2017

English Classrooms and Curricular Justice for the Recognition of LGBT Individuals: What Can Teachers Do?

Jane Pearce
Murdoch University, J.Pearce@murdoch.edu.au

Wendy Cumming-Potvin
Murdoch University, w.cumming-potvin@murdoch.edu.au

English Classrooms and Curricular Justice for the Recognition of LGBT Individuals: What Can Teachers Do?

Jane Pearce
Wendy Cumming-Potvin
Murdoch University

Abstract: Discrimination against LGBT[1] individuals remains widespread across Australia. Since schools continue to promote regimes of heterosexuality and cis-normativity, teachers have a crucial role in creating contexts in which LGBT young people feel accepted and safe. Drawing on North's (2006) work on social justice and Connell's (2012) discussion of curricular justice, this article explores opportunities and constraints experienced by a group of English secondary teachers attempting to practise in socially just ways. Results indicate that through the English curriculum, it is possible for teachers to find moments to achieve social justice for LGBT individuals.

Introduction

The Australian Human Rights Commission (2015) acknowledges that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) individuals should benefit from all human rights, including freedom from violence, harassment and bullying. Yet despite improvements in human rights with respect to diversity in gender and sexuality over the past two decades, such as marriage equality legislation in 21 countries (SBS, 2015) and the legal recognition of an individual's intersex status in Australia (Australian Government, 2013), discrimination against LGBT individuals in Australia remains unacceptable in terms of social attitudes, policies and practices (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2015). Schools, in particular, can be hostile or threatening places for sexuality and gender diverse young people, with students who are, or seem to be, sexuality or gender diverse experiencing a range of marginalising practices such as name-calling, bullying and other forms of harassment and violence (Taylor, Peter, Campbell, Meyer, Ristock & Short, 2015; Ullman, 2015). There is clear evidence that an unwelcoming school climate and exclusionary school practices have negative consequences for the wellbeing, mental health and educational achievement of LGBT young people (Greytak, Kosciw & Diaz, 2009; Hillier, Jones, Monagle, Overton, Gahan, Blackman & Mitchell, 2010; Kosciw, Greytak, Boesen, Bartkiewicz & Palmer, 2011; Robinson, Bansel, Denson, Ovenden & Davies, 2014). Such consequences range from failure to complete schooling to homelessness, risk taking behaviours and attempted suicide (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2005; Igbal, 2011).

Given the crucial role that schools play in framing the experiences of all young people, whether sexuality or gender diverse or not, a question arises with respect to what

---

[1] In reference to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, the acronym LGBT is used in this manuscript. Whilst we appreciate that different terms such as LGBTQI may be used for people who may not self-identify as heterosexual and/or cisgendered, in this article we limit the terminology to LGBT given that teacher participants spoke only about this group of students.

schools and teachers can and should do to respond to the widespread lack of social justice for LGBT young people in schools. This article explores how a group of high school English teachers, who have self-identified as aiming to practise in ways that are socially just (particularly with respect to LGBT students), make sense of this aspect of their work. The article focuses, first, on how these teachers understand or make sense of what is happening for LGBT young people, and then on the teachers' experiences of working for social justice in their own classrooms. [2]

Conceptualising Social Justice in Education

Social justice aims to make the systems and structure of society more just by removing those barriers that may prevent the basic human rights of individuals or groups in a society being met. Underpinning the need for socially just practices is the understanding that individual access to human rights is not equitable, and that barriers exist that prevent certain individuals or groups of people from receiving equitable treatment (United Nations, 2016). Socially just practices are attempts to redress such inequities by both identifying barriers to social justice for particular groups of people and working to remove them. Social justice may focus on broader, systemic or institutional barriers to equitable treatment, or may work on a more individual level by paying attention to and acting in solidarity with 'those who are disadvantaged and excluded in society' (Ho, 2011, p. 10).

As a concept in the field of education, social justice has undergone several shifts in meaning as commentators move from redistribution as the main focus (Rawls, 1971; Sen, 2000, 2010) to the idea that the focus of social justice should be recognizing the systemic processes by which marginalisation and mistreatment affect culturally defined groups (North, 2006; Smyth, 2011). The significance of institutional and systemic practices of marginalisation and mistreatment is identified by Young (1990; 2001), whose work on the politics of difference (1990) has been influential in highlighting the way 'institutionalized forms [of oppression and domination] are built into the taken-for-granted norms, rules, skills and values of social institutions' (North, 2006, p. 510). This perspective is particularly relevant for conceptualising social justice in education, since arguments about the redistribution of the social goods of education (such as school funding and quality teaching) do not take into account how 'dominant values and beliefs normalize and thus privilege middle-class, white, heterosexual … students' (North, 2006, p. 511). Recognition and respect are particularly relevant when considering social justice for LGBT young people in schools, subject as they are to 'the unjust consequences wrought by a dominant view of heterosexuality as natural and normal and homosexuality as perverse and despised' (North, 2006, p. 514). For North, social justice in this case requires 'a change in the status of LGBT people rather than a change in the distribution of material goods, since in her view 'an individual requires recognition by another subject to flourish as a human being' (North, 2006, p. 513). For groups such as LGBT people, misrecognition of their rights and particular identities leads to forms of marginalisation and a loss of 'respect, esteem and privilege relative to other groups in society' (North, 2006, p. 514).

