers typically do not stock them on their shelves. They are available for purchase on the internet (where we located several of them), but this is prohibitive for many families, due to cost and limited access to online book selling websites. Some of the books were available through our large university's extensive interlibrary loan system. In most cases (with the exception of *I Am Jazz*, which we were able to find at our local public library), the "more trans"/less heteronormative the books, the harder they were to find.⁶ Children in the United States without local advocates for the inclusion of these books might encounter few, if any of these texts during their early childhood years.

Perceived Race

Determinations of race in each text were made according to our own perception of the race of the characters. And as is true in the majority of children's picture books published in the United States, the majority of the characters from the books in our study were white (67%) (see Figure 1). Of the 12

⁶ Examples of 'more trans' and 'less heteronormative' books would include *Piratrans Carabarro*, or even *When Kathy is Keith*, both of which (especially the Spanish title) were difficult to locate. Such books present characters who do not at all fit within the gender binary of 'masculine' or 'feminine' but rather blur such boundaries and proffer characters with more fluid gender ontologies

books containing transgender characters, only one included an African-American character and only one contained a Spanish-speaking character (and this was the book only available in Spain). When children of color are underrepresented in children's picture books, it sends the message that these children have less value; their stories are less important to tell (Creany, 1993).

Figure 1. Perceived Race of Transgender Characters

- White – 8/12 books (66.7%)
- African-American – 1/12 books (8.3%)
- Spanish-speaking – 1/12 books (8.3%)
- N/A – 2/12 books (16.7%)

Perceived Race of Gender-Creative Characters

- White – 9/19 books (47.4%)
- African-American – 1/19 books (5.3%)
- Spanish-speaking – 1/19 books (5.3%)
- N/A – 8/19 books (42%)

Perceived Race of Multiple Gender and Gender Undisclosed Characters

- White – 3/7 books (42.8%)
- Spanish-speaking – 1/7 books (14.3%)
- Many races – 2/7 books (28.6%)
- N/A – 1/7 books (14.3%)

Perceived Race of All Characters (including Non-Binary)

- White – 36/65 books (55.4%)
- Spanish-speaking – 5/65 books (7.7%)
- African-American – 4/65 books (6.2%)
- Many races – 3/65 books (4.6%)
- N/A – 17/65 books (26.1%)

Assumed Biological Sex/Gender Identity

Of the books where characters' biological sex was known, the majority were assigned male at birth.⁷ In

⁷ We acknowledge that chromosomes and biological sex are one piece of the complex ontology of human beings. We

the books with transgender characters, this was particularly telling. Seven out of 12 characters (58.3%) were assigned male, while only 4 of 12 characters (33.3%) were assigned female at birth. One of the 12 characters had a biological sex that was undisclosed by the author. In the United States, data shows a higher prevalence of male-assigned transgender persons than female-assigned transgender persons (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). However, this bias towards male-assigned characters leaves female-assigned transgender children less able to find representations of themselves in books.

Transgender Characters⁸

- Female – 4/12 books (33.3%)
- Male – 7/12 books (58.3%)
- Undisclosed – 1/12 books (8.3%)

Gender-Creative Characters

- Female – 8/19 books (42%)
- Male – 11/19 books (58%)

Undisclosed/Multiple Characters

- Undisclosed – 5/7 books (71%)
- Multiple – 2/7 books (29%)

When seeking to identify the characters' gender identities, we looked for preferred pronouns, chosen as opposed to given names, and gender expression. Unlike biological sex (usually) and gender expression, gender identity is unseen. It is only truly known by the individual, it can be impacted by biological sex, and it can impact gender expression; however there is not always a direct correlation between gender identity and these characteristics. For example, in the gender-creative books we studied, 8/19 books (42.1%) of the characters were assigned female at birth, 6/19 books (31.5%) had a feminine gender expression, and 10/19 books (52.6%) identified as male.

Gender Identity of Transgender Characters

- Female – 7/12 books (58.3%)
- Male – 4/12 books (33.3%)
- Trans – 1/12 books (8.3%)

recognize that children are mis-gendered at birth, and assumptions are made based on genitalia alone. We understand the challenges around the term “biological sex,” and use it for ease of discussion, although we agree that the term can be problematic.

⁸ For all statistical charts, the first number is the number showing the present evidence, and the second number is the total number of books. For example, under ‘Transgender Characters,’ and ‘Female,’ 4/12 means that, of 12 books, 4 of those characters were female. All of our charts follow this model.

In one book, a character explicitly stated that their gender identity was “transgender.”

Gender Identity of Gender-Creative Characters

- Male – 10/19 books (52.6%)
- Female – 8/19 books (42.1%)
- Neither – 1/19 books (5.3%)

Gender Identity of Gender Undisclosed/Multiple Gender Characters

- Unknown – 4/7 books (57.1%)
- Multiple – 2/7 books (28.6%)
- Neither – 1/7 books (14.3%)

Gender Identity of All Characters (including Non-Binary)

- Female – 25/65 books (38.5%)
- Male – 29/65 books (44.6%)
- Trans – 1/65 books (1.5%)
- Multiple – 3/65 books (4.6%)
- Undisclosed – 4/65 books (6.2%)
- Neither – 2/65 books (3.1%)
- Both – 1/65 (1.5%)

Human/Non-Human Characters

Fascinatingly, just over one quarter (26.2%) of the 65 books contained non-human characters. Specifically, 2 of 12 transgender books contain non-human characters. For example, *When Leonard Lost His Spots* (the only text about a trans parent) is a book about a transgender/transspecies male leopard who becomes a female lion (Costa & Shupik, 2012). To quote the text, “I’m not a lion. To this I must confess. My name is now Leona and I am a lion-ESS” (*When Leonard Lost His Spots*, para. 11).

Some of the non-human books do not explicitly reference gender, but are metaphors for gender. In *Goblinheart: A Fairy Tale*, (gender undisclosed) there are two types of characters—fairies and goblins. Julep (whose gender identity is never revealed), is born a fairy but wants to be a goblin. When Julep does not grow claws like the other goblins, this character creates gauntlets with claws for digging. Julep

9 “Trans kids like me are real and normal and awesome!” (*Meet Polkadot*, para. 25).

also uses a vest to bind fairy wings that have sprouted (Axel & Bidlespacher, 2012). Quoting the text, “That night Julep made a vest that would hold wings down, then a pair of gauntlets with stone claws for digging” (*Goblinheart: A Fairy Tale*, para. 15).

One of the most clever and recent books we came across was titled *Red, a Crayon’s Story* (Hall, 2015). In this book, a blue crayon with a red label struggles with identity. (In the text, Red is assigned a male gender evidenced in the use throughout of the pronoun “he.”) The other crayons try to help Red become redder. They suggest that he needs more practice and encourage him to draw red things. The characters begin to question whether or not Red is indeed red. One crayon states, “Don’t be silly. It says so on his label” (*Red, a Crayon’s Story*, para. 16). Another replies, “He came that way from the factory” (para. 16). Some crayons question his character and others suggest simply giving him time. A variety of office supplies attempt to fix Red. The Masking Tape suggests that Red is “broken inside” (para. 20). The crayon is then wrapped in tape. The Scissors say his label is too tight and snips it. None of the help changes him. Finally, a crayon named Berry comes along and helps Red to realize that he is in fact blue. The other crayons question how they did not know all along (para. 32).

Findings: Plot Arcs

Table 2. Transgender Book Themes (12 Books)			
Plot Theme	Yes	No	N/A
Medical Professional	6 (50%)	6 (50%)	
Special Talent/ Saving the Day			N/A
Peer Bullying	5	5	1 No peers
Parental Support	9 Supportive/Eventual Acceptance	1 Unsupportive	2 No parents
Teacher Support	3 Supportive	1 Eventual Acceptance	8 No teachers
Sibling Support	4 Supportive/Eventual Acceptance	1 Bullying	7 No siblings

Medical Professionals

Six of the 12 (50%) books about transgender characters contained a medical professional. This medical professional was usually a psychiatrist/psychologist who helped the parents of the transgender child understand her/him. This was often a critical moment in the character's transition. Prior to meeting with the doctors, the characters were often forced to wear clothing, respond to names, and use pronouns that were uncomfortable because they did not match the characters' gender identities. After meeting with the doctors, the children were then able to live as their genuine selves.

The doctors were always portrayed positively and held in high esteem. It is as if these doctors were the "heroes," the saviors without whom the child would have been doomed to live an inauthentic life. This quote from *I Am Jazz* does well to explain what we call "the hero narrative:"

Then one amazing day, everything changed. Mom and Dad took me to meet a new doctor who asked me lots and lots of questions. Afterward, the doctor spoke to my parents and I heard the word "transgender" for the very first time. That night at bedtime, my parents hugged me and said, "We understand now. Be who you are. We love you no matter what" (Herthel et al., 2014, para. 14).

Special Talent/Saving the Day

A common theme in the gender-creative books and the non-binary books as well is that characters are bullied, teased, and/or unaccepted until they demonstrate a special talent or save the day. It is almost as if it is not acceptable to deviate from gender norms unless you have something to offer to those who do conform. These characters were not "enough" just being themselves, they had to be extraordinary.

In *Roland Humphrey is Wearing a What?*, the main character is not accepted until he becomes confident and decides to stand up for himself against the children who are trying to force him to assimilate to male culture (Kiernan-Johnson & Revenaugh, 2012): "What matters to me is whether you're kind. The friends I deserve truly won't mind if I choose sparkly nail polish, skirts or clogs, they'll like me for me, not for my togs" (*Roland Humphrey is Wearing a What?*, para. 21).

In *Morris Micklewhite and the Tangerine Dress*, the main character paints a beautiful picture of himself in a dress: "And who's that?" his mother asked, pointing at the little boy in the tangerine dress riding

atop the big blue elephant. Morris was hoping she'd ask. "That's me," he said" (para. 17). He creates an engaging play-based activity for the other children: "Eli and Henry followed Morris to a planet they had never visited before. As they explored, Morris swish, swish, swished" (para. 20). It is only then that his bullies accept him (Baldacchino & Malenfant, 2014).

When the prima ballerina is injured during a performance in *Dogs Don't Do Ballet*, the main character, a male dog who loves to dance and wear pink tutus, gains respect when he steps in to dance the lead: "And Biff dances like no dog has ever danced before," (Kemp & Ogilvie, 2010, para. 21). In *Nice Little Girls*, the main character is only accepted by a peer once she stands up to an oppressive teacher. Her bravery as well as her ability to build things inspires the friendship: "I'm not a boy!" said Jackie. "Don't be so angry" said Susie. "I just think you're pretty brave, that's all" (Levy & Gerstein, 1974, para. 24).

The main character in *Yuck! That's Not a Monster* scares away a large and potentially ill-intentioned monster: "The Big Monster wailed and dropped Little Shock in horror. He was so afraid that his fur turned to frizz and his bristles fell out" (McAllister & Edgson, 2010, para. 19). Only then is the character accepted by its siblings, who say, "Maybe being cute is useful after all" (*Yuck! That's Not a Monster*, para. 21).

Peer Bullying and Peer Support

Roughly half of the books contained portrayals of bullying by peers. For example, more than half the characters in the gender-creative books were bullied. Some books have unsupportive peers who disagree with the characters' gender identity/expression, but we segregated these disagreements from acts of bullying, such as harassment, name-calling, violence, or fear of violence, for coding purposes.

The Adventures of Tulip, the Birthday Wish Fairy (2012) is about a magical fairy named Tulip who grants birthday wishes. One wisher in New York is a male-assigned child named David who wishes to be a girl named Daniela. The fairy consults with the Wish Captain who explains that though someone is born "looking like a boy" that person might have the "heart and mind and soul of a girl on the inside" (para. 7). Tulip dips Daniela's wish in "bravery broth," puts extra luck in her pockets, places "teaching paste" on her family's toothbrushes (to help her teachers and her doctors understand her), and sprinkles "clear sight sparkles" (para. 9) on her entire family. Later in the book, the fairy addresses a wish from Daniela's mother. Her mother wishes for her child to be free from bullies. Tulip dips the wish in "confidence cream," so her mother "would feel strong when she helped Daniela to face her bullies" (para. 13).

As critical as the discussion of bullying, the discussion of peer support is equally important. Five of the 12 (42%) transgender books included supportive peers. These characters defended and encouraged the transgender characters. We know that these supportive peers greatly impact the school experiences of transgender children (Sullivan, 2009).

Parental Support

When parents were present in the books, they tended to be supportive or were unsupportive at first but eventually accepted their children—this was true of 75% of the transgender books, 74% of the gender-creative books, and 57% of the undisclosed/multiple books. The implications of their parents' support impacts transgender children in perhaps the most critical way (Sullivan, 2009), providing such inquiries for both parents of trans children and trans children themselves, such as: Are children allowed to transition? Are they forced to retain given names, play with uninteresting/embarrassing toys, and wear uncomfortable clothing?

Teacher Support

There were fewer teachers in the books than we had expected. When teachers were present, they tended to be supportive in the transgender and gender-creative books. Interestingly, more teachers were included in the multiple/undisclosed books than in the transgender and gender-creative texts. Teachers in the multiple/undisclosed books tended to be either supportive, or they were unsupportive at first and eventually accepting of the children.

Sibling Support

When textually present, siblings tended to be supportive or demonstrated eventual acceptance. We found that the majority of texts did not contain siblings. This was a startling finding, as many children in the United States do, in fact, have siblings.¹⁰

Transgender

- › 4/12 books (33.3%) – Supportive Sibling/Eventual Acceptance
- › 1/12 books (8.3%) – Bullying Sibling
- › 7/12 books (58.3%) – N/A or No Sibling Present

10 A recent article showed that four out of five American families, 80%, have more than one child (Olson, 2015).

Gender-Creative

- › 3/19 books (16%) – Supportive/Eventual Acceptance
- › 1/19 books (5%) – Unsupportive
- › 15/19 books (79%) – N/A

Multiple/Undisclosed

- › 2/7 books (29%) – Supportive
- › 5/7 books (71%) – N/A

Implications and Future Research

Our study shows that there are very few transgender books in English, fewer in Spanish, and no bilingual (English-Spanish) texts.¹¹ In the books, a majority of trans characters are white, were assigned male at birth, and transition to female. All of the texts containing trans characters are didactic in nature, seeking to educate a perceived cisgender audience on what it is like to be ‘trans’, that is, emphasizing the main character’s ‘trans-ness.’ As such, these texts mark the inception of the trans character’s journey toward changing, with salient themes highlighting love, diversity, and acceptance of trans children.

There are limited representations of trans characters in children’s books, and of these very few are individuals of color, Spanish-speaking or bilingual, or biological females transitioning to males. Few of the books offer plot arcs that go beyond being educational tools for the cisgender reader.

In sum, with over \$1 billion of children’s books purchased each year (Anderson and Hamilton, 2005), it is hard to ignore the enormous impact children’s literature has on both children and adults. Historically, children’s literature has presented characters that reinforce gendered stereotypes, with males as dashing princes or hard-working providers for families, and females as performing traditional tasks at home such as child-rearing, or playing with dolls and dresses (Anderson & Hamilton, 2005). Even when books are deemed “non-sexist,” in their portrayal of female characters, very rarely do any male characters play traditionally female roles (Diekman & Murnen, 2004).

With a growing number of Spanish-speaking Americans in the U.S., and more visibility and acceptance of trans individuals nationwide, a clear necessity exists to tell the stories of these LGBTQ individuals

¹¹ The dearth of these books in actual classrooms around the country represents another problematic issue, which we intend to examine in a future study.

as children. Citing Hermann-Wilmarth (2010): “While literature alone might not alter students’ systems of belief about those different from them, it can help facilitate discussions about systems of oppression that are at work in our society.”

Conclusions

Our project seeks to promote understanding of and sensitivity toward multiple gender ontologies in children’s books, particularly transgender characters. We hope that not only will trans children see themselves accurately represented in picture books, but also that there will be an increase in societal acceptance and approval of non-binary gender subjectivities. We hope too that someday the notion of a ‘spectral status’ of transgender characters in bilingual children’s books will be referenced as a chimerical ‘ghost of the past,’ relegated only to the shadows.

Appendix

Books Reviewed by Gender of Characters

Transgender

Title	Author	Year	Publisher
<i>10,000 Dresses</i>	Marcus Ewert	2008	Seven Stories Press
<i>Backwards Day</i>	S. Bear Bergman	2012	Flamingo Rampant
<i>Be Who You Are</i>	Jennifer Carr	2010	AuthorHouse
<i>But, I’m Not A Boy!</i>	Katie Leone	2014	CreateSpace Independent Publishing
<i>I Am Jazz</i>	Jessica Herthel and Jazz Jennings	2014	Dial Books
<i>Meet Polkadot</i>	Talcott Broadhead	2014	Dangerdot Publishing
<i>Piratrans Carabarro</i>	Manuel Gutierrez and Silvia Rivera	2015	Asociación de Transexuales de Antequera
<i>Rough, Tough Charley</i>	Verla Kay	2007	Tricycle Press
<i>The Adventures of Tulip, Birthday Wish Fair</i>	S. Bear Bergman	2012	Flamingo Rampant
<i>When Kathy Is Keith</i>	Wallace Wong	2011	Xlibris
<i>When Kayla Was Kyle</i>	Amy Fabrikant	2013	Avid Readers Publishing Group
<i>When Leonard Lost His Spots</i>	Monique Costa	2012	Dodi Press

Gender-Creative

Title	Author	Year	Publisher
<i>Are you a Boy or a Girl?</i>	Karleen Pendleton Jiméneez	2000	Green Dragon Press
<i>Bonnie Does Not Like Dresses</i>	M.F. Keene	2015	N/A
<i>Dogs Don't Do Ballet</i>	Anna Kemp	2010	Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers
<i>Elena's Serenade</i>	Campbell Geeslin	2004	Atheneum Books for Young Readers
<i>Jacob's New Dress</i>	Sarah and Ian Hoffman	2014	Albert Whitman & Co.
<i>Jesse's Dream Skirt</i>	Bruce Mack	1979	Lollipop Power Inc.
<i>John Jensen Feels Different</i>	Henrick Hovland	2011	Eerdmans Books for Young Readers
<i>Melinda and the Class Photograph</i>	Deborah van der Beek	1991	Carolrhoda Books
<i>Morris Micklewhite and the Tangerine Dress</i>	Christine Baldacchino	2014	Groundwood Books, House of Anansi Press
<i>My Princess Boy</i>	Cheryl Kilodavis	2010	Aladdin
<i>Nice Little Girls</i>	Elizabeth Levy	1974	Delacorte Press
<i>Odd Bird Out</i>	Helga Bansch	2011	Gecko Press
<i>Play Free</i>	McNall Mason and Max Suarez	2012	Max N'Me Studio
<i>Princess Max</i>	Laurie Stiller	2001	Random House Australia
<i>Pugdog</i>	Andrea U'Ren	2001	Farrar, Straus and Giroux
<i>Roland Humphrey is Wearing a WHAT?</i>	Eileen Kiernan-Johnson	2013	Huntley Rahara Press
<i>The Girl WHO Would Rather Climb Trees</i>	Miriam Schlein	1975	Harcourt Children's Books
<i>White Dynamite and Curly Kidd</i>	Bill Martin Jr. & John Archambault	1986	Holt & Rinehart
<i>Yuck! That's Not a Monster</i>	Angela McAllister	2010	Little Tiger Press