---

[2]

Direct quotations in this article that are used to capture teachers' experiences were originally published in Pearce, J., Gardiner, V., Cumming-Potvin, W. & Martino, W. (2016). *Supporting gender and sexual diversity in high schools: Building conversations for LGBTQI human rights in the English classroom.* Retrieved from http://www.the-rainbow-owl.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Pearce-et-al.-2016.-Supporting-Gender-and-Sexual-Diversity-in-High-Schools.pdf under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0. Full terms at http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/

The idea that social justice refers not only to material equality but also to recognition of and respect for difference is the foundation of Connell's (2012) argument for 'curricular justice'. As Connell argues,

> *schools and colleges do not just reproduce culture, they shape the new society that is coming into existence all around us. Social justice in education therefore not only concerns equality in the distribution of an educational service [but] concerns the nature of the service itself, and its consequences for society through time. (2012, p. 681)*

Connell argues that justice is 'connected with responsibility', and that the achievement of a just society is a 'mutual responsibility' (2012, p. 681). When we fail to act justly towards someone, 'we fail to take responsibility for the effects of our actions on them.' (Connell, 2012, p. 681). This perspective is particularly relevant to teachers, who have a significant responsibility for the futures of children in their care and whose actions may have deep and long-lasting effects. Connell's argument underlines the relevance, for teachers, of an approach to social justice that focuses on the recognition of how groups of students who do not fit the norms may be marginalised or mistreated by educational systems and practices. Connell (2012, p. 682) argued that justice in education requires a set of 'educational responses to 'deep diversity'; naming sexuality is one of many 'educationally relevant differences'. In this vein, rather than a fixed expression of biology or character, gender is also defined fluidly through the lens of social relations, culture and performance (Connell & Pearse, 2012; Butler, 1990).

Connell (2012) highlights two institutional responses to the diversity of school populations. The first is 'curricular justice', in which the curriculum is organised 'around the experience, culture and needs of the least advantaged members of the society – rather than the most advantaged, as things stand now' (Connell, 2012, p. 682). For this to occur, decision-making about curriculum must be 'decentralized, right down to the classroom level' (Connell, 2012, p. 682), in order that the diverse life experiences and cultural contexts that make up classrooms may be acknowledged in the curriculum. A second response to deep diversity is 'an emphasis … on the *social encounters* that make up an education system' (Connell, 2012, p. 682). Where there is a focus on social encounters in educational settings, 'diversity' shifts from being an abstract idea to being 'a concrete matter of experience'. This emphasis on social encounters echoes proposals for schooling that address misrecognition in education by respecting and including all students and providing 'multiple opportunities for teachers and students to experience diverse perspectives and people on a daily basis' (North, 2006, p. 514).

Methodology

The findings explored in this article draw on a Young and Well CRC funded study aiming to develop inclusive Australian communities through literacy learning, teaching and technology. A participatory collaborative process was privileged, which highlighted the generation of knowledge via dialogic encounters across researchers, participants and community stakeholders (Bergold & Thomas, 2012; Phillips, Kristiansen, Vehvilainen & Gunnarsson, 2013). As such, the research methodology was qualitative, aiming to generate greater understandings of the lived experiences of a small number of participants, rather than replicate results across the general population (Maxwell, 2013). Building conversations to support the human rights of all educational stakeholders, particularly students who self-identify as LGBT, the project explored secondary English teachers' classroom practices in literacy and technology. Sixty-eight teachers completed an online survey, which was

disseminated through teacher organizations. Follow-up, semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine teachers (seven female and two male), most of whom had already completed the survey and had indicated an interest in further participation. Some interview participants were also recruited through the technique of snowballing, via professional networks. As part of the interview process, teachers were invited to reflect on media resources inclusive of diverse representations in gender and sexuality and how such resources might (or not) be used in English classrooms. Interview data, which provide the focus for this paper, provide rich insights into pedagogical experiences of teachers working to support students who identify as LGBT, and of the steps teachers were taking in their daily work to create a more socially just school community.

Participants were all high school English teachers, who voluntarily engaged in interviews because of a commitment to practise in ways that are socially just, particularly with respect to LGBT students. Participants' ages ranged from the mid- twenties to the late fifties, and teaching experience between five years and over 20 years. Teachers were from both government and independent schools, and all participants had experience of teaching in government schools. Schools were predominantly situated in metropolitan areas, with limited representation of schools in regional areas. At the time of their interviews, all participants were teaching English in high schools. In view of ethical considerations and the limited number of participants, only general background teacher information is given here.

A semi-structured interview with open-ended questions provided participants conversational space to comment, reflect and ask further questions. In the first part of the interview, participants were asked to describe their approaches to planning and teaching and to discuss what they understood as the aims of Secondary English. Prompts were used if necessary, inviting participants to consider such issues as the role of critical literacies and multiliteracies (New London Group, 2000), the relevance of human rights, students' socio-economic and socio-cultural contexts to English teaching, and the role of national standardized testing in shaping their teaching of English. The researchers were particularly interested in exploring the extent to which participants thought that English had the potential to contest complex ideas through a range of perspectives, and to build a strong personal and social ethical outlook through understanding the impact of one's values and behaviour on others.

The second part of the interview focused on participants' experience of working with gender and sexuality diverse students in schools. Participants were asked to consider what school might be like for these students, including students from LGBT parented families; the extent to which the school made provision for the needs of LGBT students; the extent to which LGBT issues were included or addressed in the secondary English curriculum and whether teachers knew of or used resources that dealt with LGBT issues or themes. Interview data were analysed using an inductive approach, during which emerging themes were identified and grouped with the intention of developing an 'enhanced and deepened understanding of the phenomenon' (Patton, 2002, pp. 544-5).

In the following discussion of the research findings, we first explore how the teacher participants understand or make sense of what is happening in schools for LGBT students. We then consider how the teachers were thinking and about practising aspects of curricular justice within the framework provided by the Australian Curriculum. Finally we explore some barriers to achieving curricular justice, which were identified by the teachers. To ensure confidentiality, individual teachers are identified as T (for teacher), followed by a number from 1 through to 9.

How do the Teachers Understand or Make Sense of What is Happening in Schools for LGBT Students?

Teachers' perceptions echoed findings in other studies that students' experiences of marginalisation and misrecognition on account of their actual (or perceived), diverse gender or sexuality, were very much localised and dependent on the context of the school. The view that different school cultures can work in powerful ways to either empower or disempower students who are different also came through strongly in the interviews (see also Payne & Smith, 2014; Richard, 2015; Taylor et al., 2015; Ullman, 2015; Winans, 2006). All participants had experience of teaching same-sex attracted students, and some of teaching bisexual and transgender students, but the perception also emerged that some students may be reluctant to openly acknowledge an LGBT identity, due to stigmatization of same-sex attraction and gender creativity in schools (Robinson et al., 2014; Varjas et al., 2008). In some school environments, there is 'no way' that students can come out (T2). The perception that schools are 'unsafe' places for LGBT students was shared by all teacher participants, with many describing their experience of students practising self-surveillance as they 'fly under the radar and tread carefully' (T2, T4, T8; see Gattis & McKinnon, 2015; Youth Gender Action Project, 2009).

Homophobia was reported to be particularly widespread in the boys' schools mentioned during interviews, with the normalisation of homophobic bullying (T1; T7; T8) and a 'blokey' culture (T9) limiting possibilities for teachers to explore issues of gender and sexuality with students. One teacher identified the 'very conservative views' that are 'still *very powerful* among our youth' (T9), and that further contribute to the marginalisation, misrecognition and lack of safety of LGBT students (T3; T8). Several teachers pointed out the difficulty of adopting non-normative identities in some schools, since 'you cannot be who you want to be in school … peer pressure is a constant constraint' (T1; T7; T9). Of greater concern were reports from teachers of instances where colleagues colluded with the homophobic behaviour of students, either through silence and failure to confront homophobic behaviour in classrooms or by 'sniggering' and making derogatory remarks about LGBT individuals (both students and staff) (T8, T9) (see GLSEN, 2016).

While such overtly discriminatory behaviour was rare, overall, the impression shared by teacher participants was that LGBT students were often disregarded or subject to damaging forms of marginalisation and abuse, suggesting that their emotional and social welfare was not considered at the whole school level. Adjusting to the needs of transgender students was seen as a particular challenge, with schools being 'taken by surprise' when asked to make basic provision such as male and female universal toilets (T6). There was clear evidence in the teachers' interviews of the invisibility and misrecognition of LGBT students by teachers and school leaders, not only in terms of a lack of recognition of individual students' emotional and social needs but also in the failure to 'speak critically about difference, human rights, and social justice' (North, 2006, p. 514).

In contrast to the negative incidents of misrecognition and marginalisation of LGBT students, there was cause for hope in occasional reports that some school students were surprisingly open and supportive of LGBT peers, with examples of students caring for each other, advocating for gender or sexuality diverse peers, and of 'standing up for' each other (T1). One teacher (T3) reported their perception of an increased acceptance by their peers of those students who are openly exploring their sexuality, and of greater 'tolerance' of students with diverse sexualities. Another participant spoke of how students are becoming 'more accepting' of each other (T6). Two teachers observed that the incidence of students who are 'out' in schools changes the school's culture and leads to greater acceptance and openness (T1; T2). Another participant noticed not only that their students seemed to be increasingly

familiar with these issues, but that a consequence of that familiarity was a noticeable concern not to cause offence with respect to LGBT issues. This teacher also shared their perception that same-sex families were 'becoming cool' possibly because of media coverage and programs such as *Modern Family* (T4) (see Parke, 2013). It is nonetheless acknowledged that some popular media representations fail to destabilize the heteronormative script and may, inadvertently, reinforce stereotypical gender binaries and the commodification of sexuality (Frohard-Dourlent, 2012).