Multiple/Undisclosed

Title	Author	Year	Publisher
<i>All I Want to Be is Me</i>	Phyllis Rothblatt	2011	CreateSpace
<i>Are you a Boy or are you a Girl!</i>	Sarah Savage	2015	Jessica Kingsley Publishers
<i>Call Me Tree/Llámame Árbol</i>	Maya Christina Gonzalez	2014	Children's Book Press
<i>Goblinheart: A fairy tale</i>	Brett Axel	2012	East Waterfront Press
<i>Red, A Crayon's Story</i>	Michael Hall	2015	Greenwillow Books
<i>This Day in June</i>	Gayle E. Pitman	2014	Magination Press
<i>X: A Fabulous Child's Story</i>	Louis Gould	1978	Daughters Pub. Co

Non-Binary

Title	Author	Year	Publisher
<i>A Fire Engine for Ruthie</i>	Lesléa Newman	2004	Clarion Books
<i>Amazing Grace</i>	Mary Hoffman	1991	Reading Rainbow Books
<i>Ballerino Nate</i>	Kimberly Brubaker Bradley	2006	Dial Books for Young Readers
<i>Exactly Like Me</i>	Lynn Phillips	1972	Lollipop Power, Inc.
<i>Horace and Morris but Mostly Dolores</i>	James Howe	2003	Atheneum Books for Young Readers
<i>In Christina's Toolbox</i>	Dianne Homan	1981	Lollipop Power, Inc.
<i>Jump!</i>	Michelle Magorian	1992	Walker Books Ltd.
<i>Max the Stubborn Little Wolf</i>	Mario-Odile Judes	2001	Harper Collins
<i>Mercedes quiere ser bombero</i>	Beatriz Monco	2004	Ediciones Bellaterra
<i>Not All Princesses Dress in Pink</i>	Jane Yolen & Heidi E.Y. Stemple	2010	Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers
<i>Not Every Princess</i>	Jeffrey Bone and Lisa Bone	2014	Magination Press
<i>Oliver Button is a Sissy (English)</i>	Tomi dePaola (English)	1979	Harcourt Brace
<i>Oliver Button es una nena (Spanish)</i>	Tomi dePaola & Sandra Lopez Varela, tr. (Spanish)	(En.) 2010 (Sp.)	Jovanovich/Carretera León, La Coruna

Title	Author	Year	Publisher
<i>Pink!</i>	Lynne Rickards	2009	Chicken House/ Scholastic
<i>The Basket Ball</i>	Esmé Raji Codell	2011	Abrams Books For Young Readers
<i>The Boy with Pink Hair</i>	Perez Hilton	2011	Celebra Young Readers
<i>The Boy Who Cried Fabulous</i>	Lesléa Newman	2004	Tricycle Press
<i>The Boy Toy</i>	Phillis Hacken Johnson	1988	Lollipop Power Books
<i>The Only Boy in Ballet Class</i>	Denise Gruska	2007	Gibbs Smith
<i>The Princess Knight</i>	Cornelia Funke	2001	Chicken House
<i>The Sissy Duckling</i>	Harvey Fierstein	2005	Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers
<i>The Story of Ferdinand (English)</i> <i>El Cuento de Ferdinando (Spanish)</i>	Munro Leaf (English) Pura Belpre (Spanish Translation)	1936 (En.) 1990 (Sp.)	Grosset & Dunlap/ Puffin Books
<i>Time to Get Up, Time to Go</i>	David Milgrim	2006	Clarion Books
<i>Toby's Doll's House</i>	Ragnhild Scamell	1998	Levinson Books, Ltd.
<i>Tough Eddie</i>	Elizabeth Winthrop	1985	Dutton Books for Young Readers
<i>Tuts Aren't My Style</i>	Linda Skeers	2010	Dial Books
<i>The Worst Princess</i>	Anna Kemp	2012	Random House Books for Young Readers

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An Embodied Education: Questioning Hospitality to the Queer

Clio Stearns

“Are you a boy or a girl?” the second grader asks. It is not an unfamiliar question—not to me, not to many of us—but it disarms me each time in this context. I am here to observe one of my own students, a pre-service teacher learning about literacy instruction. The class is busy with their reading workshop; children are lying on scrappy cushions with their feet up on shelves, huddled into cubbies, or sitting at the horseshoe-shaped guided reading table with their teacher. My interrogator is reading from the Nate the Great series and has been tasked with documenting three of Nate’s character traits. She is distracted.

My student looks embarrassed and uncertain. She tends to be anxious when I sit with her, and I’ve tried to handle this by making my presence unobtrusive, but clearly I have failed. My student points down at the chapter book, saying, “Come on, do you think Nate is kind?”

“Is that a boy or a girl?” the child asks again, nodding toward me.

In fact, I’m not a boy or a girl but a woman, a white person, a mother, a lesbian, a graduate student, and a teacher educator. I have short hair and prefer clothes designed for men, and I assume these characteristics are at the root of the conundrum. At the same time, I know, or at least think I know, what the child is asking. Eager to help my student in her moment of uncertainty, I answer, “I’m a girl.” The child is satisfied and resumes reading.

This is an essay about hospitality and the ways we must question frameworks telling us to welcome the queer in educational contexts. I will show how educational scholarship as well as programming for schools, teachers, and students have emphasized the interconnected concepts of hospitality and welcome as a way of keeping queer bodies legislatively, physically, and psychically safe. While acknowledging the importance of hospitality as a starting point, I examine its limits with the hope of showing how it might foreclose the curiosity that surfaced in the example above. I argue that a fundamental problem with hospitality and welcome toward the queer is the way they disembody individual and collective existence.

My goal is not to critique efforts at queering education but rather to offer an alternate vision of the relationship between queerness and education, one that takes the body seriously. An aspect of my aim is indeed to provoke; while I understand that an embodied vision for education is unlikely to come to fruition quickly, I think that urging queer educational discourse and even programming in this direction might create new possibilities for mutual coexistence and discovery.

This article is organized around the concepts of hospitality, welcome, and embodiment. I offer autobiographical interludes that engage with each of these concepts, beginning with analyses and examples of hospitality and welcome and continuing with an articulation of embodiment as a more desirable concept. I close by contemplating future possibilities, wondering whether a turn away from aspirational hospitality might establish a sense of hope for queerness and education by eliciting an ambivalent but steadfast orientation toward the other.

Here I rely on Ahmed's (2006) sense that one purpose of queer theory is the offering up of an orientation rather than an analysis of momentary experience. By considering the ways we are oriented toward thought and to each other, Ahmed explains, we take up a queer way of being and thinking that is willing to live with constant flux and an iteration of queerness that, like education, disrupts a drive toward comfortable stasis.

The research methodology is both conceptual and autobiographical in nature, taking up Salvio's (1990) claim that exploring our own stories as educational artifacts offers meaningful material for theoretical reflection. I also borrow insight from feminist researchers like Lather (1991), recognizing my own positionality as an inescapable contributor to my scholarship. My queerness and my identity as a mother have an obvious and abiding effect on the way I interpret the interactions I describe in this essay. At the same time, my whiteness and socioeconomic privilege provide me with a degree of power that both enables and limits my critique; I reflect on these limitations at various points in the paper.

Hospitality

Hospitality is a concept with great discursive baggage, in large part because it was taken up by Derrida as a way of dealing with questions of otherness, strangeness, and foreignness. In his 1996 seminars on hospitality, Derrida considers hospitality, a term with Latin roots, to be that which the owner or lord of a house or nation may confer. The master must first assert ownership and then may be hospitable to the other, but even then, hospitality has limits embedded in ownership. Because hospitality includes a

giving over of one's self and one's home to the stranger, it is something that cannot be done completely if the underlying ownership is to be maintained.

Derrida describes as unattainable but still conceptually valid, “the law of unlimited hospitality (to give the new arrival all of one's home and oneself, to give him or her one's own, our own, without asking a name or compensation, or the fulfilment of even the smallest condition)” (1996/2000, p. 77). I work with the understanding of hospitality as the assertive, temporary, and ostensibly loving taking-in of the other. It reifies otherness and strangeness and is needed by “exiles, the deported, the expelled, the rootless, the stateless, lawless nomads, absolute foreigners” (Derrida, 1996/2000, pp. 88-89). Hospitality is also needed by hosts, because it renders the foreign less frightening or threatening.

In the context of relating queerness to education, hospitality is explicitly evoked in scholarly work that argues for schools to escape heteronormative and cisgender-normative assumptions embedded in curriculum and practice and take up uncomfortable and even painful conversations. Gilbert (2014) articulates what she calls a “reluctant manifesto” for education as hospitality. Drawing on Derrida, she considers the ethical obligation to talk of sexuality and queerness as part of the educational project. As an example, she presents the tale of a transgender student whose school managed to work through the discomfort generated by her body and identity. According to Gilbert, educators ought to demonstrate their hospitality by recognizing that queerness need not be controversial and accept that anyone who enters a school belongs there.

In a different paper, Gilbert (2006) constructs a call to see hospitality as necessarily emerging from the conflict between what we imagine and what we can do, and to insist that our commitment to justice and human rights does not, and indeed cannot, lie flush with social practices. (p. 33)

Here, she acknowledges conflicts embedded within the concept of hospitality but assumes that it will lead educators along a general path toward justice. Lee (2012) has written similarly of hospitality in the educational context as a way of moving beyond heteronormativity. She describes hospitable situations in which gay mothers are welcomed by early childhood teachers in New Zealand who make space for their experiences and family traditions as part of the curriculum in spite of an overall heteronormative frame. That the word hospitality is largely absent from queer educational work outside of a scholarly context has much to do with the conflation of hospitality with welcome, which I address in the next section.

I find two fundamental and conceptual problems with hospitality as a normative structure. The first is definitional: as Derrida makes clear, hospitality shares a root with hostage, and to be hospitable to the other is to change both the host and the stranger in irrevocable, frightening, and potentially problematic ways. “The host,” he writes, “becomes a retained hostage, a detained addressee” (p. 107). As Westmoreland (2008) explains, “The host has welcomed into his home the very thing that can overturn his sovereignty. In welcoming the new arrival, the host has brought about that which takes him hostage” (p. 7). At the same time, the foreigner, in order to be understood and treated hospitably by the host, must relinquish some of his or her language and the subjectivity it contains: “In what language can the foreigner address his or her question? Receive ours? In what language can he or she be interrogated?” (Derrida, 1996/2000, p. 131).

In absolute hospitality, Derrida maintains, questions are of course unnecessary, but therein lies an important paradox: the foreigner cannot be welcomed if he or she does not grasp something of the language of the person doing the welcoming. A mutual hostage holding begins to unfold, one that undermines absolute hospitality. In Derrida’s understanding, absolute hospitality must be constantly sought, but with an implicit understanding of its limits. Is it then possible for the school to be hospitable to the queer if the queer does not take up the heteronormative language and epistemology of the school?

Another problem with arguments for hospitality is often overlooked. If education owes hospitality to the queer, why does it not owe a similar hospitality to all individuals and communities? Why are we not ethically obliged to construct schools that are hospitable to the anti-Muslim extremist who preaches hate and xenophobia? Why not to the evangelical Christian who insists on damning gays?

Bindewald and Rosenblith (2015) exemplify an assumption widely accepted in academia that there is no such obligation, questioning how the presumably left-wing and secular teacher ought to handle problematic “spontaneous utterances” from students and families of the religious right. Gilbert (2006), in condoning an ethic of hospitality, considers the obligation of curriculum regarding gay marriage to be “to hold open the tensions that contested conversations will provoke” (p. 10). In other words, a discussion of gay marriage must leave space for conflict and diversity of perspective. Yet at what point does the acknowledgement of conflict with an implicit, predetermined, morally right endpoint from the perspective of the school render the real difficulties of any controversy shameful and silent, leading to festering anger and even vitriol?

In other words, the articulation of hospitality as a normative structure assumes an evolutionary chain of sorts and becomes little more than an extension of liberalism that opens its doors of accepting beneficence to a slightly larger range of human behavior but does not confront the truly knotty issues inherent in mutual coexistence.

Allen (2004) has shown how in the history of racial politics as they play out in education, this sort of mandated acceptance of the other ultimately reifies mutual mistrust, forecloses conversation, and misses opportunities to consider the painful sacrifices of privilege and even self required for coexistence amid difference. “Distrust,” she writes, “can be overcome only when citizens manage to find methods of generating mutual benefit despite differences of position, experience, and perspective. The discovery of such methods is the central project of democracy.” This discovery is quite different from that which emerges from even provisional hospitality, for it requires a greater effort at leveling power gradients and an acknowledgment of bias as an extant (if troubling) perspective rather than something that will be gradually overcome with the salve of time.

I do not mean to argue that the school, the teacher, or the individual ought to extend hospitality to people with damaging and even violent behaviors and beliefs, but on a theoretical level, I find it impossible to endorse a hospitality that does not acknowledge its paradoxical liberal assumptions. Jackson (2011) and Noddings (1995) are two very different examples of serious thinkers who have argued that “education... is fundamentally a moral enterprise” (Jackson, p. 92), oriented toward facilitating moral and intellectual discovery rather than foreclosing it because it fails to answer the demands of liberalism. Working with these definitions, we can see that it is precisely the limits of hospitality that can be most educational, for we can learn about ourselves and our capacity to truck with difference when we work with that which disrupts our hospitable impulses.

At bedtime, my daughter wants to know, “What is hell? Are we really going there?” Taken aback, bereft of a simple answer, I wonder where the idea took root. Her best friend told her during math today that our family does not make sense: it is impossible for us to live properly without praying, and likewise impossible that she has two moms and no father. She should pray, her friend told her, to find her father, because he is somewhere out there and we, her mothers, are consigning ourselves to eternal damnation by withholding him from her. I feel an odd calm as I remind her of what she knows about her conception and our family and tuck her in to sleep. The next morning, I ask my daughter’s teacher to talk with me for a moment at drop-off. She is busy, of course, as first graders are squirrely when they get to school. Still, she steps into the hall with me and I repeat what my daughter told me, asking only for some help. She looks stricken. “Did she really say those things?” The teacher promises to speak with the girls and explain that all families are different.

“Here at school, we value all families,” she tells me. She wonders aloud if she ought to speak privately with the parents of my daughter’s friend: “I will tell them that they can believe whatever they want, but that she can’t say such things here at school.” I nod but begin to feel hesitant, worried about what is a real and maybe unusual friendship between two very different children.

The teacher has been hospitable to me, and our interaction has acknowledged both the challenges posed by my family’s queerness and the school’s institutional message that we belong and are not creating undue problems for them. But what about the other family, I wonder? What about the parents who will sit uncomfortably in a conference and be asked by a figure of authority to quiet their seven-year-old daughter? What about the message they will receive that their beliefs are private—tolerable, maybe, but not to be brought to school? Most importantly, what about the recognition that the two girls might be unalterably strange to one another yet find a game to play at recess? The game does not make the difference easy, but does that mean they should not be allowed to play? I was the one who brought it to the teacher, though. I could not have reasonably expected more.

When school personnel are required, practically legislated, to be hospitable to the queer, certain conversations are foreclosed before they have a chance to materialize. The evangelical fundamentalist Christian is put to shame in this context, as is anyone who questions the basic precept that “it’s okay to be gay.” This is a difficult argument to make, for there is no level on which schools ought to let hateful language or even hateful thought go unchecked. But nor does telling teachers or children they may not talk a certain way in school do anything to ameliorate those thoughts or to address the question of how very different people might coexist without hiding or compromising aspects of themselves, or perhaps most importantly, allow for genuine curiosity and moral discovery. A vision of education that allows for hostility and hate to exist openly, as artifacts for study and discussion but never to be legislated away or brushed aside, is a less hospitable vision, to be sure—but it is a more educational one, with greater potential for discovery of new truths and construction of knowledge inaccessible to preceding generations.

Welcome

The major distinction between welcome and hospitality is the connotation of pleasure embedded in welcome. To be welcoming, an individual or school must not only be hospitable but must do so while experiencing joy and internal warmth (Merriam-Webster, 2015). Mandated positive affect has left its mark in other educational areas, including the ubiquitously taught “growth mindset” (Dweck, 2006; Dweck, 2015) and the myriad social-emotional learning programs that aim to teach students about

“managing stress, controlling impulses, motivating oneself, and setting and working toward achieving personal and academic goals” (CASEL, 2015). This “hegemonic positivity” (Stearns, 2015) mandates that we not only get along with one another but feel incessantly good about it and train ourselves out of experiencing socially unacceptable feelings. To welcome the queer is to let queer bodies exist in a space that does not belong to them but whose host is pleased that they are there and will not acknowledge, indeed may not even experience, any ambivalence about their presence.

Welcome is seen in the titles and missions of such organizations as Welcoming Schools, a project of the Human Rights Campaign, which offers “keys to success” for schools interested in “embracing family diversity, creating LGBTQ-inclusive schools, preventing bias-based bullying, supporting transgender and gender-expansive students.” “Welcoming schools,” the website explains, “empower children rather than limit them” and “provide students the opportunity to learn and succeed” (HRC, 2012).

Teaching Tolerance, the magazine of the Southern Poverty Law Center, includes welcome among its “best practices (for) creating an LGBT-inclusive school environment”; it publishes a poster that reads, “This school welcomes...students of all races and ethnicities/ students with diverse abilities/ students who are LGBT/ students of all family structures/ students who are English language learners... YOU!” (SPLC, 2016).

The Welcome Friend Association is another group that draws upon the importance of welcome; it runs seminars and programming to “educate and promote awareness in society regarding gender, sexual identities and expressions” and conducts training for faith-based communities to learn to “become more welcoming and inclusive, particularly of LGBTQ2SA persons” (WFA, 2014). The concept of welcome is widespread among organizations seeking to play a role in determining the relationship between queerness and education, functioning as an iteration of hospitality that is perhaps more anxious and more comprehensible to a public longing to improve itself.

Like hospitality, welcome positions the queer as a permanent outsider, but in this case one whose identity as guest is evocative of self-satisfied pleasure for the educational host. More explicitly than hospitality, welcome attempts to legislate pleasure and particularly the taking of pleasure in the other.

What becomes of accounts of queerness that assert that queer identities are lives lived in relation to shame and negative affect? As Love (2007) writes, “Not only do many queers, as I suggest, feel backward, but backwardness has been taken up as a key feature of queer culture” (p. 11). To the extent

that this is true, welcoming the queer in education undermines their very queerness, replacing it with a mandatory bringing of joy. The queer is the feel-good body in this formulation, the eternal child whose presence reminds a host how much better the world is constantly becoming.

Embodiment

I sit in a meeting with the two principals of the schools where my undergraduate students will be conducting their practicum. We have gone over their schedules and the names of the teachers they are working with. I explain some of my hopes and goals for the practicum, and they share some of the curricular changes they have been working on. Then one of them asks, “Is it a good group?”

I have only met the student teachers twice but already feel impressed; I say that they are knowledgeable, enthusiastic, and curious. “Are they all girls?” one principal wonders. I tell her what I know of the demographic breakdown, wondering whether my 22-year-old students would indeed identify that way.

The principal whose office we are in glances worriedly at her clock. I ask if there is anything else they want me to know before we adjourn. “No,” one principal says. “Well... just one thing. Make sure you talk to them about professional dress.” The other nods in vigorous agreement. “No yoga pants,” she puts in, “we don’t let our teachers wear them either.” I jot this down and she continues. “And... I don’t know how to put this, but... they should watch the cleavage. The tight pants. It’s... distracting. Especially for our fifth grade boys. Just... remind them they are professionals.” Not knowing what else to do, I nod my assent.