Still, some schools were thought to be more accepting of difference than others (T1; T7), and there was a perception that a focus on understanding and valuing diversity as a general principle leads to a greater acceptance of all types of diversity (T5). There was no opportunity to explore this latter perception further in this research, but what emerged from the interviews was the nuanced nature of the diversity of the schools' populations. One school, situated in an affluent, middle class suburb, offered both arts and sports specialist programs. In this school, diversity was evidenced not so much by differences in ethnicity or socio-economic status but rather by the gender diversity of the students: by the groups of 'arty boys' and 'butch soccer girls' (T1). Another school, in a small regional town with a predominantly working class school population, was nevertheless 'full of minorities' (T5) distinguished on the basis of their ethnic and cultural diversity, with large numbers of Indigenous students and refugees alongside white working-class Australians. As a consequence, the teacher from this school believed their school to be 'very open' to diversity (T5). In other schools, the lack of acknowledgement of gender diversity in 'deeply misogynistic' school environments (T2; T8; T9) had a negative effect on both female students and male students who do not exhibit hegemonic masculine traits. Girls in one [misogynistic] school have said 'if you're not the right sort of [overtly feminine] girl then you don't get treated correctly' (T9). Boys who are gay, or who are perceived to be gay are also 'very unsafe' in such schools (T2; T8). These insights highlight the importance of acknowledging the 'deep diversity' of school populations (Connell, 2012, p. 682), and is a reminder of the need to consider the *full* range of 'educationally relevant differences' for developing a 'just education' (Connell, 2012, p. 682). We suggest that being a person of diverse sexuality or gender constitutes an educationally relevant difference, for the reasons laid out in the introduction to this article.

Towards Curricular Justice - What Can Teachers Do?

Curricular justice requires a curriculum that is 'organized around the experience, culture and needs of the least advantaged members of the society', that draws on the knowledge of those members, and that aims for 'richness rather than testability' (Connell, 2012, p. 682). The following discussion explores how the teacher interviewees thought about and practised aspects of curricular justice within the framework provided by the Australian Curriculum. Every teacher involved in our study was obliged to follow the Australian Curriculum, which clearly endorses the principle of equity in education. The policy framework draws on the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians,* the first of which includes the promotion of equity in Australian schooling (MCEETYA, 2008). *The Shape of the Australian Curriculum* (ACARA, 2012) signals a commitment to 'promot[ing] equity' by addressing the 'intellectual, personal, social and educational needs of young Australians' as individuals (ACARA, 2012, p. 5) by helping young people become 'confident and creative individuals' who 'have a sense of self-worth, self-awareness and personal identity that enables them to manage their emotional, mental, spiritual and physical wellbeing', 'have a sense of optimism about their lives and the future',

and 'develop personal values and attributes such as … empathy and respect for others' (ACARA, 2012, p. 8). The inclusion of respect for others is revisited in the rationale statement, that education in Australia must prepare young people to 'contribute to the creation of a more … just society' in a future that is 'difficult to predict' (ACARA, 2012, p. 7). These guidelines provide authorisation for teachers to practise equitably addressing the needs of individual students in their classroom, and by preparing all students to contribute to the creation of a more just society.

The teacher interviewees appeared well aware of ACARA's curriculum goals and rationale statements, and utilized them explicitly to justify the educational goals of acknowledging the needs of individual students and of encouraging an accepting and safe classroom environment. The English classroom is an environment well-suited to prepare young people to engage as future citizens of a complex, challenging and constantly evolving community by 'truly engaging with difference' (Rennie, 2009, p. 13). Influenced by a 'multiliteracies' approach that acknowledges the need to prepare young people as informed citizens able to participate fully in an increasingly diverse and complex society (Anstey, 2002; New London Group, 2000), English teaching has clear potential to bring social justice into the classroom (Cumming-Potvin, 2009; Exley, Woods, Lunn, Walker & Whiteford, 2014). A multiliteracies approach that incorporates 'situated practice', with its emphasis on working with the kinds of texts the students use themselves (Cope and Kalantzis, 2015, p. 4), also has the potential to help every student feel they belong in the learning community and are connected to the content presented. This aspect is particularly relevant to young people, such as members of the LGBT community, who are not represented in more traditional texts and for whom social justice is a question of recognition (North, 2006; Smyth, 2011).

Teacher participants shared the view that the English classroom can open space for curricular justice. Similar to the teachers in Alsup's (2006) study, our group of teachers struggled to reconcile 'mulitfaceted, contextual, and sometimes contradictory ideologies and situated identities' as they worked to put their 'philosophies and beliefs into actions in their classrooms' (2006, p. 125). Equally, teachers' experiences resonated with findings that 'teachers' practice is formed by schools' and teachers' histories and beliefs as much as they are by the wishes of politicians in creating educational policy' (Flynn, 2015, p. 21). Emerging from the interviews were several common themes which relate to the potential for English teaching to help create socially just school communities where LGBT students feel acknowledged and included, and where misrecognition (North, 2006) of the rights and particular identities of LGBT young people is challenged.

First, a relational orientation to teaching was evident in several teachers' interviews (T1; T6; T7), with teachers valuing 'the *social encounters* that make up an education system' (Connell, 2012, p. 682). As we saw earlier, a key consequence of a focus on social encounters is a shift from diversity being seen as an abstract, detached concept to being a matter of concrete experience (Connell, 2012). English invites such a focus on social encounters, as students are able to explore issues that are 'real and relevant' (T9). This emphasis makes it easier for students to discuss their own experiences and perspectives (T7), and English teachers are 'uniquely positioned to *hear* when students share personal information' (T7).