It is my daughter’s second day of school and she is upset when I pick her up. “Leila said something really bad about you,” she tells me. “She said you’re a man. She said you have short hair and no boobs and you’re a man. She said, “Ha ha, your mom is a man. And then she told me not to tell you.”

I go twenty rounds that night in my mind and talk with the teacher the next morning. Later that day, I get an email from the assistant principal. She met with my daughter and Leila, she writes, and Leila apologized; they went back to class looking happy. She reminded Leila that it’s never okay to say something about another person’s body at their school. The takeaway message from this incident, she tells me, is, “That’s Body Talk. And we don’t do that here.”

Education, like many aspects of social and cultural life, places bodies in close proximity to one another. The two principals took the risk of recognizing this, but anxiously and through an intense lens of

worried heteronormativity. All bodies ought to be covered up and decentralized; the queer body, however, does not exist. No one needs to worry about the fifth-grade girl who is staring down her student teacher's bra; this is unmentionable and even unthinkable. The principals implicitly asked me to ensure the erasure of heterosexual desire as we brought my students into contact with theirs, but simultaneously reified just such desire as the presumptive norm. That children—perhaps boys in particular—are in some sense dirty, excessively sexual, fearsome, is assumed but not to be mentioned in this rendering; even more silenced, though, is the idea that girls might long for other girls, or that boys might turn shamefully away, or that my students might have bodies that defy easy categorization.

That school is a place where the body is alternately disavowed or approached with the greatest of anxiety is not a new observation (e.g., Silin, 1995; Taubman, 2011; Tobin, 2007). Here though, I would like to show that discourse placing hospitality and welcome at the fore widens a gulf between children and adults, works counter to educational purposes, and makes hostage of the queer in addition to the host in education.

The most insidious way that queer identities are held hostage by a hospitable norm is via a process of disembodiment. Of course queer people and communities construct our identities based on a number of characteristics, beliefs, and sensibilities. But how can we ignore the fact that on some level queerness is, as Winterson's (1992) eponymous novel reminds its readers, "written on the body"—connected with feelings about and within our physical selves? When curriculum describes the gay person as a sort of sexless creature with bountiful love for someone with the same gender label, describes the transgender individual as someone whose "gender identity, expression or behavior is different from those typically associated with their assigned sex at birth" (National Center for Transgender Equality, 2015), when it instructs adults who are answering "What is gay?" to "focus on love and relationships" (HRC, 2012), it contributes to a disavowal of the body, of sex, and of desire.

Under the mandates of hospitality and welcome, it is understandable to address hateful language like Leila's by silencing it; after all, it is frightening and deeply unwelcoming to critique the queer's body or to consider the simultaneous potential queerness of Leila herself as child comfortable talking casually about "boobs." A less hospitable response to this event might allow the two girls to talk to each other frankly, each explaining her understanding of the body, the mother, the negative emotions that a confusing body can evoke. "Body talk" is quite possibly not welcoming, but if it does not happen, where do questions and anger about otherness in general go for children, and what becomes of curiosity? There is a deeply problematic epistemological message here, for the repression of curiosity,

discomfort, and sexuality is strikingly anti-educational. Questions of racial and economic privilege, both of which my daughter carries in relation to Leila, become similarly silenced via the process of disembodiment, and both questions and lessons about intersectionality and power are left unspoken.

When sex itself is held in such low regard by the school, the queer, though welcomed, is hostage. Queer identities are discussed in educational settings as void of bodily existence. This is how we are rendered safe and likable—but sanitized. Much as the education that allows for hostility to stay, even fester, gets worked through but not worked on, an education that is more embodied is not a hospitable one.

I find myself at times the ideal figure to be welcomed: a married, white, educated lesbian with two children, who volunteers at bake sales and feels comfortable e-mailing teachers. Yet this version of myself requires significant internal sacrifice—the erasure of my body and the ways it has defined my identity and life. I wish not to be welcomed in that particular way. The very concepts of hospitality and welcome have bodily metaphors rife with risk: What does it mean for a body to be absolutely hospitable to another? How can we ask this of each other without acknowledging desire and aggression?

Toward Discomfort

What then, is the relationship between education and queerness I propose, if not a hospitable one? It is more negative than anything we currently have, and it focuses less on maintaining individual happiness and conflict-free classrooms. To articulate the vision I am considering, I return to the autobiographical excerpts at the beginning of this essay. The second-grade child asks about my gender. My student looks on, embarrassed, recognizing that there is something vaguely unsuitable about posing the question, which is both derisive and evocative of the body. The child has not yet internalized these norms. If moments like these are allowed to extend as beginnings of curriculum, we can find a place where queerness—as interconnected with sex and the body and education—can intersect, a site for ongoing moral discovery and the troubling of previously held assumptions.

I do not mean sitting children down for a one-off lecture on why it's okay for girls to have short hair. It does mean relentlessly probing assumptions about the morality we draw on in encounters with the other and bringing internalized aggression, drive, and frustration to the fore of the educational project. It also means using words like vagina and masturbation in school, acknowledging that neither our minds nor those of the students are floating vessels without corporeal selves. Listening to each

other, watching each other, thinking about each other, and talking to each other: these are not original ideas, but in the context of mandated affects and legislated welcome, they have the potential to seem revolutionary.

An embodied and inhospitable education takes up moments of questioning, curiosity, meanness, and discomfort as sites for exploration and discovery. It does not mandate acceptance of the queer but requires careful articulation and analysis of rejection. This version of education cannot be codified into a packaged curriculum of welcome; instead, it interconnects autobiography, embodiment, and emotion and requires that teachers listen to each other, families, and students without predetermined liberal ideals. It requires speaking the body, noticing the body, and maintaining an albeit uncomfortable awareness of the ways bodies and identities constantly intersect.

This vision of education is a hopeful one whose hope lies precisely in its negativity. It is by turning away from false visions of legislated positivity, absolute hospitality, and ever-cheerful welcome of the queer that we can allow education to entail seeking and creativity. It is by turning away from an acceptable but disembodied vision of queer individuals and communities that we can make space for queerness in schools and in education. Taubman (2000) implores educators to let go of the desire to cure or rescue, to sit with the pain that compels us to reach for quick reforms...to reframe the standards in terms of our ability...to articulate and reflect on what we are feeling and experiencing, to face the terrors that gnaw at us, and to work through the fantasies that structure our existence (p. 31).

Acknowledging the limits of hospitality and learning within these limits is potentially more frightening than declaring hospitality as a normative goal, because this acknowledgment releases an idealistic vision of acceptance and smoothness. An inhospitable answer to “What’s gay?” might be “What do you think it is?” or it might be, “Some people think it’s one way of wanting another person’s body,” or it might be, “Some people think it’s a way of being that means you’re going to hell.” Only by allowing these understandings to be articulated and explored can the violence that sometimes underlies them be mediated and contained. An inhospitable answer to “Are you a boy or a girl?” might be “Why do you ask?” or “Well, I have a vagina,” or “What do those words mean to you?” or “Is there something about me that makes you wonder?” Are these answers defensive, damning, evocative of discomfort? Certainly. Yet to forge a continuing relationship between education and the queer, we must turn toward this discomfort and away from legislated responses that force us to cover up what we really mean or that circumvent placing opposition at the fore.

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Teaching Trans*: Transparent as a Strategy in English Language Arts Classrooms

Joseph D. Sweet and David Lee Carlson

Though trans* people represent only 0.3% of the total US population, they receive much attention in the media and in public and scholarly discourse. The popularity of the critically acclaimed Amazon series *Transparent* confirms that trans* experiences are integral to the lives of the cisgender population.

Transparent problematizes sociological and historical constructs of gender and sexuality. It depicts the intimate life of a transwoman, Maura, and her family as they try to manage their relationships in the midst of their own burgeoning gender and sexual fluidity. *Transparent* also offers a specific opportunity to open conversations about trans* experiences. Its themes undermine notions of a gender binary, and its popularity suggests that the show offers significant potential for engendering public conversation and education about trans* identities.

Given the difficulties that trans* students face and how popular *Transparent* is, we are compelled to wonder how schools—and in particular, secondary schools—can capitalize on the popularity of the show to inform adolescents about being trans* and potentially help reduce some of the physical and verbal assaults trans* people suffer. The research question that guides this paper thus is, How can English Language Arts (ELA) teachers use the popularity and pedagogy of *Transparent* to educate adolescents about trans* experiences?

In order to address this question, we create classroom lessons that are grounded in methods of teaching English (Burke, 2012; Milner, Milner, & Mitchell, 2012), incorporate scenes from the television show, and align with ninth- and tenth-grade Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in ELA¹. Hence, the purpose of this paper is to illustrate how ELA curriculum can use scenes from *Transparent* to inform adolescents about the experiences of being trans*.

¹ More information about the CCSS in ELA is available at National Governors Association and Council of Chief School Officers. (2010). Common core state standards for English language arts & literacy in history/social studies, science and technical subjects. Retrieved from http://www.corestandards.org/wp-content/uploads/ELA_Standards1.pdf

Trans* Youth Experiences

In recent years, trans* adolescents have become increasingly visible in their schools and communities, yet the classroom remains a space that perpetuates heteronormative discourses and practices (Miller, 2015a). In fact, recent scholarship has shown that school communities reproduce heteronormative discourses in order to compel gender-variant children into gender conformity (Blackburn, 2006; Connell, 2005; Halberstam, 1998; Kimmel, 2012). As more and more gender- and sexually fluid students come out in schools, school communities must do more to educate all of their stakeholders about trans* people in order to ameliorate some of the conditions that trans* people endure.

The Williams Institute, a think tank at UCLA's School of Law, recently published a report that detailed some disturbing trends for trans* people (Biegel & Kuehl, 2010). The harrowing difficulties trans* people face as they interact with the world continue to be at the center of their lived experiences.

Some of the issues trans* people contend with involve local, state, and federal antidiscrimination laws that fail to protect them from employment, custody, and housing discrimination. Other difficulties involve challenges to permitting trans* individuals to use a public bathroom that aligns with their gender identity even when the restroom does not match their sex assigned at birth (Girshick, 2008; Halberstam, 1998; Ingrey, 2012; Rasmussen, 2009). This issue remains important, especially when trans* people have to live as their “authentic”² gender for at least one year prior to having gender-affirmation surgery (Teich, 2012).

As the trans* population continues to rise, 75% of trans* youth report being harassed in school (K-12), 35% report being physically assaulted in school, 12% report being sexually assaulted, and 14% report dropping out of school as a result of prolonged harassment (Biegel & Kuehl, 2010). Teich (2012) similarly writes that trans* youth experience verbal and physical abuse and continual bullying in schools. The most current information regarding harassment at schools indicates that “90 percent of transgender students reported hearing fellow students comment about someone not being masculine enough or feminine enough on a regular basis” (Teich, 2012, p. 105). This suggests that the likelihood of trans* students being harassed in schools remains high.

2 *Transparent* writer Our Lady J speaks of her “authentic gender” and “authentic self” to refer to her real gender as a woman. Thus, we use her term to distinguish between the gender performance of passing and the gender performance after coming out as trans* (authentic).

More troubling is the low percentage (11%) of school staff who intervene when students make disparaging comments about a fellow classmate's gender expression. It is no wonder, then, that an astounding "82 percent of trans students felt unsafe at schools" (Teich, 2012, p. 105). We hope the research presented here will begin a conversation about how schools can become safer spaces for trans* and gender creative youth. Our approach attempts to integrate the use of popular media with the scholarship on methods of teaching English and with the secondary English curriculum and standards.

Transparent Pedagogy

We interviewed six members of *Transparent's* creative team to learn about the creative process of producing the show, the writing process involved in developing the scripts, and the public pedagogy the show's success engenders (Sandlin, O'Malley, & Burdick, 2011). Participants were chosen to represent a broad spectrum of roles within the creative team (three writers, two producers, and one editor) and also to represent a wide experience of gender and sexuality (two transwomen, one transman, one cis straight man, one cis gay woman, and one cis straight woman). We hope that this diverse group provides varied perspectives that both enrich the quality and depth of our data and reveal different approaches for addressing our research questions.

We asked each interviewee a series of questions about how *Transparent* potentially teaches viewers about trans* experiences. One question asked them to choose a scene that would best illustrate or provoke discussions among secondary school students about trans* experiences. Although we do not view the participants as experienced pedagogues, we believe that they are experts in the experiences of trans* individuals and that they can also speak to the aspirational aspects of the show. We believe that because they are among *Transparent's* creators, producers, editors, advisors, and writers, they are the best people to speak to how they hoped it would illuminate the complex and sometimes difficult experiences of trans* individuals.

During their interviews, each of the participants indicated that the show intends to teach the public about trans* experiences and that this focus remains an important emphasis throughout their work in the writers' room. *Transparent* employs both trans* and cisgender writers, editors, and producers; in addition, the show's creative team reads and discusses a great deal of trans*studies scholarship and other material on trans* experiences. Though the cisgender members of the team lack the lived experience of being trans*, they self-identify as trans* allies who vehemently advocate for increasing public understanding of trans* experiences.

Transparent offers its viewers an opportunity to understand the various dimensions of trans* experiences. It also presents secondary English teachers with an opportunity to integrate issues of gender and sexuality into an inclusive curriculum. During the interviews, we asked only one question regarding the pedagogical aspects of the show for secondary students because we wanted to explore other facets of it as well. In addition, as former high school English teachers, we realize that secondary English teachers have limited time to include trans* topics in the ELA classroom. The participants selected five different scenes from season one to highlight some of Maura's specific struggles and triumphs. In turn, we designed ELA lessons based on those scenes, which align with the best practices of teaching secondary ELA and incorporate literature and writing.

Each lesson begins with a description of the scene, followed by a discussion of the reasons the participant selected it. Next, we provide a detailed description of the lesson, including suggested procedures for teaching it, and we state which of the CCSS aligns with it. Although there are limitations to the CCSS (Beach & Thein, 2012), we acknowledge that many secondary English teachers plan their daily lessons within the framework of those standards. Thus, we are compelled to think pragmatically about how to prepare teachers to infuse issues related to trans* students into curriculum that aligns with the CCSS.

The criteria we used in deciding which standards to incorporate were whether they were applicable to visual literacy and whether students could master them by writing in various genres. Together, the lessons offer a wide variety of literacy activities and cohere with the dual goals of teaching both trans* and cisgender students about trans* experiences as part of the ELA curriculum and helping students master grade 9–10 writing standards.

Though educators could teach one or two of these lessons in isolation, we strongly suggest that they integrate the lessons into a larger unit focused on civil rights and social justice, encouraging students to draw on their prior knowledge and fostering their ability to make connections among various human rights issues. Additionally, the four lessons work together to focus on trans* identities, critical literacy, and writing in different genres. Collectively, the artifacts the lessons generate can be combined to create a multigenre paper. As Romano (2000) has shown, writing multigenre papers increases student engagement and writing quality.

We also recognize that as cisgender males (one straight, one gay), we are writing on a topic with which we cannot personally identify. As such, we call to mind the important work of Paris and Winn (2014), who advocate for humanizing research methods and who argue that “to understand what it means to

‘humanize’ research, it is important to consider the ways in which people, and more specifically youth, are often ‘dehumanized’” (p. 1). Transgender studies scholar and historian Susan Stryker (2008) also points out the need to recognize the humanity of trans* people: “[a] gender-changing person can evoke in others a primordial fear of monstrosity and loss of humanness” (p. 6).

Attentiveness to the threat of dehumanization generates valid concerns about how our gendernormative identities may skew the research, or even worse, render it illegitimate. However, we borrow from Miller’s (2015b) queer literacy framework (QLF) to frame our project. Miller comments:

As adolescents come to see their realities reflected, affirmed, and made legible both through literacy practices in the classroom and society writ large, self-determination and, hence, a queer autonomy can be realized . . . teachers who take up a QLF framework can be agents for social, political, and personal transformation. (p. 38)

With this in mind, we position ourselves as cisgender allies to the struggles of trans* people, and specifically trans* youth. We hope that our experiences working with trans* youths in the ELA classroom, adherence to a QLF, 16 years of collective secondary ELA teaching experience, and being self-conscious in conducting “humanizing” research will result in lessons that advocate for trans* people.

School communities and teachers can also take up a QLF to address trans* issues through their teaching. This is increasingly important because of trans* students’ vulnerability to violence. We believe that it is our ethical responsibility as secondary English teachers to consider how best to teach trans* issues within the secondary ELA curriculum to ensure that all students have a safe and dynamic learning environment. Taking trans* students’ needs, wants, and interests into consideration when planning that curriculum is essential.

In order to contextualize the lessons and make them more comprehensible, we offer a brief summary of the *Transparent* plot and a description of its characters.

Maura, played by cisgender male Jeffrey Tambor, discloses to her children that she is transitioning after 70 years of passing as a man. Maura’s three grown children support her transition in different ways. Each of them also struggles with their own gender and sexual identity throughout the show.

Shortly after Maura’s transition, her oldest child, Sarah, leaves her husband and father of their two young children to live with her college girlfriend, Tammy. The second oldest, Josh, performs hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005) in a futile attempt to maintain the status quo. The youngest, Ali, defies gender and sexual binaries, never settling on any fixed gender or sexual identity. These characters play significant roles in Maura’s transition, and they provide insights into the ways in which students could potentially relate to shifting sexual and gender identities.

The next section of this paper examines each of the five scenes and describes related ELA lessons for the secondary classroom.

Scene 1: “This Is Me”

In the opening scene of episode 1.2, Maura, wearing women’s clothes, returns home from her trans* support group and accidentally stumbles upon Sarah and Tammy in the bedroom, kissing. Sarah asks Maura, “Are you going to start dressing up as a lady all the time?” Maura responds, “No, honey, all my life, my whole life, I’ve been dressing up like a man. This is me.”

Four of the participants named this scene as an important moment for teaching adolescents about trans* people. The primary reason they selected it is because it crystallizes Maura’s experience as a trans* person in a way that uninitiated viewers can understand. Editor Catherine Haight, for example, states, “Somehow, people get that [scene]. [It] makes sense in people’s minds.” For people who have never knowingly interacted with a trans* person, this scene humanizes Maura and makes her legible in a way that allows access into her experiences.

Lesson 1: Letter-Writing to Learn

The lesson based on this scene seeks to encourage students to critically evaluate the delimiting factors of sociohistorical gender constructions while simultaneously validating trans* identities. Miller (2015b) writes that a QLF addresses “how teachers can support students to understand and read (a)gender and (a)sexuality through a queer lens” (p. 37). This lesson employs a QLF to empower teachers and students to advocate for trans* students by supporting all students as they learn to recognize and understand trans* identities. It also aligns with the CCSS to promote lucid expression of complex texts.

Queer theory and transgender theory thus provide the theoretical basis for this lesson. Queer theory argues that sexuality and gender expression are fluid and situated (Butler 1999, 2004; Foucault, 1978). Similarly, as Nagoshi and Brzuzy, 2010, explain, “Transgender theory suggests that the lived experiences of individuals, including their negotiations of multiple intersectional identities, may empower them without confining them to any particular identity category” (p. 439).

The lesson begins by reviewing some important vocabulary necessary for understanding the scene. Key words that allow students to engage in this lesson include *gender*, *sex*, *trans**, *masculinity*, *femininity*, *fluidity*, *assigned gender*, and *sociobistorical*. After a discussion of this vocabulary, the students are invited to use some of these words in their response to the following prompt: Without taking the anatomy of the body into account, how do you know a person’s gender? Students are first asked to share their responses with their table partners and then invited to discuss their opinions with the whole class. Next, students work in groups of four or five as they respond to the following question: What do you know about trans* identities? Each group creates a response, which can be a written statement, a drawing, a concept map, or a list showing their prior knowledge of trans* identities, and then presents it to the entire class.

After completing these presentations, the class critically views the “This is me” scene and then watches Lee Mokobe, a young transman, perform his poem about what it feels like to be trans*³. Afterward, the students respond to one of the following prompts: (1) How do you understand the ways in which Maura and Lee know their gender identity?, (2) What do you think Maura and Lee may have struggled with as they were socialized in an assigned gender that was not theirs?, or (3) Predict moments of victory or triumph Maura or Lee may have experienced as their authentic gender. To conclude the lesson, students compose a letter to Maura or Lee in which they explain how Maura or Lee’s coming out experiences have helped them understand trans* identities. The letter could also include ideas about how to help fight discrimination against trans* people in the local community.

Scene 2: The Bathroom

During this scene, Maura and her two daughters, Ali and Sarah, are in line at a public ladies’ room in a local shopping mall. While they’re waiting, Sarah says, “Dad, if you have to go in front of me, that’s fine.” A teenage girl overhears this comment and tells her mother that the person standing in line may

3 Mokobe’s performance is available at https://www.ted.com/talks/lee_mokobe_a_powerful_poem_about_what_it_feels_like_to_be_transgender?language=en.

be a man. The mother confronts Maura, saying, “Sir, can you hear me? Because this is the ladies’ ladies’ restroom, and clearly that is a man.” Sarah engages in the confrontation with the mother and says, “This is my father, and he’s a woman. And he has every right to be in this bathroom.” “No, he does not,” the mother responds, “And you know what? I’m calling security because there are young women in here—that you are traumatizing.” Depending on the ages of the students in the class or the school culture, the scene may need to be stopped here because it ends with Sarah shouting profanities.

Transparent producer Zackary Drucker selected this scene because of its centrality to genderqueer and trans* experiences. She explains, “Bathrooms are ground zero for trans* people.” Writer Noah Harpster explains in some detail about what he learned in the writers’ room:

[The bathroom] is currently a national debate, but when we first began in the writers’ room—I learned that finding a safe restroom is one of the most common struggles for trans* and gender-nonconforming people. It is a frequent point of fear.

Much recent scholarship on gender acknowledges that for trans* people, public bathrooms are sites of conflict, danger, and potential threats (Girshick, 2008; Halberstam, 1998; Ingrey, 2012; Rassmussen, 2009). Further, Halberstam (1998) has pointed out that the restroom is a space in which female gender is policed by feminine women enforcing gender conformity. Maura’s experience in this scene demonstrates the challenges that trans* people endure because the public restroom has the capacity to reinscribe gender norms (Blackburn & Smith, 2010).

Both Harpster and Drucker recommend showing this scene to adolescents to teach them about trans* experiences because it has the potential to illustrate how a common event (using a public bathroom) can be a terrifying and threatening experience for many trans* people. Maura’s experience in the women’s restroom is partially mitigated because she has a strong ally, her daughter Sarah. Nonetheless, the scene illustrates how misunderstanding trans* people produces bigotry and malice. Teachers can use this scene as an opportunity to inform students that transgenderism is not a pathology but instead an indication of the limits of norms perpetuated by a gender binary. They can also explain that, as Nagoshi and Brzuzy (2010) contend, “The depathologizing of transgenderism . . . does not remove the problem of transgender individuals having to deal with the pervasive and pernicious transphobia that exists in society” (p. 438).

Writer Ali Liebegott points out that Sarah’s defense of Maura offers an important teaching moment for young trans* or queer people. Liebegott explains, “When Sarah defends Maura in the bathroom, I

think that’s very powerful in a way that you have allies. You’re gonna be alright . . . It’s not the end of the world.” Liebegott emphasizes the significance the support of loved ones plays as trans* and queer people negotiate the worlds in which they live. Trans* youth have an especially high risk for depression and suicide, so it is profoundly important for them to witness moments when trans* allies show public support.

However, this scene emerges as a more complicated teaching moment because Sarah misgenders Maura, using male pronouns to refer to her. This moment illustrates one way that loving allies must also evolve their language when people transition. With regard to classroom pedagogy, the scene thus serves a triple purpose: it shows the bigotry trans* people are forced to face in a space they already approach with fear and apprehension, the unconscious difficulty allies have adjusting their language when someone is transitioning, and the power that advocacy has for validating trans* identities.

Lesson 2: Collaborative Recognition through Poetry

The goal of the ELA lesson based on this scene is to have students critique transphobia. The lesson employs a QLF and assists in reworking “social and classroom norms where bodies with differential realities in classrooms are legitimated and made legible to self and other” (Miller, 2015b, p. 37). It aligns with the CCSS that promotes collaborative discussions that challenge one’s views while simultaneously building on others’ ideas. The bathroom scene offers educators the opportunity to make trans* bodies legible by compelling students to recognize and contextualize trans* experiences. Depending on the age group and experiences of the students, it may help to teach the words *heteronormative* and bigotry before the lesson.

The class begins by responding to the following questions: Should everyone have the right to use a public bathroom? Why or why not? Why do we have bathrooms assigned to specific genders? What challenges do you think trans* people may have in using public bathrooms? How do you think trans* people feel about using a public bathroom? Using a concentric circles or fishbowl protocol (see Milner, Milner, & Mitchell, 2011) facilitates a student-led discussion.

The class is informed that they will be watching a scene during which a trans* woman attempts to use a public restroom. Once the scene is over, students reflect on why a woman claims that Maura does not belong in the women’s restroom and demands that Maura leave. The class engages in a discussion based on the following questions: Why does the woman believe Maura is violating the bathroom

space? Why does the woman call Maura a “pervert”? What are the implications of the word “pervert”? Based on her response to Maura, what do the woman’s views about gender identity appear to be? What are the counterarguments to her claims?

The class discusses these questions in small groups, and to foster further conversation about this scene, each group composes one question they would like to ask Maura, Sarah, or the woman who tells Maura to leave the bathroom. If the teacher has elected to cut the scene before Sarah uses profanity, students can be asked to predict what happens next or to explain what they would do if they were in that situation. Stopping the scene before it ends could also be an opportunity to have students dramatize the conclusion and provide alternative and even more empowering endings (Wilhelm, 2016).

After students reflect on these questions and share those they wrote, the teacher distributes copies of “Let America be America Again,” by Langston Hughes and “A cut won’t kill me,” by Bo Luengsurawat. A close reading of both poems could stimulate the discovery of connections between the experiences that Maura endured while waiting in the bathroom and the experiences of the speakers in the poems.

After the class has read the poems, they have a discussion based on the following questions that challenge students’ ideas about gender identity: How might Maura’s experiences as a trans* person correlate with the experiences of groups represented in the poems? In what ways does the bathroom scene resonate with other patterns of oppression in the United States? If there were a trans* student or teacher at this school, how would that affect the way you view gendered bathrooms? How would you react if you were in a public restroom with a trans* person? How do these poems help you understand challenges that trans* people face?

After students write about these questions, they exchange their responses with a classmate and respond in a journal to the following prompts: Do you agree or disagree with what your tablemate wrote? Why or why not? How have your partners’ responses offered an alternative view of trans* issues? After students finish writing their responses, the journals rotate to another student reviewer, who responds in writing to the prompts and to the first reviewer’s ideas. After the second reviewer writes in the journals, they are returned to their owners and each student reads their classmates’ questions and thoughts. The students then write their reactions to the feedback they received.

The lesson culminates with students composing a poem that challenges prejudice against trans* people. The students may use the question they wrote earlier in the lesson (the one they would like to ask

Maura, Sarah, or the other woman in the bathroom) as the opening line of the poem. Students can also pluck words, lines, images, and ideas from their own responses and from peer comments to create a type of found poem that wonders about, reports, questions, or denounces prejudice against trans* individuals.

Scene 3: Support Scenes

This lesson involves two different scenes that depict belonging. The first scene takes place near the end of episode 1.1, when Maura attends a trans* support group at the Los Angeles LGBTQ Community Center. During the scene, Maura reveals a moment of victory when she recounts being asked for an ID while using a credit card. The clerk accepts her ID, which depicts her as a man, and completes the transaction. Maura describes this moment as a “big victory.” This scene also presents a diverse population of trans* people and provides an example of how the trans* community relies on each other for support.

The scene paired with this one occurs in episode 1.2, when Maura visits her friend Davina’s apartment. Davina is a transwoman who transitioned several years earlier, and during a conversation with Maura, she says, “You know sweetie, this is a really big journey that we’re on, and you’ve just started on it so you gotta learn to let go of everything that anybody thinks of you . . . In five years you’re going to look up and not one of your family members is still going to be there. Not one.” Davina reveals an unfortunate reality for many trans* people: the queer community often becomes their (only) family after they transition.

Writers Ali Liebegott and Our Lady J comment that both the support group scene and the scene in which Maura visits Davina illustrate safe spaces and the ways that more experienced trans* people mentor the newly transitioning. Our Lady J explains why she chose these scenes to teach adolescents about trans* experiences: “The scenes with Davina [reflect what] happens in her community. We have mothers—adopted mothers and adopted children, where we teach each other the ropes of transitioning . . . That’s how we learn. Davina does that for Maura.” Although Davina is considerably younger than Maura, she mentors Maura as Maura journeys into her trans* identity. Our Lady J posits that these scenes remind the viewer that “there’s this amazing community of trans* people and Maura asking Davina all these questions. In her apartment is the first time we see it.” Our Lady J implies that the scenes demonstrate the enduring support in the trans* community.

Similarly, Liebegott believes that the support group scene possesses important pedagogical moments because it serves as a reminder to people transitioning “that there’s a whole world [comprised of gender queer and trans* people.]” Liebegott and Our Lady J strongly contend that it is important that gender-nonnormative adolescents know that a community of people just like them exists. As Liebegott said, “They [trans* adolescents] need hope.” Both of these women believe the television show offers adolescents positive examples of the trans* community, and they hope that a durable and tight community of trans* people will help trans* children negotiate many of the challenges they may face.

Lesson 3: Creating Support Structures in Monologues and Collages

The lesson based on the support scene articulates the value of support for the trans* community. The lesson uses a QLF (Miller, 2015b) to enable teachers to offer an opportunity for support and make legible the growing number of youth who identify outside normative gender and sexual classifications. It also aligns with the CCSS that helps secondary ELA students produce cohesive writing based on appropriate evidence. Students draw on their prior experiences as well as their understanding of the scenes to create monologues or collages to explore the value of mentorship and support in the trans* community.

The lesson begins as students respond to the following prompt: Think of a time when you or someone you know needed help in order to overcome a difficult experience. This experience could include people’s perceptions or biases regarding your ability, your ethnic background, your gender, or your age. Take five minutes to write the story of the events that transpired during this time. You must write for five minutes without stopping. Volunteers then read their narratives to the whole class, and the teacher lists common motifs and draws a two-circle Venn diagram. Next, students watch the support and mentorship scenes critically. As a class, students use the Venn diagram to organize how their personal experiences and the scenes from *Transparent* converge and diverge. The teacher points out the common experiences that all people share when faced with difficult circumstances.

Students then discuss the following prompts in small groups: Why is the support group important for Maura? Why would a trans* person’s family no longer be present five years after transition? What do you think about this? What does Davina gain from providing support for Maura? What does Maura gain from Davina’s support? Where do you foresee trans* people succeeding and struggling in their public lives? How would you feel if your assigned gender did not match your authentic gender? What

challenges would this pose? Write on the whiteboard one question that you would like to ask Maura or Davina. After the students have discussed all of the prompts and have written their questions on the board, they use the Venn diagram, one of those questions, and their discussion to create either a monologue or collage.

The prompt for the monologue is: Your monologue must be between one and two minutes; you must write it in first person as Maura or Davina. To get you started, choose one of the questions the class created and answer the question as if you were Maura or Davina. Imagine that she is talking to this class about the importance of support in managing life's struggles. As you continue writing your monologue, rely on your experience in receiving and providing support and also incorporate the challenges people like Maura and Davina face in their daily lives. Once the students finish writing, volunteers read their monologues to the class while the teacher provides specific feedback.

Writing and performing the monologues is intended to make it possible for students to embody and empathize with trans* lived experiences. However, the performances have the potential to mock those who identify as trans*. Teachers need to use their discretion in having cisgender students perform monologues as trans* people.

The prompt for the collage assignment is: Create a collage in which you depict an aspect of trans* lived experience. The collage can focus on the importance of support, depict challenges and prejudices that trans* people endure, or illustrate the ways that cisgender youth allies can work for trans* equity to combat transphobia. After students complete their collage, they write an interpretation of it and detail how it represents the experiences of trans* people or the possible actions of cisgender youth allies. Student volunteers share their collages.

The lesson concludes with a discussion of the students' experiences in creating the collage or writing the monologue, and teachers provide students with a list of resources for trans* youth and their allies.

Scene 4: Restaurant Scene

When asked which scene she would show to teach adolescents about gender, Liebegott chose a scene from episode 1.5 in which Maura, Davina, and their friend Shea (also a transwoman) enjoy drinks at a local restaurant. As they converse about Shea's transition, a cisgender man, Gary, approaches their table and proceeds to flirt with Shea. As he banters with Shea, Maura, who recognizes him as one of

her former colleagues at UCLA, says, “Hi, Gary.” Gary addresses her as Mort, raising his voice and bursting into uncontrollable laughter. Maura stands her ground and asks Gary about his wife, to which Gary turns and walks away. Ultimately, Shea rejects him, and Gary retreats from the restaurant.

Liebegott cites this scene as an important one to teach adolescents about trans* experiences because she believes it shows hope for trans* youth in that it is “very powerful. She’s [Maura’s] not beaten by him. They also aren’t really having him. That kind of solidarity I think is awesome.” The scene represents a moment of triumph for Maura as the women repudiate Gary’s bigotry and it simultaneously signifies the unity of the trans* community.

Lesson 4: Dramatic Embodiment of Mediation

The ELA lesson based on this scene analyzes Maura’s victory in the restaurant by comparing it to similar themes in Maya Angelou’s poem, “Still I Rise,” and queer poet Andrea Gibson’s poem, “Letter to the Playground Bully from Andrea (age 8).” The lesson culminates with students composing and dramatizing short scenes which depict how to mediate bullying of trans* youth. The lesson offers strategies for combating bullying and aligns with the QLF, affirming the gender diversity in secondary ELA classrooms. It also aligns with the CCSS that promote discussion of key themes in different artistic modalities.

To begin this lesson, the teacher writes the following questions in different places on the board: What is bullying? How do you recognize bullying when you see it? What is the difference between teasing and bullying? How do you respond when someone is being bullied? Students discuss these questions using a chalk talk protocol, silently questioning and responding to one another on either a whiteboard or chart paper.⁴

After completing the chalk talk activity, the class discusses the themes emerging from the conversation. The teacher then informs the students that after examining different types of bullying, they will be asked to synthesize them into a unifying statement. First, the students watch Andrea Gibson perform “Letter to the Playground Bully from Andrea (age 8).”⁵ Then they read the poem, creating annotations for phrases that relate to any of the themes from the chalk talk.

Next, the students watch the restaurant scene and note any similarities that they see between it and

4 For an example of chalk talk, see “Chalk Talk: Management in the Active Classroom,” <https://vimeo.com/101254151>.
5 Gibson’s performance is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Clm8w8_eOnc

“Letter to the Playground Bully.” Then they watch a video of Maya Angelou reading “And Still I Rise.”⁶ Afterward, they read and annotate it, identifying themes that it has in common with the restaurant scene and “Letter to the Playground Bully.” Groups of four or five students discuss the similarities among the works and compose one unifying thematic statement synthesizing the three of them.

Using their unifying statements as a ground, the students work together, writing 3–5 minute scenes about bullying. They begin by generating a word bank for the scenes from the comments produced during the chalk talk activity. The scenes should deal with acts of bullying that occur at school and in communities and demonstrate strategies to oppose those behaviors. After the students perform their scenes, the groups discuss the question, What can we do as a community to eliminate bullying?, and create a poster that outlines five specific steps their school community can take.

Culminating Activity: Multigenre Paper for Trans* People, Trans* Allies, and Social Justice

All of the artifacts these lessons produce can be assembled together to create a multigenre paper that represents the lived experiences of trans* people and strategies their cisgender allies can use to advocate for social justice. Educators should also consider publishing these projects to promote equity within the school community. Publishing on a class website, in the classroom, and in a public space in the school demonstrates support for trans* youth and validates queer or questioning students’ identities (Blackburn, 2006). Public recognition of trans* lives helps to establish an inclusive learning environment. The scholarly literature has shown that inclusivity is paramount for creating positive school experiences for LGBTQ students (Blackburn, 2006).

Impact of Inclusion

We believe that it is the moral responsibility of all schools and educators to create environments in which all children feel safe and can be successful. When the classroom fails to represent queer students, they are increasingly likely to disengage from learning (Blackburn, 2005; Blackburn & Smith, 2010; Carlson, 2015; Carlson & Linville, 2015; Miller, 2015a, 2015b). However, a merely superficial classroom representation of sexual and gender diversity is not enough to produce feelings of inclusiveness among LGBTQ students (Blackburn, 2006). With this in mind, the lessons we outline employ a QLF to encourage legibility and recognition of gender diversity within the student body in order to both

6 Angelou’s performance is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JqOqo50LSZO>

increase literacy and promote inclusivity. Miller (2015b) emphasizes an overarching goal of a QLF: “As adolescents come to see their realities reflected, affirmed, and made legible both through literacy practices in the classroom and society writ large, self-determination and, hence, a queer autonomy can be realized” (p. 38).

The primary purpose of these lessons is to encourage empathy and connection among all students and to allow everyone to feel represented in the classroom. Though attention to LGBTQ issues is a mandated element of teacher preparation social justice standards (Miller, 2015b), ongoing concerns about the safety of trans* students, remind us that much work still needs to be done.

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“It’s Nonexistent”: Haunting in Trans Youth Narratives about Naming

Julia Sinclair-Palm

I mean for a lot of people a name is not a big deal. But to me, I know for sure that when my name was changed and people started calling me Tye that was a huge deal. And it meant some . . . it just meant more than a name. It was like more like respect. They respected me enough to respect that I wanted to be called Tye and that’s what I prefer. The pronouns I was used to. The name was the first thing.

—Tye¹

Often, choosing a name is one of the first ways trans² youth begin to assume a different gender from the one they were assigned at birth. Trans youths’ negotiation of naming is particularly complex as they juggle family affinities and independence as well as trying on new identities and building relationships with peers. To explore how the names they receive, refuse, and choose can expose the challenges trans youths face when narrating their identity formation, I turn to their narratives regarding their renaming themselves. Stories about the process of choosing a name reveal how trans youth negotiate their relationship with their birth name and their emerging sense of identity.

In this paper I ask: What do birth names and chosen names tell us about the work of narrating an origin story? How do birth names haunt stories trans youth tell about the self? How do trans youth make sense of their birth name, and how can schools support trans youth in their naming process?

Current research about trans youth relies on discourses that position them as always at risk (Rasmussen, 2006; Russell, 2005). And indeed, young trans people tell stories about their mental health issues, their lack of parental and family support (which is often correlated with their psychosocial issues and can be a contributing factor to homelessness), and their experiences of violence and discrimination at school (which is often described as being a contributing cause of trans youth dropping out of school) (Grossman & D’Augelli, 2006; Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014; Taylor & Peter, 2011).