Second, a perception that English as a subject had the potential to change individual students' understanding of themselves and others was popular across interviews. Because of this focus on how human beings experience their lives, and communicate those experiences, English teachers are well-placed to acknowledge and include those students such as 'that person in the corner who's struggling with the fact that they've got something they want to say, but is hiding it every day' (T9). However, several teachers noted that when curricular content becomes more prescribed, relational and human elements of English teaching can be weakened in favour of assessment and performativity. In an educational environment where

there is a strong push towards standardization (Cary, 2013; Thompson, 2013; Valentine, 2012), teaching too easily ceases to be able to focus on individual students and becomes 'de-humanised' and 'soulless' (T4).

While the teachers agreed that English *potentially* provides a unique context in which to explore risky or difficult ideas such as gender and sexuality, not all participants had actually taken steps to introduce LGBT issues in their English classrooms (Pearce et al., 2016). However, despite most teachers never having explicitly explored ideas about LGBT experiences and issues in their classroom, a focus on the relational and human elements of English led several teacher participants to become advocates for those students whose particular rights and identities are not recognised in schools. Many teachers had become allies of LGBT students, or made a point of being role models to students and colleagues (T2) by 'not being bystanders' and 'calling out' pejorative language (T7), 'being vigilant' (T8), and helping students 'feel normal' by choosing texts that reflect a spectrum of genders and sexualities (T2). Being an advocate for LGBT students needs teachers to be able to 'speak out' against the normalised culture of schools, if this culture is to be changed. Teachers acknowledge that this requires courage (T8), but the consequences of not engaging with students to explore some of the realities of young people's lives can be much worse. As one teacher explained:

> ... these are confronting issues, [but] I'd much rather ... present some confronting issues, than be hearing about ... tragic lives lost, because we didn't ... possess the strength to engage them (T7).

Third, emerging from the interviews was the critical dimension of English, which has the potential to change the perspectives of others. English provides an ideal context for developing an ongoing, integrated curricular focus for examining homophobia, transphobia and heterosexism through introducing texts that explore the experiences of gender and sexuality diverse people. By introducing transgressive texts, and by modelling a critical literacy approach to reading them (Luke, 2012), English teachers can 'open minds' (T5) by exposing students to texts that invite exploration of humanity, relationships and complex lived experiences (T8), such as those experienced by LGBT people. Students can thus be introduced to new perspectives and understandings about the world, and to new ways of understanding themselves and other human beings (T5; T7). (See Martino & Cumming-Potvin (2014) and Pearce et al. (2016) for examples of this approach). Teacher participants agreed that the Senior English curriculum (ACARA, 2015) offers an environment for exploring complex or challenging subject matter that would help young people to 'broaden their views' (T5) and 'think critically' (T2; T4). There was also consensus that LGBT issues can readily be subsumed under the umbrella of critical literacy, as Gutierrez (2013) suggests. One teacher expressed the hope that teachers of English may even have a role in 'shaping the future' (T3) by changing perspectives. More precisely, (T6) commented:

> Teachers in public schools ... are here to promote the values of the [Education] Department and the values of public education, which are around fairness, equity and justice ... and people becoming adults who think for themselves. So in that respect ... I tell teachers that they ... must fight homophobia, they must fight against homophobia and racism and ... sexism whenever they see it. It is their job.

Throughout the interviews, the English teachers' interests in inspiring social change came across strongly. Teacher participants agreed that there is space in Australian Curriculum to be colonised for social justice purposes (T9), with teachers making use of possibilities for 'slipping in' (T2) texts, activities or items for discussion in which LGBT young people or their families were represented. One teacher described this as an aspect of pastoral care, and expressed the view that pastoral care is 'not something that should be delivered but should be entrenched in the school day-to-day' (T7), an approach that resonates

with Connell's (2012) view that for curricular justice to occur decision-making about the curriculum must take place at the classroom level. Participants acknowledged, however, that many teachers would disagree that their role is to change cultural norms (T8), and that in many classrooms and schools, behaviour management takes precedence over teaching (T1). These insights may reflect how the more normalised conservative values, which participants see at work in schools, limit possibilities for curricular justice for LGBT people. The following section explores in more detail how the teachers understood and explained why this might be.

Barriers to Achieving Curricular Justice

Despite being open to possibilities for decentralised decision-making about the curriculum, as outlined by Connell (2012), there was consensus across teacher responses that increased standardisation has seriously limited teachers' opportunities to plan flexibly while respecting the individual needs of students. Teachers agreed that the introduction a National Curriculum has had the unfortunate result of limiting possibilities for innovation, creativity and inclusion (Valentine, 2012; Cary, 2013). One teacher suggested that in attempting to achieve greater conformity, the Australian Curriculum has 'killed curriculum as a creative pursuit' (T3). Another spoke of the resulting impoverishment of the curriculum, where teachers' attention is directed away from 'real teaching' (T9). Additionally, the impact of high stakes testing on teachers' curriculum and pedagogical choices has been largely negative and constraining (Down & Smyth, 2012; Thompson, 2013), with the result that teachers become 'locked down … rigid' (T4). In an environment that 'discourages reflection' (T1), and 'erodes critical thinking' as students and teachers 'become rule-bound' (T7), possibilities for curricular justice are limited.

Many teacher participants acknowledged that while the official curriculum (specifically, the Australia Curriculum for English) may not appear constraining, in practice it often is. Many factors make it easy for teachers to follow the standard curriculum, but difficult for them to adapt or resist what is prescribed. Interview participants agreed that while there is space in the Australian Curriculum in English for teachers to exercise autonomy and plan learning that is responsive to students' needs and experiences, the push towards standardisation makes it more and more risky to challenge the norms and boundaries of established practice (T1; T2; T4) (Brass, 2015). Numerous constraints work against teachers' capacity to shape the official curriculum and 'cut through [its] rigidity' (T1). For one thing, opportunities for individual teachers to choose content that acknowledges the experiences of LGBT students, or that requires the exploration of new and confronting subject matter for cis-gendered or heterosexual students, are limited by students', colleagues' and parents' expectations that every class should study the same texts (Pearce et al., 2016).

Individual teachers who may want to work against the grain by introducing new or challenging texts are therefore pushed back by the orthodoxy of others (T1; T2; T3; T4). Lack of time is also a factor when extreme pressure of work leaves little time for innovation (T1) or the development of a respectful classroom climate that is needed when students are asked to engage with new and challenging material (T2). Teachers recognise the potential for texts and reading practices to 'interrupt' and 'work on our assumptions' (T1), but instances of censorship of text choice by parents and/or by school leaders (T3) can mean that teachers may resist stepping into difficult territory, and quickly learn to practise self-censorship to avoid conflict or professional risk (Cumming-Potvin & Martino, 2014). A significant degree of experience and confidence is important for a teacher to be able to work 'against the grain' of the curriculum (T1; T7) (Martino & Mellor, 2000; Mellor & Patterson, 2000).

The concept of 'curriculum' is thus complex and highly contested. Numerous researchers have argued that in addition to the 'official' curriculum (represented here as the Australian Curriculum), there exists a hidden curriculum, which includes inexplicit learning outcomes, student experiences, practices, norms, attitudes, etc. (Apple, 2004; Carpenter & Lee, 2010; Pearce et al., 2016; Skelton, 1997, Vallance, 1991). More specifically, the official curriculum is impacted by numerous factors, such as: the presentation of curricular content, the timeline, the presenter and the venue (Apple, 2004; Carpenter & Lee, 2010). We agree with Eisner's view that the 'null' curriculum, 'what schools do not teach' may be 'as important as what they do teach' (1994, p. 97). As such, the absence of LGBT representation in formal curricula can be viewed as interwoven with attitudes and values that marginalize students who do not fit into traditional binaries of gender or sexuality (Meyer, Tilland-Stafford & Airton, in press; Rhodes, 2009).

One aspect of the hidden curriculum that provides a barrier to curricular justice is the standardisation of learning and teaching resulting from high stakes testing (Thompson, 2013). It is ironic that despite the stated commitment that schooling in Australia should aim to 'nurture an appreciation of, and respect for, … diversity' (ACARA, 2012, p.6), one effect of the standardisation associated with high stakes testing has been a loss of diversity in the curriculum (T4; T9). An emphasis on testing has led to what one teacher described as 'an obsession' with standardisation and consensus (T1; T2; T4), and a tendency for students to become 'programmed to pay attention' only when being tested (T2). A standardised curriculum is an impoverished curriculum as it 'reflects very limited social realities' (T3). The diversity of students' cultures and experiences and the future needs of the young people as they prepare to participate in an increasingly complex and increasingly diverse society are not addressed (Lingard, Martino, Rezai-Rashti & Sellar, 2016). In such a regime, opportunities for decentralised decision-making about curriculum and the acknowledgement of the 'deep diversity' of school populations, as advocated by Connell (2012) to achieve curricular justice, are seriously limited. This aspect of the hidden curriculum is damaging for everyone, not just because it fails to take account of individual students' needs but also because it limits students' thinking, leads to the 'erosion of [students'] rights', and risks creating a 'compliant, non-questioning, homogeneous society' (T3).

Participants agreed that whilst the Australian Curriculum has missed an opportunity to include LGBT issues, learning about LGBT people still takes place in schools through the null curriculum – what is not officially taught; when gender diversity and gender justice are not addressed as part of the official curriculum, the null curriculum ensures that default learning occurs. This creates particularly difficult environments for trans gender students, those who are questioning their gender identity or those who simply do not fit within binary frameworks for making sense of gender (Robinson et al., 2014). Male students who are 'in a space where [their] masculinity is not clear' often feel threatened by the hyper-masculine culture of their male peers (T1) (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003; Pascoe, 2007). Female students who are not overtly feminine are made to feel they are not the 'right sort of girl' (T9). The misogynistic environment of many schools, particularly (but not exclusively) of all boys' schools, further entrenches stereotypical ideas about sexuality, such as women with short hair must be lesbians and men who are gentle must be gay (T7; T8), and constrains possibilities for exploring issues of gender and sexuality (T9) (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2005).

The null curriculum ensures that where there are silences about homophobia and transphobia (and the silence about transphobia was particularly noticeable in interview data) it is easy for heteronormative and cis-normative discourses to fill the space (Pearce et al., 2016). In this context, gender-normative discourses are largely unchallenged in schools, to the detriment of those students whose gender embodiment and expression defies binary

systems for thinking about and understanding gender identity/identification (Ullman, 2015). Evidence of this is where participants described their colleagues as 'accepting or silent on homophobia' and students, consequently, being 'watchful, working out what is and is not acceptable based on teachers' practices' (T1) (Greytak et al., 2009; Robinson et al., 2014; Taylor et al., 2015).