1 Participants had the option of choosing the name(s) that would be used to refer to them in the project.

2 I use the term “trans” through my paper as a way to acknowledge, describe, and “encompass all manifestations of transness” (Cromwell, 2001, p. 263; see also Noble, 2006), including, but not limited to, transgender, transsexual, gender queer, and “diverse gender variant practices” (Aizura, 2006, p. 291). I also recognize that although I am attempting to be inclusive, gender expressions and identities are culturally specific and that some people do not use the term trans and in fact disavow it (Namaste, 2000; Valentine, 2007).

While it is important to recognize the challenges trans youth face, discourses that position them as always at risk set up a limited framework for understanding their lives and the stories they can tell about their experiences (Driver, 2008; Rasmussen, 2006). Research about young trans people needs to explore the ways they are using language to render themselves intelligible and how they are resisting victim narratives through the naming and un-naming of who they are or want to become.

A new direction within research about trans youth attempts to think differently about them by positioning them as neither at risk nor as resilient, instead focusing on understanding the ways in which trans youth negotiate their identity and development within various social contexts (Driver, 2008). Furthermore, this research considers the ways that individual characteristics influence how young trans people engage with and experience their social world. I include my research within this new paradigm in trans youth literature, which recognizes the importance of continuing to examine the risks and challenges faced by trans youth in addition to the ways these youth are resilient and thriving. It explores the complex ways young people construct an understanding of their identities and experiences, the social contexts in which they are engaged, and the varied ways that context matters in the development of trans youth.

In this paper, I draw upon a qualitative study in which I spoke with young trans people about their experiences of naming and their narrative self-constructions in order to argue for a more complex understanding of trans youths' experiences in school and to question how schools can better support and accommodate trans students. Although there has been progress in the creation of safe spaces and the inclusion of trans students in schools (Taylor et al., 2015), many institutions continue to use gender as an administrative category and complicate trans youths' ability to determine their gender identity and to name who they are at school.

I begin with a description of the methods and methodology I used in this project. Next, I draw on Gordon's (2008) concept of haunting to examine the relationship between trans youths' birth names and the presence of those names as ghostly figures in the lives of young trans people. I bring Gordon's discussion to my analysis of a story from one trans youth named Tye about his experiences at school. Gordon's concept of the ghost presents an opportunity to think about how trans youth like Tye experience the erasure of their birth name as a death as well as about the traces old names leave in their lives.

Studying Trans Youths' Naming Practices

The purpose of the study was to solicit rich, nuanced stories about renaming from trans youth to get a sense of how identity is negotiated and shifts over time. As part of the study, I interviewed 10 young trans people on two separate occasions, using an in-depth semistructured framework. The first and second interviews typically took place a month apart. Interviewing participants twice allowed for a detailed investigation into the narrative practices and complexities trans youth face when choosing a name and offered participants a chance to tell multiple and contradicting stories about themselves (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000).

In-depth interviews invite participants to select details of their life and to reflect, bring order to, and develop a narrative about their lived experience and the meaning they make of that experience (Seidman, 2006). These interviews allowed me to explore how trans youth navigate their naming process at school and how they narrate the role of their birth name in their story of who they are.

Participants in my study were between the ages of 15 and 25 and self-identified as falling along a spectrum of trans experiences.³ They were recruited in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) through existing contacts in LGBT centers and by using snowball sampling to find more participants (Bertaux, 1981). In addition to speaking directly about the project with service providers and youth, I handed out a small flyer describing it that included my contact information.

Four participants were 25 years old, and the other six were 20 years old or younger, spread equally across the range of 15 to 20 years of age. Five participants identified as biracial or mixed race, two identified as Caucasian, one identified as Italian, one identified as Lebanese, and one identified as Albanian. Five participants were assigned female at birth, and five were assigned male at birth.

For each of the two interviews, participants were given the option of meeting in a location that was most comfortable for them. Eight interviews were held in private rooms at a large university, four were conducted over Skype, and eight took place at a restaurant or café. Interviews lasted from one to two hours and were audio recorded and then transcribed. I conducted the interviews between March 2014 and December 2014. Each participant chose a pseudonym in the first interview or agreed to let me use their name(s) in my data analysis and writing.

³ This age range allowed me to capture some of the diverse relationships youth have to their sense of home and family. I use this age range to define youth because those years are a time of transition between childhood and adulthood when young people are negotiating the push out into the world and the pull back into the home. They are gaining a sense of self and constructing narratives about themselves that both tie them to their family and separate them from it.

The data analysis is informed by Regales's (2008) work with trans youth. She cautions researchers working with that population that a great concern of trans youth is that they may be "misrepresented or 'cut' into smaller 'pieces' to prove an academic point, since forcible fragmentation and invisibility in mainstream society confronts and frustrates them" (Regales, 2008, p. 88). Doing justice to a narrative also involves recognizing the complexity of each individual life and the unique ways people navigate social situations. Trans youth are entitled to what Gordon (2008) calls "a complex personhood," which "is about conferring the respect on others that comes from presuming that life and people's lives are simultaneously straightforward and full of enormously subtle meaning" (p. 5).

Gordon (2008) critiques the tendency in social science research to equate persons with social markers; in research about trans youth, this means not defining them only by their gender transition, age, or high rates of discrimination and suicide ideation. Gordon demands that we notice, in our reading and research practices, the complicated relationship that individuals have both to the particularities of their lives and to the social categories we use to make sense of the world. I turn now to explore how Gordon's concept of haunting offers a way to think about the presence of Tye's birth name at school.

The Ghostly Figure of the Birth Name

In her book *Ghostly Matters*, Gordon (2008) begins with the seemingly simple statement that "life is complicated" (p. 3). She argues that it is "perhaps the most important statement of our time" (p. 3) and needs to be taken more seriously, but that it is often overlooked and that social analysis has been weakened by generalizations. She addresses two dimensions in this theoretical statement: the complexity of power relations and the idea of complex personhood.

In her discussion of power relations, Gordon (2008) uses the concept of haunting to describe the ways oppressive and abusive systems of power continue to make themselves present and their impacts felt in everyday life. For her, haunting "raises specters" and "is an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known" (Gordon, 2008, p. xvi). She cites capitalism and racism as representations of two forms of oppressive and abusive systems of power, but argues that those terms do not fully convey the inequalities that permeate social relations. Haunting draws attention to the ways that racism is not always seen at face value; haunting shows the banalities of everyday racism and the complicated ways racism leaves its traces.

Haunting ghostly figures point to what is missing and appear when “the trouble they represent and symptomize is no longer being contained or repressed or blocked from view” (Gordon, 2008, p. xvi). The ghost is important because of both its presence and what it represents, which “is usually a loss, sometimes of life, sometimes of a path not taken. From a certain vantage point the ghost also simultaneously represents a future possibility, a hope” (Gordon, 2008, p. 63).

I use Gordon’s (2008) concept of the ghost to think about birth names. Trans youth often describe their birth name(s) as only part of their past, and yet those names often arise in their life in unanticipated and unwelcome ways. Originating in the trans community, the term “deadnaming” describes calling a trans person by their birth name after they have adopted a new name. The act of deadnaming has the effect of “outing,” or making public, a trans person’s identity. Deadnaming is sometimes accidental, as when a friend or family member is still adjusting to a trans person’s new name and unintentionally calls them by their birth name. However, there are also many times when trans people are addressed by their birth name as a way to aggressively dismiss and reject their gender identity and new name.

The loss and lingering presence of birth names takes on a ghostly figure in the lives of trans youth. Gordon (2008) frames her understanding of the ghost as one that is not invisible; rather, it “has a real presence and demands its due, your attention” (p. xvi). If one’s birth name is a ghost demanding our attention, what does it want? How should we attend to it? Gordon suggests that one should listen to the ghost because “the ghost is not simply a dead or missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life” (Gordon, 2008, p. 8).

Gordon’s (2008) concept of ghosts provides an opportunity to explore how trans youth negotiate their identity and relationship to their birth name. Trans people often speak about the death of their old name and the birth of their new self through their renaming process, suggesting that these names cannot exist simultaneously. However, birth names remain a part of the history of the trans person, haunting them in unanticipated contexts and moments. For trans youth like Tye, school is one of the sites in which their birth name often remains present in their lives.

Tye’s Graduation Story

I interviewed Tye on a warm day in October. We met in a private room at the university he attends, after exchanging emails back and forth about scheduling and his interest in the study. I brought lunch for us and we ate while I asked him questions about his name and his experiences as a young trans

person. Tye came to the first interview with a lot of excitement and positive energy. He wore glasses with square silver frames that looked a little big on his boyish face, had a small mustache, and did not wear sideburns. His hair stood straight up on his head, and as he spoke he combed his hand through it. Tye is half Trinidadian and half French Canadian and was 18 years old at the time of the interview.

Tye said that he has always known he was trans and that it had been hard for him to come out to his family. He described how at first it was really weird for his dad to call him Tye, but that now “he doesn’t have to think about it.” A couple years ago, when he knew he wanted to change his name from Tiffany (birth name) to Tye (chosen name), he brought it up to his mom and, Tye told me, “she was like no, absolutely not, that’s insane!” After some time, Tye’s mom “came around” and now “she’s really supportive.” In fact, she even helped him fill out the forms to legally change his name.

In ninth grade, Tye had not yet legally changed his name; his birth name was the only name on record at the school, although he was using the name Tye with his friends and family. He explained how “on attendance and stuff that was a huge thing for me because I did not want people, teachers, to call out Tiffany.” Tye went to his guidance counselor, who is “amazing and gay” and “really involved in LGBT youth and stuff.” Tye described how his guidance counselor was a really great advocate for him at school:

He sent a note out every year, at the beginning of the year saying to the teachers you know could you please use the male pronouns with Tye. I think he did change it on the attendance to Tye, but it was just considered a preferred name. So it wasn’t legal, so when I got, for example, like on my report card or whatever it would say Tiffany.

Tye and his guidance counselor recognized the limits of the school policies and found ways to help him navigate his name in the classroom and with teachers. Tye believed that once he changed his name legally, his chosen name would be respected throughout the school and his birth name would cease to represent who he was there. He changed his name legally in his last year of high school and described that although he brought the formal documents of his legal name change to his school’s administration, he continued to be referred to by his birth name at school, rather than by his new legal name. This came to a head at his high school graduation.

Tye explained that at his school’s graduation ceremony, students are given a piece of paper on which their full name is printed. As they approach the stage, they hand their piece of paper to someone who

then reads the name aloud as the students walk across the stage. Tye stood in line waiting with all his other classmates when he was given his slip of paper. It read “Tiffany (Tye) Thomas.” Tye described his reaction to seeing the name that was written on the slip:

I’m like okay, this is ridiculous, I’m like, technically Tiffany is nonexistent. Like this is not a person. Like come on, how do you screw that up? I was so pissed and I took someone’s pen and I had to search for a pen first of all because no one had one and I scratched out Tiffany.

Tye insisted that the person named Tiffany does not exist, yet there are traces of her that he cannot escape and forms of structural violence that keep Tiffany attached to him. This structural violence takes shape in the systematic ways Tye’s school denies his name change and fails to replace his birth name with his new name. Because structural violence is embedded in the political and economic organization of our social world, it can be subtle and sometimes invisible, and yet is violent in the way it injures and disadvantages individuals. The misrecognition of Tye’s name is an example of one of the ways trans students experience harassment and violence at school because of their gender identity and expression (Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014; Taylor & Peter, 2011). The moments when Tye’s status as a trans person is made public and he is not recognized by his new name demonstrate some of the ways social structures and norms about gender harm Tye or create a potentially dangerous situation for him.

The existence and ghostly figure of names gain traction because they represent the ways oppressive and abusive systems of power are at work in everyday life. Although Tye legally changed his name, his birth name continues to exist and demand a presence; this persistence is the way the ghost makes itself known. Tye may wish Tiffany were dead, but he does not have control over how this name haunts him. For Tye, the name Tiffany reminds him of the disconnection and alienation he has to his birth name and to the gender identity he was assigned at birth. Although the name Tiffany is not itself abusive or oppressive, the school’s persistent use of that name might cause injury to Tye and represents oppressive and abusive systems of power by misgendering him. Despite feeling betrayed and misunderstood by the school, in telling stories about how his teachers and guidance counselor have advocated for him, Tye simultaneously describes ways that some in the school community support his gender identity and name.

Tye worries about getting in trouble for scratching out the name Tiffany at graduation. His behavior is an act of rebellion, reflecting resistance or resilience. But what might that act mean for Tye? He

might hope that because he has scratched out the name, Tiffany will die or become nonexistent, which raises the question: Are ghosts scratched-out people? Tye's birth name leaves a trace of who he was, and it remains on the paper despite now being illegible. The visibility and invisibility of his birth name hint at its ghostly presence. Tiffany remains a ghost in Tye's story of himself, leaving traces of herself throughout his life and asking for a new relation with him.

Tye's story raises questions about names: What does it mean for a name to exist? And how do names represent who we are or were? Gordon's (2008) concept of haunting offers a way to consider the recognition and representation of Tye's birth name in his life story. For many trans people, birth names can be emotionally triggering, and the presence of their birth name challenges their new name and identity. This conflict of representation and recognition is complex for trans youth. If birth names are part of the self, what would it look like to provide a space for trans youth to work through their relationship to that self? How do trans youth mourn their old name and their past self?

The distance Tye creates between himself and the name Tiffany divides his old self from his new self, but the space between these two people and two names remains unspeakable, unknown, and tenuous. Tye was unable to describe his relationship to his birth name, except to say that he wished it did not exist. Tye's birth name appears as a conflict for him and the school; by pointing to the gender oppression and abusive systems of power affecting the lives of trans youth, it represents the haunting Gordon (2008) describes. For Tye, being called Tiffany is traumatic, and the repetition of being misnamed and misgendered exposes the presence of ghostly figures.

The way Tye's name is written by the school at graduation reads like a math formula: Tiffany (Tye) Thomas. The school recognizes Tye's preferred name but resists the erasure of his birth name. The presence of Tye's birth name speaks to the complex ways it represents part of Tye's life and high school career. Graduation is a ceremony to celebrate and recognize the hard work students have completed, and Tye's years in high school include a period of his life when he was addressed by the name Tiffany. The inclusion of his birth name may speak to the school's desire to recognize its relationship to the student named Tiffany.

Trans people insist that it is important to use their chosen name, not their birth name, in referring to their past. For example, although the name Tiffany represented for many the person who would become Tye, the name Tye should be used to describe him during his high school career. Tye did not become who he is because he transitioned; he transitioned because he already was that person.

So far I have been discussing how Tye's birth name haunts him, but I also want to consider how, by being bracketed in a strange way, the name Tye haunts his birth name and his past self. The story of Tiffany will always be haunted by Tye and by who she would become. And maybe he was always also a part of her, as she is now a part of him. Brackets are used as a punctuation device to insert explanatory material or to indicate where a passage was omitted from the original material by someone other than the original author. At graduation, the name Tye was left out of his "original" name by someone other than himself. The slip of paper, given to him by others, becomes part of the story of who Tye is. If the "original" name was Tiffany (Tye) Thomas, who authored it? This question points to the complex ways stories about the self are always narrated in relation to others and how one's ghosts move through stories about the self.

The Traces of Trans Youth

Reading Tye's birth name as a ghost may represent a "loss" or "a path not taken" (Gordon, 2008, p. 63–64), but I want to conclude by thinking about what it represents as a social figure. Trans youth have diverse, complex, and changing relationships to their birth names. The ghost of Tye's birth name—or the presence of Tiffany—may want a more complex relationship to Tye's history. But I also recognize that the school's refusal to recognize Tye by his legal and chosen name makes way for the ghost.

The school is not hospitable to Tye's new name and does not know how to attend to his birth name. The ghostly presence of his birth name draws attention to the norms of the school and to conflicting stories about how to represent and name trans youth. The presence of the ghost and what it represents as a social figure is influenced by oppressive systems of power that narrate Tye's name and identity. In this way, the ghost that haunts Tye may not be his, but instead a ghost haunting the school.

The social figure of Tiffany secures the stability of gender norms and challenges the existence and presence of trans youth at the school. Tye's name and intelligibility is disavowed, and the structural violence of the school haunts trans youth like Tye. This insight suggests schools need to look closer at their ghosts and the stories they tell about trans youth in order to gain a more complex understanding of the meaning of names and trans youths' experiences at school. The oppressive systems of power perpetuated by the school limit the ways young people imagine and understand gender and sexuality.

Tye was denied recognition and support at school, and his story demonstrates the conflicts birth names present for trans youth and schools. The administrators at Tye's school might argue that the

name Tiffany is a part of the story and record of who Tye was there. His story demonstrates the way names are an important part of the stories we tell about who we are and of the stories others tell about us. Schools need to attend to the ghostly figures that haunt trans students and recognize the unique, complex, and emotional relationship trans students have with their birth names and chosen names. Schools also need to take more seriously the work of supporting trans youth in their process of choosing a new name as well as the work of considering the abusive systems of power that shape the intelligibility and lives of young trans people.

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“White people are gay, but so are some of my kids”: Examining the intersections of race, sexuality, and gender

Stephanie Shelton

Miranda¹ rolled her eyes and smacked her lips. “Seriously? We’re going to talk about this again?” The other focus group members shifted uncomfortably and looked between Miranda and Andy. The group, 17 English education students, had been actively discussing the ways that most of them believed that the civil rights battle for their generation was that of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer (LGBTQ) rights. Lulu, who self-identified as a Black cisgender heterosexual woman, had summed up the conversation by saying, “Yeah, my mom keeps saying that the [US] Civil Rights Movement and the gay rights movement aren’t the same, but I’m like, ‘Yes they are, Mom!’ And, I’m excited to see what all gets accomplished. I mean, the Civil Rights Movement’s protests integrated schools and changed education, so I’m excited to be a teacher who’s on the verge of another big shift.” The optimism and excitement that permeated most of the group met firm resistance when Andy spoke up, however.

Andy had been listening for nearly 10 minutes of the group discussion. She had told the group during the first meeting that she wanted a “masculine sounding pseudonym” to encompass her identity as a “gender-fluid Hispanic lesbian,” and throughout the semester she had been a solo but active voice for intersecting issues of race with those of gender and sexuality. (For a more detailed discussion of Andy’s intersecting identities, Andy’s contributions to the group, and the group’s resistances to Andy, see Shelton and Barnes, 2016.) At this moment, she said, “You know, y’all talk about racism like it’s over, and you talk about gay rights or queer rights or whatever like they don’t ever matter as far as race. I mean, there are queer kids of color, right? And people who deal with racism and homophobia. It’s stupid to separate them.” Her contribution earned an eye roll and dismissal by Miranda, a White cisgender heterosexual woman. Miranda was a clear leader in the group dynamics and discussion, and she was the most actively resistant to Andy and to Andy’s contributions in terms of connecting race with LGBTQ issues.

1 All participants’ names are self-assigned pseudonyms.

During this and all other focus groups, I worked primarily as an observer, at times becoming a participant-observer either by choice or by invitation or insistence from the group. As I reflect on the ways that my presence shaped the research on pre-service teachers' understandings of gender and sexuality in secondary schooling, I acknowledge that multiple identities unquestionably mattered. In addition to being the researcher, I was the participants' instructor in a Secondary English Education foundations course. They knew that I had worked for a decade in secondary schooling. I also openly identify as a lesbian cisgender White woman.