One disturbing aspect of the null curriculum is the tacit acceptance of homophobic language, which the teachers agreed must be 'called out' (T2). There are also curricular silences about ways in which the world outside is changing with respect to the lives of people of diverse genders and sexualities. Several teachers felt subject to parental resistance and control (T1; T8) and described the 'fear factor' and 'risks' for teachers who are apprehensive of negative reactions from parents when they appear to break taboos by discussing issues such as sexuality (T9) (Cumming-Potvin & Martino, 2014; Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2011). On the other hand, as mass and social media are generating new understandings and providing provocations that shape students' understandings (T3) it is possible that such exposure to events outside school may 'expand' students' views (T4) (Bryson & MacIntosh, 2010; Driver, 2007; Sandercock, 2015). The extent to which any perceived new openness in the wider community will transfer to school contexts remains to be seen (T9). However, this perception does raise a further question about the extent to which schools are keeping pace with societal change, and how well they are taking note of the requirement of the Australian Curriculum to prepare young people to meet the challenges and expectations of societies of the future (ACARA, 2012).

Conclusion

There is evidence in the responses of this group of English teachers that a just curriculum, that is, a curriculum organised around the experiences, culture and needs of the least advantaged members of the society (Connell, 2012), is possible. With respect to LGBT young people, a just curriculum would be one in which their own experiences are recognised as just as valid and worthwhile as those of every other member of the school community; in other words, a curriculum that acknowledges the 'deep diversity' of school populations (Connell, 2012, p. 682). Research shows that LGBT-inclusive and supportive curricula do indeed matter, and that in schools where such commitments exist there are higher reports of safety and awareness of bullying (Pearce et al., 2016; Snapp, McGuire, Sinclair, Gabrion & Russell, 2015; Taylor et al., 2015).

In a context where schooling 'constitutes and perpetuates homophobic, cis-normative and heteronormative discourses' (Robinson, Bansel, Denson, Ovenden & Davies, 2014, p. 25), our research shows it is possible for teachers to commit to the struggle to confront such discourses, despite the 'lack of institutional direction' that Ullman identifies (2015, p. 41). The experiences of teachers involved in this study were by and large of working in contexts where deeply conservative school cultures shaped students' and teachers' experiences and rarely reflected contemporary social realities. Despite the complex intersection between the official, hidden and null curriculum that works to exclude and marginalise LGBT students, some teachers demonstrated that by drawing on critical and multiliteracies (New London Group, 2000) and an approach informed by curricular justice (Connell, 2012), it was possible to find moments to achieve social justice for LGBT people.

References

Apple, M. (2004). *Ideology and curriculum* (3rd ed.). New York: Routledge Falmer.

Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) (2015). *Senior English secondary Curriculum – the Australian Curriculum v.8.1.* Retrieved from http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/seniorsecondary/english/english/curriculum/seniorsecondary#page=1

Australian Curriculum, Assessment & Reporting Authority (ACARA) (2012). *The Shape of the Australian Curriculum. Version 4.0.* Sydney, NSW: ACARA.

Australian Government (2013). *Australian Government Guidelines on the Recognition of Sex and Gender.* Retrieved from https://www.ag.gov.au/Publications/Pages/AustralianGovernmentGuidelinesontheRecognitionofSexandGender.aspx)

Australian Human Rights Commission (2015). *Resilient Individuals: Sexual Orientation, Gender and Intersex Rights.* National Consultation Report.

Alsup, J. (2006). *Teacher identity discourses: Negotiating personal and professional spaces.* Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Apple, M. (1990). *Ideology and curriculum* (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203241219

Anstey, M. (2002). *Literate Futures: Reading.* Coorparoo, QLD: State of Queensland Department of Education.

Bergold, J. & Thomas, S. (2012). Participatory Research Methods: A Methodological Approach in Motion [110 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 13 (1). Art. 30, http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs1201302

Brass, J. (2015). Engaging education through governmentality studies, *English in Australia* 50(3), 9-14.

Bryson, M. & MacIntosh, L. (2010). Can we play *Fun Gay*? Disjuncture and difference, and the precarious mobilities of millennial queer youth narratives, *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 23(1), 101-124. https://doi.org/10.1080/09518390903447150

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the subversion of identity.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Cary, L. (2013). Privileged citizenship: Dancing with discourses in Australia. *Social Educator*, 30(3), 4-10

Carpenter, V. & Lee, D. (2010). Teacher education and the hidden curriculum of heteronormativity. *Curriculum Matters* 6 (99-119).

Connell, R. (2012). Just education. *Journal of Education Policy*, 27(5), 681-683. https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2012.710022

Connell, R. & Pearse, R. (2015). *Short Introductions. Gender.* Third Edition. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Cope, B. & Kalantzis, M. (2015). The things you do to know: An introduction to the pedagogy of multiliteracies, in B. Cope and M. Kalantzis (Eds.), *A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Learning by design* (pp. 1-36). London: Palgrave. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137539724_1

Cumming-Potvin, W. (2009). Social justice, pedagogy and multiliteracies: Developing communities of practice for teacher education. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 34(3), 82-99. https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2009v34n3.4

Cumming-Potvin, W. & Martino, W. (2014). Teaching about queer families: Surveillance, censorship and the schooling of sexualities, *Teaching Education*, 25(3), 309-333. https://doi.org/10.1080/10476210.2014.889672

Down, B. & Smyth, J. (2012). Introduction: From critique to new scripts and possibilities in teacher education. In B. Down & J. Smyth (Eds.), *Critical voices in teacher education. Teaching for social justice in conservative times* (pp 1-9*).* New York: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-3974-1_1

Driver, S. (2007). Performing communities online: Creative spaces of self-representation. In *Queer girls and popular culture: Reading, resisting, and creating media* (pp. 169-193). New York: Peter Lang.