Due to my interlaced researcher/instructor roles and personal identities, I held numerous positions of authority within the research context. Due to my teaching experience and my role as the participants' instructor outside the research setting, for example, they often looked to me to learn how to successfully implement various curricula. Similarly, because of my instructor role and my lesbian identity, they understood me to be an expert on LGBTQ issues, though I had never claimed to be. When they needed to resolve a disagreement on questions related to gender or sexuality, they turned to me for answers. Most important to this paper, perhaps, my dual identities as White and lesbian potentially reinforced for the participants the idea that LGBTQ equaled Whiteness. Andy was certainly present as a queer woman of color, but my multiple authoritative identities likely muted, or at least minimized, her contributions. Unintentionally, I reinforced preexisting notions of LGBTQ identity while maintaining multiple positions of power within the group.

The Participants

The focus group was comprised of members of a senior-year undergraduate English Education teacher preparation program cohort at a research-intensive university in the southeastern United States. In the field-based foundations course that I taught, I consistently asked students to examine issues of social justice that arose during their fall semester practicum placements. After several weeks of students' questions pertaining to LGBTQ issues, I realized that there was insufficient course time to address all of the topics that my students were asking about and also fulfill programmatic requirements. I therefore established a voluntary research study focused specifically on LGBTQ issues in education for all of my foundations students who were interested and available.

Seventeen of the 24 students enrolled as participants, and their interactions included biweekly focus groups and one individual interview per participant during the academic year. Of the 17, 13 self-identified as White cisgender heterosexual women; two self-identified as Black cisgender heterosexual

women; one self-identified as a Chinese American cisgender heterosexual man (though I should note that he rarely participated in group discussions and maintained that his participation was due to his romantic interest in one of the women who was involved in the study); and one (Andy—one of four people of color and the only self-identified LGBTQ) self-identified as a Hispanic gender-fluid lesbian.

Following my students' graduations at the end of the first year of the study, I extended it for two additional years. The inclusion criteria required that participants be full-time in-service teachers and take part in at least one in-depth individual interview per academic semester. Of the 17 from the first year, five were available and participated consistently for the next two years, as they adjusted to being, as they put it, "real teachers."

The Larger Context

Unsurprisingly, my participants' contributions mirrored many concerns represented in the literature. The US-based Gay, Lesbian, & Straight Education Network (GLSEN) found in a survey of over 7,800 middle and high school students that 85% reported being verbally harassed at school, and 65% reported hearing queer-specific hate language, such as "fag" and "dyke," in their schools (Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014). LGBTQ students were "disproportionately at risk for experiencing negative psychosocial well-being and health problems" (Toomey, Ryan, Diaz, & Russell, 2011, p. 175), in addition to decreased academic performance. Throughout both pre- and in-service teaching experiences, the participants described similar bullying in their schools—students who identified as or were perceived to be LGBTQ were at greater risk for school-based harassment than those who were presumably heterosexual and/or cisgender. Several participants described severe consequences of that harassment for LGBTQ students' well-being, including homelessness, self-injurious behaviors, and excessive school absences. Harper, for example, had been nearly in tears as she described to the group a day in which a high school student, who she described as gender-nonconforming due to the student's androgynous appearance and affect, was called "faggot" by peers at least four times over a short period during class, with no intervention from the veteran classroom teacher. Mango had come to the group several times with her concerns for a ninth grader who often missed school and was homeless because his parents had discovered that he identified as gay.

The participants worked consistently to build effective LGBTQ-ally teacher identities; however, as they discussed their efforts collectively in the focus groups and individually in the interviews, I realized that the issue of race in relation to LGBTQ topics was hotly contested and often avoided (Shelton &

Barnes, 2016). As preservice teachers, the participants—with the exception of Andy—actively separated racialized oppressions from oppressions that affected LGBTQ individuals. When Andy explicitly linked race, sexuality, and gender during the focus groups, the others, especially Miranda, aggressively silenced her. Miranda maintained throughout the study’s first year that race was an antiquated notion that no longer applied to contemporary experiences. She told peers during a focus group, “Andy’s always trying to make discussions about racism, but that’s not something that kids today necessarily deal with. I hear ‘faggot’ and ‘gay’ all the time, so I know that the focus today is LGBTQ issues.” She, like nearly all of her peers, understood LGBTQ identities to be completely separate from racial identities.

Miranda was one of the five who continued her participation in the second and third years of the study. It is because of her outspokenness during the first year and her longitudinal participation that I focus on her in this paper. During the first year, she had been the most assertive in the group in separating race and sexuality, but as she began her in-service experience, she found that the new context challenged her previous ideas. She remarked in her preservice interview that she had attended a small, highly selective private high school where nearly all of the students and teachers were like her: White and upper middle class. Her university had been a similar environment, with over 70% of the students self-identifying as White, and most self-identifying as middle class or wealthier. She said of her in-service school, “I know that I’m in a new world for me. I’m the minority now.” She taught in a location where, according to state data, 99% of the student population self-identified as Black, and 78% were “economically disadvantaged.” Over the course of the next two years, Miranda wrestled with how to reconcile her preservice teacher ally identity, which had separated race and LGBTQ issues, with her in-service efforts to serve students whose views, experiences, and self-identification contradicted both her personal experiences with education and her understandings of LGBTQ identities.

The following research question guided this analysis:

How do racial identities and other race-related factors intersect with issues of sexuality and gender to shape the participant’s teacher ally identity development?

Miranda’s significant contextually informed shifts over the three years of the study are the focus of this paper. Her binary assumptions as a preservice teacher aligned with much of the existing literature, in that racial and LGBTQ identities were assumed to be separate; her in-service reflections, however, explored the intersections of race, sexuality, and gender in ways that allowed her to acknowledge her White and heterosexual privileges while better appreciating her students’ multifaceted identities and her complex role as a teacher ally.

Examining Education Research for Intersections of Race and Sexuality

There is a significant body of sociological literature that examines the importance of ways that race and ethnicity interconnect with sexuality and gender. For example, Garcia's (2012) examination of Latina girls' efforts to navigate complex identities included considerations of the ways that racism, sexism, and homophobia shaped the girls' lives. Cohen (2010) explored Black youths' navigations of politically charged and value-laden identities that inevitably and inextricably connected race with gender and sexuality (see, in particular, Chapter 3). Ferguson's (2004) work extended examinations of the intersections of race and sexuality to thoughtfully theorize the ways that sexuality becomes a means of maintaining racialized differences that are also class based. There is, then, some substantive work being done in the social sciences that explores the ways that race, sexuality, and gender are constantly connected and sometimes at odds.

However, in educational research specifically, a significant body of LGBTQ-related literature ignores the intersections of race with sexuality and gender (identity and expression). There are some important exceptions. For example, both Brockenbrough (2012) and Melvin (2010) explored how teachers of color, specifically Black men and Black women, respectively, often feel enormous pressure due to their racial identities to remain "in the closet" in terms of sexuality and/or gender identity. Mayo (2014) and McCready (2004) examined the ways in which LGBTQ students of color often lack the same resources and support systems as LGBTQ White students, because education often ignores the two identities as simultaneously relevant. Kumashiro (2001) has actively critiqued bodies of educational research for ignoring the important intersections between race and sexuality. However, while these researchers offer important perspectives, their work is an exception in larger discussions of education. Indeed, a number of education research sources that focus on LGBTQ issues completely omit race as a topic (e.g., DeWitt, 2012; Murray, 2015), reinforcing the notion that race is irrelevant in discussions of sexuality and gender.

Other resources create a different sort of division. Some researchers discuss race in relation to sexuality and gender, but do so in ways that deny how the concepts intersect for individuals and within society. For example, Lehr (2007) discusses race in relation to biblical arguments against homosexuality—making the case that slavery was also justified on the basis of religious belief before societal acknowledgment that Scripture was an insufficient rationale for the practice (p. 40). This position is not so different from Miranda's comparing racism to LGBTQ oppression in ways that disavowed the connection between the two. Whitlock (2007) discussed race in the southern United States as one of many "kinds of evil in

the world” (p. 72), along with homophobia, poverty, and violence, but did not take the additional step of considering how issues such as race, poverty, and violence related to LGBTQ identities and research on LGBTQ issues. These approaches nod to racial oppressions but do so in ways that understand LGBTQ-targeted oppressions to be a separate set of issues.

As these sources suggest, LGBTQ topics are often discussed as if Whiteness is a preexisting parameter for queerness. Media depictions of the LGBTQ community consistently feature White celebrities and characters, thereby implying that LGBTQ issues are synonymous with Whiteness (Camilleri, 2012). Additionally, race is always sexualized, no matter which racial group is involved. Mayo (2014) pointed out that “non-White sexuality is non-normative” (p. 43), while Cohen (1997) noted that White sexuality, no matter the sexual group, is normalized. Historically, non-White groups have had their sexuality presented in extreme terms.

People of color tend to be hypersexualized in caricatured and damaging ways. Sillice (2012) discusses how, both historically and contemporarily, Black identity has been equated with sexual promiscuity and barbarism. The oversexualized “Jezebel” figure historically justified slave masters’ sexual assaults on, and presently permits media representations of, oversexed Black women (Blair, 2014; Collins, 2009). And while most discussions of racialized sexuality focus on Black women and men, other racial groups are equally vulnerable. Asian women often serve as passive but sexualized objects for (typically White) male pleasure in media and real life (Shimizu & Lee, 2005). Latino men work against the confining notions of masculinity afforded by the *machismo* culture (Davila, 2012, p. 61).

These hypersexualized stereotypes pair non-White identity with assumed heterosexuality. The Jezebel seduces men. The passive Asian woman is an object of pleasure for men. The Latino man enacts his masculinity through relationships with women. All of these caricatures reinforce the notion that LGBTQ identities are reserved for White people and effectively erase LGBTQ people of color from existence.

Schools and Sexuality

This erasure carries serious consequences in school settings. Gilbert (2014) wrote, “There can be no education without the charge of sexuality” (p. x). Though schools often actively avoid discussions of sexuality in the curriculum, the sexual identities of students and teachers affect the ways that schools work and the modes of being that schools permit within their walls. Again, the data on the

vulnerability of LGBTQ students shows that risks and abuses are higher for LGBTQ students of color (Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014). A GLSEN study that focused on identity factors including race found that students of color were more likely to be harassed than White students due to their intersecting racial and sexual identities (Kosciw & Diaz, 2006). McCready (2004) pointed out that LGBTQ students of color often had no access to necessary support resources due to “overwhelming Whiteness and uninterrogated racism” in relation to gender and sexuality (p. 43). The consequence of “whitewashing” LGBTQ identity is that “racialized subjects may not find themselves inside any of the terms [within the LGBTQ acronym] on offer” (Gilbert, 2014, xvi). Their exclusion emphasizes their racialized identities in continuously sexualized terms that prohibit them from existing outside heterosexuality.

Expanding Queer Theory to Include Discussions of Race

Queer theory has historically separated racial and sexual identities (Kumashiro, 2001), creating “the illusion that they are parallel, rather than intersecting” (Somerville, 2000, p. 4). However, queer theory rejects one-dimensional or static identities. In examining dynamic identities, queer theory itself continues to shift, prompting a call for queer theoretical work that includes examinations of racial as well as sexual and gender identities. Kumashiro (2001) points out that the term “queer” is one that traditionally has included all LGBTQ individuals, but because there is a constant interrelationship between race and other identity markers, queer research offers unique possibilities for “highlight[ing] the interrelationship among sex, gender, sexuality, and even race” (p. 3).

In noting the ways that LGBTQ research fails “to account for the intersections of racism and heterosexism, and of racial and sexual identities” (Kumashiro, 2001, p. 1), my theoretical use of queer theory insists that queer identity include acknowledgment and examination of racial identities in addition to sexual and gender identities. Race is always sexualized, and the identity politics afforded through queer theory provide valuable means of examining the ways that race and sexuality are both critical to researching LGBTQ topics in education.

In considering the ways that Miranda’s positions shifted over the course of the study and the ways that she described her students’ complex identities, queer theory is also helpful in that it problematizes the ways that social structures normalize and enforce particular behaviors. In throwing norms into question, the theoretical framework blurs or “queers” sociocultural boundaries and normative forms of self-expression. Kumashiro (2001) discusses how identifying one’s self as “queer” is a transgressive

action that pushes against normative understandings of gender and sexuality. To be queer is to challenge the notion of any static identity across intersecting categories.

Hearing the Participants' Voices

In an effort to provide participants as much opportunity as possible to reflect on and discuss their personal positions and experiences, this study began as a series of focus groups and interviews aimed at supporting preservice teachers' discussions of LGBTQ issues in education. The research was a space for crafting clear and consistent participant voices that accommodated members' shifting, and even contradictory, identities. However, the new focus became examining the ways that the participants considered race and racism in relation to LGBTQ issues.

Individual Interviews

In the first year of the study, I conducted at least one semistructured interview per participant. The interviews were face-to-face and scheduled at the convenience of the participants. The protocol evoked detailed narrative responses through the use of phenomenological questioning (deMarrais, 2004), asking participants to provide "detailed descriptions of the particular experience being studied" (p. 57). I transcribed the individual and focus group interviews, providing the transcriptions to participants for approval prior to analysis as a form of member checking.

In the second and third years of the study, the participants engaged in individual interviews via Skype. To elicit rich narrative responses in relation to the participants' experiences and understandings, the interview protocol followed the same questioning approach.

Focus Groups

Focus groups are a productive method for engaging in critical conversations on social justice issues and for invoking narrative-based responses (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2008). The critical work that focus groups make possible aligns well with this paper's theoretical framework. Madriz (2000) wrote that focus groups served as a means for "the advancement of an agenda of social justice" (p. 836), specifically in relation to women of color in her own research, and that the shifting identities permitted in these exchanges allowed for greater and "different dimensions of power" (p. 839) than standard interviews. Madriz's point that focus groups permit spaces in which marginalized (and racialized) voices might be heard and valued is also relevant to this research.

The meetings were on campus, convenient to most participants' practicum and student teaching placements, and typically lasted 60–90 minutes, depending on the participants' schedules and availability. The meetings were unstructured, in that there was no set discussion protocol. Instead, the discussions opened with a shared text or prompt that I selected in response to a questionnaire that the participants filled out prior to the first meeting, related to the goals for the focus group.

Considering Miranda's Contributions and Experiences

As I had selected methods that would ensure narrative responses, my intent in analyzing the data was to attend “to the temporal and unfolding dimension of human experience” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 16) by considering the ways that Miranda worked to “configure [...] events into an explanation” (p. 16) through her narratives, while I also worked to develop “concepts from the data” (p. 13) in order to consider the “content and meaning exhibited in the storied data” (p. 14). I understood both the group's and Miranda's individual responses to be cohesive accounts in which her and other participants' responses were fully contingent on specific contexts. As a result, I only permitted myself to excerpt from the transcripts if the excerpted text retained what I had interpreted to be the overall point of the whole narrative.

After I had analyzed both the group's and Miranda's individual narratives, I began to code to identify “aspects of the data as instances of” themes (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 21). To code, I first read and analyzed each individual interview (especially Miranda's) and focus group discussion and considered possible themes based on what issues, terms, and people the participants mentioned often or discussed in detail. After this step, I conducted a cross-case analysis (Brooks, 2012) and compared and contrasted repeated concepts across the transcripts.

In relation to the research question, I examined the interviews and focus group conversations while focusing on Miranda's discussions of her understandings of race and racism, rather than on LGBTQ topics, because the latter were inherent to the study. While the individual interviews and focus groups were designed to encourage discussions of particular topics and events, none of the questions explicitly introduced issues of race; participants brought those up without being prompted.

During the analysis, I established the themes “Gangs Matter When Teaching LGBTQ Stuff” and “Slave Narratives Don't Include Gay People” as ways to clearly organize the findings in relation to the research question. Given my efforts to preserve Miranda's narratives during my analysis, these were in

vivo themes, based directly on quotations that she provided during individual interviews. The themes captured Miranda's efforts to understand herself as an LGBTQ ally while examining the ways that race and racism shaped her and her students' contexts and identities.

Miranda: Resisting the Intersections of Race and LGBTQ Issues

My review of the literature suggests that though there is extensive research on LGBTQ issues in education, little of that work examines the ways that LGBTQ topics intersect with those of race and racism. Mirroring that research, my participants consistently discussed race as separate from gender and sexuality throughout the first year of the study. Perhaps most adamant about the division between the concepts was Miranda.

During a focus group meeting in the fall semester of preservice teaching, Andy, who identified as a Hispanic gender-fluid lesbian, told the group, "Teachers really have to think more about queer kids like me—ones who aren't White." Miranda forcefully responded, "Nobody wants to hurt Black kids, Hispanic kids, whatever. Nobody here's racist. But, dragging race into all of this makes things too crazy when they don't have to be. I mean, there are rules for when kids use the n-word, but nobody does anything about saying 'faggot.'"

Though Andy had personally experienced instances when her school setting had ignored specific aspects of her identity, Miranda led the group in dismissing race or ethnicity as irrelevant to LGBTQ identity. Miranda began by positioning herself and the others as not racist. Doing so challenged any argument that Andy would have, as the only LGBTQ person of color in the group, to insist that the group examine race. If Miranda and the others weren't racist, then they were presumably open to arguing for racial equality if they felt that a particular form of oppression appeared to be an instance of racism.

Miranda then extended her effort to negate Andy's comment by arguing that intersecting race with gender and sexuality was "too crazy." Andy was "dragging" race into it, which implied that it was an irrelevant topic, made all the more inappropriate because, Miranda suggested, bringing it up put too much of a burden on the other participants. Additionally, Miranda pointed out that schools typically punished racist language in ways that they did not punish homophobic, transphobic, or heterosexist language—an argument that established racism as addressable and possibly solved, while LGBTQ students did not have the same protections as students of color. Miranda's participation in this instance

and throughout the academic year consistently dismissed Andy's efforts to examine race in light of LGBTQ topics. Miranda maintained that race was a source of social injustice but that addressing it was not as critical as working for LGBTQ-positive schools and classrooms. She discussed race and LGBTQ topics as distinct issues.

In future focus group meetings, Miranda consistently shut down Andy's efforts to discuss race in conjunction with LGBTQ issues. For example, during a later discussion, Andy asserted that students who used religious beliefs to justify homo- and transphobia "should be dealt with so that their beliefs don't make the whole classroom toxic for everyone else. I mean, yeah, okay, religious freedom is good, but you beating the Bible doesn't mean that you get to hate on a queer kid." Tying her point back to race, Andy pointed out, "People used to use the Bible all the time to justify slavery, right? This isn't different. If it's not okay to hate a Black or Hispanic kid because of religion, then it's definitely not okay to hate a gay or trans kid."

A long pause followed Andy's comments, and then Miranda broke the silence: "I guess I get your point about slavery and all, but that's from forever ago. Why even bring it up? There are definitely kids out there who can point to [Bible] verses that explain why they are anti-LGBTQ. I obviously don't agree with them. I wouldn't be here if I did, right? But Bible-based racism was shut down centuries ago; we're dealing with religiously based homophobia every day. I know that I am where I'm student teaching, anyway."

Several other participants agreed with Miranda that they too had students who based anti-LGBTQ sentiments on religious beliefs, and the conversation shifted, ignoring Andy's points about race as salient. As the researcher and discussion facilitator, I attempted to reintroduce Andy's point, but Miranda again insisted, "We need to talk about what I'm going to deal with tomorrow. I know if a kid's racist, my mentor teacher will write him up; if a kid calls another 'fag,' though, I'm going to have to act if anything gets done."

Miranda's points were valid in that she and all of her peers, including Andy, agreed that their supervising mentors were prepared to shut down any explicit racism, while only a few mentors even cursorily addressed overt anti-LGBTQ statements. As a novice educator with little classroom authority, Miranda positioned sexuality and gender as the issues that needed her attention because she could not trust the veteran teacher to intervene (Meyer, 2009). However, Miranda's desire for practical discussion and application resulted in both historicizing race and bifurcating race and sexuality. In making the

statement that “Bible-based racism was shut down centuries ago,” Miranda clearly established her belief, as before, that race had been a social issue at one time but was no longer relevant. To that effect, because race was no longer a concern, the issue of “religiously based homophobia” did not include racial identity for Miranda, or presumably for the others, since they readily left Andy’s point about racism behind as they moved forward in their discussions about their school placements.

“Gangs Matter When Teaching LGBTQ Stuff”

Miranda’s bifurcated position shifted in her first year of in-service teaching, however. During an individual interview during her fall semester, I asked her, “Describe a way that you’re working to address LGBTQ issues in your classroom.” Miranda shook her head and said,

I was so stupid last year. I thought that my one big challenge was going to be teaching LGBTQ stuff. It’s not easy, but that’s not my biggest concern. Like, we have so many gangs. We have all of these faculty sessions on how to identify and respond to gang activity. And, I have this one kid who I know is in a gang—I see his colors, his signs, all the stuff I’ve been trained to see. But I know from his journal writing that he’s gay. Like, he just sort of came out to me. So, I look at this kid and I think, “How in the hell am I supposed to teach him? Protect him?” He has all of these competing factors in his life. He’s in a gang, and I very seriously doubt that they know he’s gay given what I hear his crew say about “faggots.”

But, he’s also in the school full of Black kids who live in poverty. Like, I don’t even have a dry erase board in my room; I have a chalkboard. The school is like the community—no resources, no money. So, being in a gang makes sense to him because it’s a means of income, a means of belonging, but it’s also something that makes him hide part of who he is. So, now when I teach LGBTQ-related stuff, I keep him in mind. I’ve realized, gangs matter when teaching LGBTQ stuff. Most of my kids are in gangs, at least one of my kids is closeted while in a gang, and the resources I get focus on LGBTQ bullying or gang activity. Never both. I just have to figure those connections out the best I can.

As Miranda reflected on the previous year of the study, she acknowledged that her new context gave her a greater appreciation of the ways that race, gender, and sexuality intersected, as well as of socioeconomics. Previously, she had maintained that school policies addressing racism equated to racism being solved; however, as an in-service teacher, Miranda realized that a range of factors influenced what mattered

in schools. Given her school's student body of predominately socioeconomically disadvantaged Black students, Miranda could not ignore race and class as highly relevant factors. She continued to identify as a LGBTQ ally, but she now recognized the ways in which race was an inextricable aspect of her students' identities, and therefore just as critical to her teacher identity.

Additionally, community contexts included high gang activity that affected day-to-day schooling. Importantly, Miranda never dismissed the gang activity as a symptom of having a large student-of-color population. She observed that the gangs organized on racial lines, but that race was not the sole factor, and that the few White and Latino students in her school tended to be gang members too. Miranda noted that the gang presence was so pervasive that she had attended multiple faculty trainings related to gangs, but she continued to struggle with how to incorporate an acknowledgment of gang presence into a LGBTQ-positive curriculum.

Specifically, Miranda examined her efforts from the perspective of serving a closeted gay gang member in her classroom. In considering the ways that this student's intersecting and competing identities mattered, Miranda challenged dominant literature on LGBTQ-ally work. She asserted that "gangs matter when teaching LGBTQ stuff," thereby noting the ways that the racial, socioeconomic, and cultural factors associated with gangs also shaped efforts to address LGBTQ matters.

In the spring semester of the same year, I again asked Miranda how she was working to address LGBTQ issues in her classroom, particularly in conjunction with the concerns that she had shared in the fall about gang activities and students such as the one who had provided the journal entry. Miranda paused for several seconds and then responded,

You know, I never realized how good I had it as a kid. Like, this isn't an "Oh my God, my poor kids have terrible lives" comment. I mean, my kids are great, and they work hard, and their parents work hard, so this isn't knocking them at all. It's that I'm realizing that I just took for granted that my teachers had plenty of paper to make copies of assignments, that I had up-to-date books that weren't falling apart.

I mean, your question is about LGBTQ stuff, right? But that's the thing—I had thought "I want to protect LGBTQ kids because I didn't have to deal with all that they do because I'm straight," right? But my kids go to a shitty school with freaking chalkboards and no projectors in this day and age. That isn't because they're gay or straight. That's because they're Black and

brown and poor. Because they're not middle class White kids, like I was growing up. I mean, any LGBTQ kids are dealing with all of that, on top of having no fair shot because their school sucks, because gangs constantly disrupt their lives and our classrooms, because they're the wrong race and class.

Miranda's response showed critical reflection that not only permitted her to interrogate her students' educational experiences in relation to race, class, sexuality, and gender, but also to examine her own privileges not just as cisgender and heterosexual but as White. In the previous year, Miranda had dismissed Andy's various attempts to connect race, gender, and sexuality; now she realized that while LGBTQ issues still mattered very much to her and her students, her school's lack of resources and support were race- and class-based.

The shift came not by any magical revelation, but by an active comparison of how she had experienced schooling as a student and how she was forced to enact schooling as a teacher. She had known since the beginning that the school in which she worked had lacked basic materials and resources, such as dry erase boards and standard technology; she had also known that there had been no such resource deficits in her own school when she was a secondary student. She had also noted early on that gang activity was new to her and that she had needed the mandatory training to recognize evidence of gangs. What was new in this interview was the realization that the differences in those experiences had been due to racial and socioeconomic inequalities. She recognized her own race- and class-based privileges because she recognized the school resource allocations that her students lacked.

Additionally, unlike the previous year, Miranda saw the intersections of LGBTQ identities with race and class. My question framed LGBTQ issues as the focus of the interview, so when Miranda returned to my question, she noted that "any LGBTQ kids are dealing with" all of the complexities of being a sexual and/or gender minority, in addition to the challenges of attending a poorly equipped school in which "gangs constantly disrupt their lives and our classrooms, because they're the wrong race and class." Miranda understood that race was a contemporary concern for both her and her students, in that they were all affected by the various sociocultural implications of racialized inequality, such as limited educational funding and threats of gang violence.

“Slave Narratives Don’t Include Gay People”

In the fall semester of Miranda’s second year as a teacher, she had shifted even further away from her preservice teaching stances. Her attention was on working toward making the curriculum intersectional, addressing racial identities and poverty while emphasizing gender and sexual fluidities. She struggled with how to support her efforts while teaching the required curriculum—particularly since her students had to take a state-mandated course content test. I asked her, “tell me about a lesson or unit that you’re planning that deals with these intersections [of race, gender, and sexuality] that you’ve talked about.” She responded,

We’re doing slave narratives. Let me tell you: Slave narratives don’t include gay people. I mean, there were definitely queer slaves, right? We don’t have those stories. I just have [Olaudah] Equiano, Frederick Douglass, and Phyllis Wheatley. No mention of sexuality at all. I feel like I have to decide that we’re gonna do race, or we’re gonna do class, or we’re gonna do gender. I wish that my kids’ lives were organized that neatly, but they’re not. They’re whole people, and I feel like what I have to use is incomplete. Like, Langston Hughes was gay and Black, but do you know that the textbook doesn’t even mention sexuality? Nothing. But there’s a little blurb about Whitman being gay. So, White people are gay, I guess. But so are some of my kids.

As a preservice teacher, Miranda had emphasized the divisions between racial and LGBTQ identities. In the following year, settling into a near-foreign context for her, she began to focus on how specific students provided counternarratives to her previous positions. In her third year in the study, she had fully embraced her students as “whole people” whose experiences and understandings were typically omitted from the compulsory curriculum. This interview narrative was a reflection of the ways that the curriculum created the same bifurcations that she had insisted on two years before as well as a consideration of the ways that she might challenge such divisions. She recognized the complexities of her students’, and even some literary figures’, identities while also noting the simplistic ways that her textbook presented various authors. Only in the case of Walt Whitman did her curriculum offer students an acknowledgment of a writer’s homosexuality, but as Miranda noted, that inclusion erased queer people of color.

In the spring semester, Miranda more actively wrestled with her own identity as both useful and limiting to her in teaching the curriculum. As she prepared to teach a poetry unit, Miranda described her plans to diversify her curriculum by integrating rap songs and spirituals as audio and written texts, in addition to the mandated curriculum. She noted,

It'll be easier that way to make sure that I have LGBTQ representation, and that all of the poets aren't just a bunch of dead White guys. I always know statistically, whether they come out or not, some of these kids are LGBTQ. They need to exist in what we learn. Like, they love Frank Ocean [a Black singer and rapper who openly acknowledged same-sex attraction], so I can use him. But, I'm also afraid. Like, what do I know about rap? I don't want my kids to think "What is this White lady doing? Trying to be all cool with this rap stuff in class?" That's not what it's about—I'm going to try to hit up front that I'm trying to make sure that who they are, what they love, what they live is what we're going to discuss. That, yeah, I'm out of my element here, but it's because I want what we're learning to matter more to them.

In her final interview, Miranda noted the complexities of trying to integrate LGBTQ people of color into the curriculum and of addressing students' perceptions that she was tokenizing aspects of their culture in order to have a "cool" lesson. In doing so, she examined the ways that her own identities were a part of her curricular considerations and her students' reactions to the texts and her teaching approaches. She had fully accepted that some of her students, whether they came out to her or not, were likely LGBTQ; in doing so, she understood that their multiple identities as students of color, as potentially LGBTQ, and as probably economically disenfranchised were relevant in her classroom and needed to be relevant in her curriculum. In integrating these intersections, she actively considered the ways that her own experiences, understandings, and (lack of) knowledge shaped her decisions and her students' perceptions of her as the teacher.

Discussion

Initially, Miranda did not have to examine the ways that race mattered in LGBTQ issues because she lived in a society that presented queerness as synonymous with Whiteness (Cruz, 2014; Lang, 2013). Instead, when Andy worked to encourage her peers to consider queer people of color, Miranda consistently dismissed Andy's efforts as burdensome and outdated. Miranda rejected intersecting race with gender and sexuality because to do so was making "things too crazy when they don't have to be." Instead, Miranda's stance positioned LGBTQ topics as solely White matters and erased race from the discussion altogether. Returning to the guiding research question, Miranda initially defined her LGBTQ-ally identity as one that focused solely on issues of sexuality, gender identity, and gender expression. She maintained that factors such as race distracted from what she saw as her primary objective in identifying as a teacher ally.

Once Miranda's context shifted and she was forced to consciously examine the importance of race, as well as other factors, her mindset and self-considerations shifted. She first humanized the intersections of racial and LGBTQ identities by considering the perspective of a gay gang member in her class. She then reflected on her own White privilege in relation to schooling and the ways that sexuality, gender, race, and class shaped her and her students' everyday experiences in the school.

In the following year, she began to actively trouble the binary between her students' lives and the curricular representations she had to teach. She began to appreciate the ways that subjugating systems such as racism, homophobia, and sexism interlocked to create complex sites of oppression. She also began to actively critique the curricular resources she was forced to use that reinforced the problematic and dichotomous position that she had taken two years before. Importantly, she continued to extend the self-examination from the previous year to consider the ways that not just her students' identities, but also her own identities shaped curriculum and learning.

In considering the shifts in Miranda's understanding and that because she is a White cisgender heterosexual woman, her demographics mirror those of much of the teaching profession. I would argue that preservice teacher education and in-service teacher training should encourage educators to interrogate their own privileges, as well as contemporary racism, especially in schools. Following that necessary component, there is then a need to connect race and racism with sexuality, in an effort to promote greater intersectional understandings and actions. In this particular study, there was a clear need for Miranda's preparation program and faculty meetings to have discussed race and sexuality's intersections. Teachers need opportunities to actively consider the ways that many identity elements, such as race, gender identity, gender expression, and sexuality, as well as other factors such as class and ethnicity, constantly intersect for all people at all times.

Additionally, I would call for LGBTQ-related research to more consistently and thoughtfully examine how race matters in relation to sexuality and gender. In relevant literature on ally identities, many resources discuss LGBTQ topics without ever mentioning race. Numerous scholars work to understand the ways that educators might support highly vulnerable populations of LGBTQ students; researchers also need to consider the ways that LGBTQ students of color are both erased from the literature and more likely to be harassed than their White counterparts. Failing to do so perpetuates the bifurcation that Miranda and her peers asserted initially, in effect obliterating LGBTQ students of color from existence and replicating some of the very systemic oppressions that social justice-minded researchers purport to challenge through their work.

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Gracefully unexpected, deeply present and positively disruptive: love and queerness in classroom community

benjamin lee hicks

During the winter of 2011, I was moving through some of the more overtly physical phases of gender transition. At the time, I was also a grade 6 teacher in a public elementary school. My presence as a visibly transitioning person in that environment was never intended to be a coming out; *it was a choosing in...* and there is a difference. I was “out” because I was visibly different, and I was visible because that difference was not expected. I – as a teacher of children who identifies as a non-binary person, as genderqueer, as trans, *and even as someone who is not willing to be ashamed of all that* – was not expected.

Well-intended and well-documented antidiscrimination policies defended my right to be an educator in theory, but there remained a distinct lack of people and/or practices in place that could help me to feel welcomed in that role – *or even less alone*. The less visible aspects of how we identify ourselves as humans are often labeled “secrets” when they are not expected. When we are forced to keep the unexpected aspects of our identities secret for the comfort of others, we are also encouraged to feel shame if these differences are seen.

I did not choose to “come out” as trans while I was teaching, but I love teaching more than pretty much anything and because of that I chose to stay. I chose to keep teaching, I chose to stay with the same students at the same school, and I chose to invite them into knowing more of who I was as a person and who I was excited about becoming. Being out happened because “out” is a definition that society sometimes attaches to queer bodies that get categorized as visibly different. Someone else’s definition of difference is not the story that I want to write about. My story is about what 24 kids taught me about showing up everyday as your whole and unabashed self... about love.

There are innumerable perspectives from which I could tell this story, ranging from the physically violent to the very subtle gaps between policy and practice that still make it difficult for a transgender person to pee comfortably in most Toronto public schools.¹ These are all valid lenses and it is important

¹ Toronto District School Board *Guidelines for the Accommodation of Transgender and Gender Independent/ Non-Conforming Students and Staff*: www.tdsb.on.ca/AboutUs/Innovation/GenderBasedViolencePrevention/AccommodationofTransgenderStudentsandStaff.aspx

to keep looking through them from every possible angle; *particularly those that consider how queerness intersects with race, religion, nationality, disability and socioeconomics in ways that allow certain queer bodies to be even less expected and therefore less cared for in mainstream education.* The story I most need to tell is about learning that queering schools deeply and sustainably has a whole lot to do with teaching about something else that is not-so-expected in public education... Love.

SIMPLY SHOWING UP

I want to tell this story in a way that will intentionally connect the words *queer*, *love*, and *elementary school education* in the same Google search because 5 years and several significant Ontario Ministry of Education mandated curriculum reforms later², trans-ness is still not “expected” in elementary school. Despite the lack of welcome by many other adults, a significant truth of my experience has been that my students welcomed me.



I ask myself what it means to be in love with a profession that asks for your entire heart in practice, and then actively dissuades you from feeling too deeply, frequently, or specifically in public. Early in my career, attempting to navigate this contradiction felt extremely difficult. Only gradually did I realize that this is not a sustainable expectation for anyone. In retrospect, it is heart-based decision making that has guided me most effectively through the places where transitions have intersected with teaching.

For example, I needed to learn what sort of access I would allow others to assume when it came to the visibility/vulnerability of my own queerness. I now see that learning to articulate how I feel about my right to privacy co-existing with the hyper-visibility that I can't always control is analogous to creating safe(r), queer(er) classroom spaces with my students. At times, the relational aspects of these explorations included them – *their thoughts, feelings, and own self-selected personal experiences* – as much as they did my own. The most important source for the courage that I have managed to muster as an educator has always come directly from my students, and this was no exception.

² Regarding the recently revised Ontario Health and Sexual Education Curriculum: <https://bioethics.georgetown.edu/2016/02/ontarios-new-sex-ed-curriculum-a-glimmer-of-hope/>

There is much that I could write about the painful and difficult things I have experienced as an out, trans, elementary school teacher but most importantly, I think it is essential to acknowledge that school conditions for transgender students and staff are not significantly safer today. This being said, it is also essential for any of us interested in truly queering classroom spaces to place our hope in those people and ideas that we have not been taught to expect in education. In retrospect, I think that it would have been most helpful to receive this message of hope from sources as unorthodox as myself. Something like a slightly messy, creatively punctuated, and very personal story told through the medium of a scholarly article. Even as I write this, I resist the urge to cite frequently and quote often that has been instilled by my academic training. I am going to keep listening to that resistance because a large part of the urgency that I feel has to do with emotional vulnerability and the magic that can arise from simply showing up.

I know that this essay reads more like a story than a traditional scholarly paper, and this is intentional. I hope that any discomfort that comes from accepting the words and actions of young people as truth will prompt readers to question who it is that academia more frequently ascribes authority to, *and who it does not*. This story of transitioning in a public elementary school would not exist without these kids, and neither would I. They are the most important knowledge producers in this story and, without exaggeration, I would not have made it past the first paragraph without them.

GRATITUDE FOR ROOM .13

This telling begins with an excerpt from an open letter that I wrote about/for my just-graduated grade 6 students in the summer of 2011. The end of our year together marked the beginning of an important new process for me as an educator. In short; having the opportunity to experience an actually-queered and inclusive classroom space during that very vulnerable year gifted my body, mind, and heart a standard of safety that I could then refer back to in every subsequent instance where I was told through words, actions, and/or policy that I as a transgender person did not belong in elementary education. I don't have all the answers as to how we can overhaul our current education system to meet such a standard quickly and/or sustainably... but I do know, *with absolute certainty*, that it is possible. I wrote this letter as a means of internalizing and appreciating all of the remarkably positive gifts that this experience brought me.

August 2011

It has been close to two months now since the final day of school when I walked my beautiful grade sixes out into the schoolyard for the last time. I didn't need to walk them anywhere anymore from a safety standpoint. I could send them down the stairs on their own, amusedly reciting a pledge that they secretly loved because it meant they were big: "I promise not to take out any small people on the way down..." And I knew that they wouldn't. I often chose to walk with them though because in terms of "need", the love, trust, and easy comfort that they gave to me everyday filled up an empty place inside that I had no idea was so deep before they were there. At the end of the school day they wanted to keep chatting, and so did I. At the end of the year, I was in no way ready for that conversation to end.

There are lots of individual activities, decisions, experiences, conflicts, and resolutions I can point to that ensured this group of kids would work themselves so essentially into my own sense of identity. With the last 2 months of space between us, I am beginning to realize that the deepest truth of it all was that we all grew up together.

I met them as "Ms. Hicks" when they were 8- and 9-year-olds in grade 4. I said goodbye to them almost three years later as lee: genderqueer, trans, and five months on testosterone.³ We were all entering into the awkward stages of early pubescence together and somehow this shared experience – however unorthodox – made us all perfectly suited to become family... The kind of family that you choose to claim, and then cherish all the more for the choosing.

"So, you've had girl puberty.... and now you're having man puberty... THAT IS SO AWESOME... You are like the most qualified person ever to teach us about puberty!"

*What better response could a transgender elementary school teacher just coming into be-ing hope for from the 24 people whose opinions and acceptance matter more to them than anyone else? They were genuinely excited. They were unabashedly proud of me. They talked openly of their happiness for me and their belief in me. **They made me so much less afraid.***

Together, we could talk openly about what it takes to grow into the kind of adult you want to be as opposed to the one you sometimes feel like everyone else is telling you that you should be... None of us pretended that we knew how to do this because none of us did – least of all me.

When I talked to my class in February about being trans and, particularly, about the physical transition

³ In 2009, I was pre-physical transition, and my students still called me "Ms." Hicks. Two years later, I asked students to start calling me by first name in order to reduce gender-assumptive labeling. When I was teaching elementary school, my students called me by the "lee" part of my full name, but the name that I use more frequently and currently prefer is "benjamin".

*part of that so that they would know some of what to expect over the remainder of our year together, **they applauded**... Sure, they had a ton of questions, and some worries – mostly about whether or not the inside of me would change as significantly as the outside – but the part that I will remember deep in my bones for always is that when I told them I was happier now, they clapped.*

When I arrived in that grade 4 classroom back in 2008, I was coming right out of a horrendous first year of teaching that was punctuated by daily physical and verbal harassment, vandalism, and panic attacks. I had very little faith remaining in myself, let alone the education system. The year that followed was hard in a different way because I knew that this vacuum of faith was not how I wanted to be as an educator or as a person in the world, but I had no idea how to get out from under the fear that was left when the immediate threat was gone. It took me two years to begin to figure that out and although I still have a hard time describing in words how all of that history has brought me to “now”, re-reading the notes these students wrote to me on the day of their grade 6 graduation has helped. For example;

“This was an amazing year and that was because of the way that you taught us... but somehow the word “taught” isn’t really right.... you trusted us, and because of that we are stronger on the inside.”

I am really glad that they felt so well taken care of in this way, but I am also quite sure that any strength being gifted flowed first from all of them into me.

THANK YOU.

Love, lee.

I share this letter about collective, queer, classroom community building because it is the way that people often react to the words and actions of these kids that has caused me to wonder what makes the difference for me as trans person in classrooms where I have felt safe, seen, and loved, as opposed to the many other places that I don’t. The first thing that people usually say after hearing the story of my 6th grade class is how “exceptional” these kids are... *and they are absolutely amazing...*

But they are not exceptional.

In fact, to attribute that quality to them is to negate the very real potential that all kids and all adults in all schools have to build safe, inclusive classrooms for whomever arrives. This is not a story about exceptional people just as this conversation about queering elementary education should never be

about exceptions to a rule. This is an example of what can happen when members of a classroom community work together to understand how they can love one another well. One percent of the time or less we talked about gender, and the other 99% we talked about love. This did not happen quickly, but it did occur continuously, and that is the context through which I want to share our experience.

I HAD BEEN THAT KID TOO

The more complete history of this grade 6 classroom that became so wonderfully and collectively queered began 2 years prior when I taught many of those same students in a grade 4/5 split class. A “dissonant moment” (Lytle, 2008) from that school year helps to explain how I have come to understand the slow, consistent, and heartfelt process of queering education.

Part way through the fall of 2008, I was moved (based on staff seniority) to a K-6 school in central Toronto. Shortly afterwards, one of my grade 4 students gave me a brave and honest gift that profoundly altered the way I relate to others and to myself as a teacher-learner-*person*. There has been no shortage of dissonant experiences in my teaching career, and each one has differently – but just as fiercely – challenged my sense of a genuine self in relation to the person that I am actually showing up as. In retrospect, this particular incident dared me to integrate more of the gracefully unexpected, deeply present, and positively disruptive aspects of queerness into my concept of sustainable community building.

I had spent much of that previous week introducing my grade 4/5 students to literary devices in storytelling and, on the day that they were to begin their own first draft of a metaphor story, I led them through a creative visualization that engaged many students and yielded some pretty amazing results. I was excited to keep the energy going and, as was our custom, any student who wished to participate was invited to read a portion of their work-in-process aloud to the class. One of these story-sharings took me completely by surprise with both its content and delivery.

The story was called *Ms. Hicks Cloud*, a metaphoric account of a village full of joyous and carefree children who were subsequently overshadowed, terrorized, and then eaten by a massive storm cloud (un-coincidentally named “Ms. Hicks”). I am certain that the other students were surprised by this sharing as well; not just by the 9-year-old author’s courage in telling her truth so eloquently and publicly to a figure of authority, but also because not everyone is equally able to trust their own reading of the discrepancies between what/how people feel and the way that we often ingenuously frame the truth

of our inner worlds. Most kids are better at this than adults but, even by elementary school age, many of us have already been pathologized into believing that such disparities are “*all in our head*”.

I don’t think that I had been acting in an overtly “*child-eating-storm-cloud*” sort of way in the classroom, but I was going through a difficult time. This was a reality that I was capable of keeping in dual-consciousness during the school day, but not one that I could talk about honestly or disconnect from completely in my role as a teacher. The student author was sensitive to such dissonance and, once upon a time, *I had been that kid too*. In my case however, I had also lacked the conditions necessary to support a young person in continued self-belief. I grew up in a situation where genuine feelings were rarely talked about and my experiences of encountering that lack-of-match between the truth of a person’s energy and the way that they claimed to “*be*” were frequently confusing and frightening.

When I first heard that metaphor story read aloud I was filled with deep sadness and regret, but I was also aware that this was probably the most important interaction I had ever had with children. I didn’t know what to do, but I did remember how I had promised myself before I started teaching that I would never lie to kids. I realized in that moment that by denying what my heart knew about the intuitive powers of children, I had also been perpetuating a different sort of un-truth whether I intended to or not. This student heard all of my silence as clearly as the storm cloud in her metaphor story, and it would have been a lie to deny that. I had convinced myself that by not speaking about my stress and unhappiness directly, I was not bringing it into the classroom. By choosing to dissociate in this way, I had also been condoning an institutional ideal that I don’t believe: the notion that difficult emotions do not have a place in curriculum.

I thanked my student for her words immediately... I was honest about the fact that it was going to take me a little while to process the enormity of her gift... and, most importantly, I told her as clearly as I could that what she knew was correct... *that she was good and brilliant and brave*.

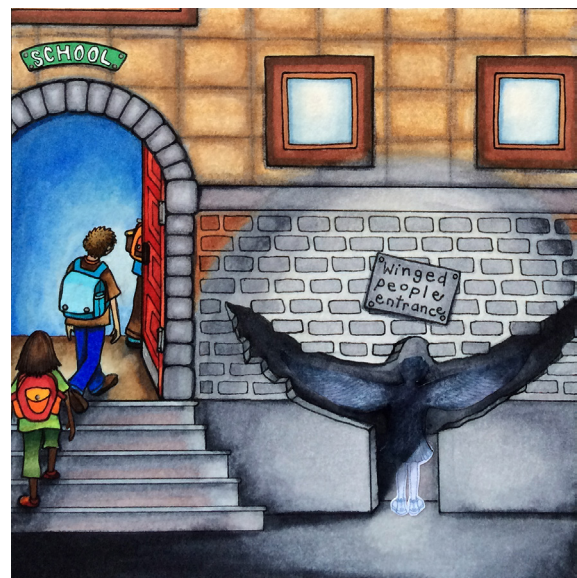
It has taken me much of the last 7 years and a lot of hard work to feel like I am closer to making the same amends with the good and brilliant and brave 9-year-old kid I once was; *a giant part of which has been believing her truths so as to give back bits and pieces of the safety and respect that she has always deserved*.

The kids that I work with have taught me every day about their want, need, and right to be with adults who are doing their own difficult identity work at the same time as they are asking these risks of their students. So much of the way that I now think about teaching, about research, and about BEing in the world has its roots in what this one kid taught me about emotional integrity.

ALL-WAYS IN TRANSITION

I believe that a big part of my job as an educator is to facilitate the co-creation of classroom/school communities that expect *so much more* than binaries and pre-determined labels... That any adult who has the privilege to work with children also has a responsibility to help them learn about a multidimensional universe of intersecting identities **before** all of the false binaries of *boys/girls, gay/straight, good/bad, right/wrong, me/you* become their automatic default for everything from math problems to washroom use. I don't think that it is possible to do this job sustainably or well without making an ongoing commitment to one's own self-care, personal growth," and comfort with change. A main difference between what "anti-transphobia education" and the deep, continuous queering of educational spaces feels like in my experience can be found in how the pedagogy of "teaching about" theories of gender differs from the experience of knowing that "*every living thing, at every living moment is all-ways in transition.*"

Oftentimes, when school-based efforts to address transphobia are discussed in an academic context, we end up focusing on reactionary initiatives and responding to surface behaviors. This seems to keep happening even though the ideas that underlie these behaviors are usually entrenched in what that school's culture supports/ignores regarding how one person relates to another. Without a common understanding of how transitions of self and identity are a natural component of every human life, even the words that we use to talk about ending violence can tend towards aggression. For example, I recall a poster for Pink



Shirt Day, 2013⁴ that featured a giant hand attached to the words "STOP IT!" physically lifting a singular, crying "bully" up into the air while a crowd of "allies" looked on⁵ ... Phrases like "*Stomping out Bullying*", "*Combatting Homophobia*," and "*Fighting Discrimination*" are frequently used to represent efforts that must actually have begun with the goal of making school spaces safe(r) for difference to reside. This gap between intention and action afflicts many well-meaning school initiatives and it is often here that efforts to support inclusion end up embracing a violent, divisive rhetoric similar to the initial threats themselves. I wonder if this tendency towards *us vs. them* is a by-product of the false binaries for

4 **Pink Shirt Day:** <http://www.pinkshirtday.ca/>

5 **2013 Pink Shirt Day poster:** <http://childrensdirectory.net/2013/02/are-you-ready-to-stop-bullying/>

“identity” that many of us were taught as children... *And I wonder what might happen if some fundamental shifts were to occur in how new teachers are encouraged to explore their own relationships to identity, transition, and change at the same time that they are learning to build queer spaces with children...*

During this first year outside of a grade school classroom, I have reflected on who I am as a teacher, student, artist, and activist. I have been thinking about what it means to embody any of these roles “well” or with integrity, and where I can most usefully direct my time and energies in relation to all of that as I move forward.

In my scholarly work, I am drawn to methodologies like critical practitioner research and arts based data analysis where abstract spaces can be something to *come home to* as opposed to a threatening otherness that must be fixed/erased/filled-in. It is no longer an absence of contradictions that I am looking for. I, like many people, enrolled in an education program with the belief that “school” was predictably formulaic. It was not until my own changing sense of identity ran headlong into the mirror held up by my students that I realized how much more there is to being an adult who chooses to teach/learn/work with kids than there is to simply being employed as a teacher. Even then... *even in the undeniable realization of this difference...* I was in no way prepared for the scope of unlearning and emotional re-education that it would take for me to keep showing up and *staying* as the classroom teacher that these/all kids deserve.

WHERE DOES THE WORK COME FROM NOW?

When Susan Lytle talks about *legacy* in relation to critical practitioner research and raises the question, “*Where does the work come from?*” (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2009), I think about those roots that feel too deep to tunnel for, and of every other thing that our human bodies remember when our brains decide, *out of trauma and/or some more subtle form of social collusion*, to-remember-to-forget. As a researcher who is now in a position that potentially affords the privilege to dig-down-deeper into a system of roots that are not all mine, I feel both the weight and want of a consciousness that will remind me about the exponential loss incurred when we skip over the histories of “what,” “who,” and “how” came before. Who I am includes all of the trans-heroes: quiet, bold and brilliant revolutionaries; unlikely feminists and gentle men; genderqueers; and neurodivergent psychiatric system survivors who challenge me to stay real and present in the world. When I engage in systems of education as when I am doing anything, I want to remember the people who taught me about love.

When I think directly about my own experiences growing up in school and society, I know that every fiber of my queer/trans body remembers the depth of tired that comes from not understanding how to speak. *“I remember the futility of trying to splice together fragments of a language that was too limited to tell the story myself to anyone, including myself. As a child, this took up so much of my own substance that wanting to disappear felt not only natural but also easy, expected, and “right.” It has taken a long time to learn that public education was not constructed to include those of us who exist in the in-between, and even longer to understand that this is not something we need to be ashamed of”* (hicks, 2016).



This is essentially what I mean when I write about the experience – the violence – of not being expected... To arrive at a school—excited and ready to communicate—only to find that words to describe the most precious aspects of yourself do not exist here. This is traumatic... *and this is the memory that stays.*

AGAIN/FOR THE FIRST TIME EVERY DAY

Many of the most important transitions of my life have occurred in relation to school. Making a commitment to remain as self-reflexive and in-the-moment as possible with the good, hard, and challenging aspects of this process has gifted me with a new hope for what having people support you unconditionally through teaching/learning can mean. My students were my first teachers of this possibility because they loved me... I think it is important to acknowledge that there was nothing in the formalities of my initial teacher education program that encouraged me to love them back. I say this because I want to be clear about about “love” in the context of a classroom.

When I speak of “loving community” in classrooms, I am thinking about the explicit teaching of love that bell hooks writes about:

“Imagine how much easier it would be for us to learn how to love if we began with a shared definition. The word “love” is most often defined as a noun, yet all the more astute theorists of love acknowledge that we would all love better if we

used it as a verb... M. Scott Peck (echoing Erich Fromm) defines love as “the will to extend one’s self for the purpose of nurturing one’s own or another’s spiritual growth”... Had I been given a clear definition of love earlier in my life, it would not have taken me so long to become a more loving person. Had I shared with others a common understanding of what it means to love, it would have been easier to create love?” (hooks, 2000).

I write so insistently about love in relation to the queering of elementary education because I think that at this point in history, one of the queerest things a person can be is a teacher who talks about what love can look like in the North American public school curriculum.

When we came together at the beginning of that 2010 – 2011 school year, my grade 6 students and I began a slow, consistent, and unapologetic process of writing down who we wanted be, how we wanted to be treated, and how we could practice extending these wants, needs, and rights to one another. One of the most profound agreements that we made that year was the one that encouraged us to see each other again/for the first time every day... to keep trying to talk about how we love and care for one another with tangible skills and actions as opposed to just some words about a notion we can’t **feel**. (see Appendix)

EVERY TIME THAT WE STAY

I taught for 4 more years in three different schools after I started hormone therapy and before I embarked on a graduate school adventure. My experiences with the staff, administration, and wider school communities varied but the best, the most consistently safe, and the *queerest* part of any of them always came from the time I spent each day getting to know my students and letting them know me.

As a new teacher, I initially struggled with how I might see, hear, and understand each of my students as individuals with so many in each class and so little “unscheduled” time together. It wasn’t until that January afternoon in 2009 when I heard the Ms. Hicks Cloud story read aloud that I started to think about this question differently. There was something in this experience that pushed me to ask myself how I could also let **them see me** more clearly/more of the time... and I’m not going to lie; *it was terrifying*.

I had seen very little evidence in the culture of elementary teaching to suggest I could safely admit the times that my feelings and experiences were less than sunshine and rainbows. It was difficult to remember that this emotional self-censorship is more of a social norm than a logical necessity. With the gift of this 9-year-old’s truth in front of me however, the idea that my own fears could be the main

thing standing in the way of class cohesion became an even scarier prospect than vulnerability. As such, it was later that same week that we started a daily ritual of “check-in” during morning attendance time.

Instead of just saying “here” when I called out their name, each student began to respond with an adjective describing how they were feeling that day. As the months went on, the students took pride and ownership in the development of this practice. The things a classroom teacher might worry about such as air time shared between shy and talkative students, the maintenance of mutual respect, listening skills, confidentiality, and even the sustained interest of *all* students day after day took care of itself. With this group – as with each new class in each year that has followed – a space opened up in reaction to this activity where we could each relax into the experience of having a few minutes of focused care, concern, and attention directed our way each day. It never ceases to amaze me that young people often seem to know quite instinctively what to do in return with that love, trust, and respect once it is offered to them.

At the same time that I began asking my students to start to our school days together in this way, I promised myself that I would honor their courage with as much of the same sort of strength that I could muster. As such, I also checked in with my adjectives of hopeful, excited, sad, frustrated, and/or exhausted every morning... Not necessarily with the details of “why”, but with the promise that even if I was feeling any of the less-than-cheerful emotions that teachers are often trained-out-of admitting, *I would tell them*. By the time that those grade 4 students reached my grade 6 classroom 2 years later, this intentional time that we spent sharing and listening to one another had laid the groundwork for a reality of inclusion that, although not perfect, was *trust-worthy*.

And it was beauty-full.

This is only one example of what a consistently queered classroom space can look like, but I hope that these specifics might also explain what I mean when I speak of how my students have loved me well. When I told them that I was transgender and they clapped, their genuine happiness felt all the more true and amazing because of every other time that we had trusted one another enough to feel anger, grief, and/or despair in one another’s presence... Every time that we had stayed.

CONCLUSION

My gender identity has never been a “secret” needing to come out. Standardized education does not yet know to expect me and is still surprised to find out that I am here, *but that doesn’t mean I am hiding when*

I don't explain. When I am not intentionally “out” as a trans person, my life is characterized as a secret that I should have told... *and when I am*, my identity is still frequently deemed inappropriate to share with children. This is still the daily reality for most trans and genderqueer people navigating a school system whose policy reforms are designed to accommodate us.



I do not want to be accommodated.

Like everyone else, what I do want is to love and be loved and I do not see any reason why all of our school-based endeavors should not acknowledge and encourage the things that we each need to learn and practice so that we can support one another well in this need.

Our lives should not require accommodation because we are *all* in transition.

ALL-ways.

(My students taught me that).

Appendix

2010 – 2011 Grade 6 Class Agreements:

LOVE:

We believe that our classroom is a microcosm of the world and that we have a lot of control over the balance of hate and compassion within our small community.

We will be compassionate and give everyone the chances that they need to make positive change so that they can earn more trust within the group.

We agree that everyone deserves a clean slate every day, and that this is one way that we can increase LOVE.

We consciously choose to increase the amount of love in our class, which will directly reduce the amount of hate. We believe that love is an antidote for hate.

RESPECT:

We will respect the personal space of others, which means keeping both hands and unkind thoughts or words to ourselves.

We agree that labeling a person because of their differences is unfair and we will give everyone the right to declare their own identity.

We will ask questions and try to understand more deeply instead of making assumptions about people or ideas.

We believe that everyone has beauty and talent inside of them and that, instead of judging them on first impressions, we will make the effort to learn about their uniqueness.

INCLUSION:

We recognize that ignoring a person's point of view or talking over them IS exclusion; therefore, we will always listen and respond to a person who is sharing their ideas.

We will work to help everyone feel included by accepting people for who they are and making sure that they are invited to join the group.

We will be brave and offer kindness to others; even if we are feeling shy or scared.

PEACE-FULL RESOLUTION:

We believe that there is more potential for power in peaceful negotiation than there is in bullying because bullying causes harm to both the bully and the bullied.

We believe that **silence = permission and permission = promotion** and therefore, we agree to speak up when we know that someone is being hurt; to ignore the problem is to perpetuate it.

We will think before we act out in anger, and solve our problems with calm and intelligent words. We agree that our goal as a group is to achieve fair and peace-full resolutions to problems.

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