Eisner, E.W. (1994). *The educational imagination: On design and evaluation of school programs* (3rd ed.). New York: Macmillan.

Exley, B., Woods, A., Lunn, J., Walker, S., & Whiteford, C. M. (2014). Reconciling Dilemmas of Social Justice in Literacy Lessons: A Case Study of Preservice Primary Teachers. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 39(1). https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2014v39n1.11

Flynn, N. (2015). Teachers' habitus for teaching English. *English in Australia* 50(1), 21-28. Retrieved from http://0-search.informit.com.au.prospero.murdoch.edu.au/fullText;dn=208421;res=AEIPT

Frohard-Dourlent, H. (2012). When the heterosexual script goes flexible: Public reactions to female heteroflexibility in the Buffy the Vampire Slayer comic books. *Sexualities*. 15 (5/6), 718-738. https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460712446281

Gattis, M. & McKinnon, S. (2015). *School Experiences of Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Students in Wisconsin*. Madison, WI: GSAFE (Creating Just Schools for LGBTIQ+ Youth).

GLSEN (2016). *From Teasing to Torment: School Climate Revisited. A survey of U.S. Secondary School Students and Teachers*. A report from GLESN, www.glsen.org. with support from WELLSFARFO. New York, NY: GLSEN

Greytak, E., Kosciw, J., & Diaz, E. (2009). *Harsh Realities: The Experiences of Transgender Youth in Our Nation's Schools*. New York: GLSEN. Retrieved from http://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/Harsh%20Realities.pdf

Gutierrez, A. (2013). *Critical literacy in Australia: affordances, tensions and hybridizations*. PhD thesis, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, The University of Melbourne.

Hillier, L., Jones, T., Monagle, M., Gahan, L., Blackman, J. & Mitchell, A. (2010). *Writing Themselves in 3: The 3nd National report on the Sexuality, Health and Well-being of Same Sex Attracted and Gender Questioning Young People*. (Monography Series No. 50). Melbourne, Vic: Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society (ARCSHS), La Trobe University, Australia.

Ho, L. (2011). *What is social justice?* (Occasional paper I). Sydney: University of New South Wales, National Pro Bono Resource Centre. Retrieved from http://probonocentre.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Occ_1_What-is-Social-Justice_FINAL.pdf

Igbal, F. (2011). *Violence against queer youth*. PhD Thesis, Presented to the School of Social and Cultural Studies, University of Western Australia, Perth, WA. Australia.

Kosciw, J., Greytak, E., Bartkiewicz, M., Boesen, M. & Palmer, N. (2011). *The 2011 National School Climate Survey*, GLSEN. Retrieved from http://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2011%20National%20School%20Climate%20Survey%20Full%20Report.pdf

Lingard, B., Martino, W., Rezai-Rashti, G. & Sellar, S. (2016). *Globalizing educational accountabilities*. New York: Routledge.

Luke, A. (2012). Critical literacy: Foundational notes. *Theory into Practice*, 51(1), 4-11. https://doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2012.636321

Martino, W. & Cumming-Potvin, W. (2011). "They didn't have *out there* gay parents – they just looked like *normal* regular parents": Investigating teachers' approaches to addressing same-sex parenting and non-normative sexuality in the elementary school classroom, *Curriculum Inquiry* 41(4), 480-501. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-873X.2011.00557.x

Martino, W. & Cumming-Potvin, W. (2014). Teaching about sexual minorities and "princess boys": A queer and trans-infused approach to investigating LGBTQ themed texts in the elementary school classroom, *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, on-line: https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2014.940239

Martino, W & Mellor, B. (2000). *Gendered fictions*. Urbana, Illinois: NCTE Chalkface Series.

Martino, W., & Pallotta-Chiarolli, M. (2003). *So what's a boy? Addressing issues of masculinity and schooling*. Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press.

Martino, W., & Pallotta-Chiarolli, M. (2005). *'Being normal is the only way to be': Adolescent perspectives on gender and school*. Sydney, Australia: University of New South Wales Press.

Maxwell, J. (2013). *Qualitative Research Design. An interactive approach.* Thousand Oaks, California: Sage

Mellor, B. & Patterson, B. (2000). *Reading stories: Activities and texts for critical readings.* Urbana, Illinois: NCTE Chalkface Series.

Meyer, E., Tilland-Stafford, A. & Airton, L. (in press). Transgender and gender creative students in PK-12 schools: What we can learn from their teachers). *Teachers College Record.*

Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) (2008). *The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*. Melbourne, VIC: MCEETYA.

New London Group (2000). A pedagogy of multiliteracies. Designing social futures. In Cope, B. and Kalantzis, M. (Eds.), *Multiliteracies. Literacy Learning and the Future Design of Social Futures* (pp. 9-38). South Yarra, Victoria: Macmillan.

North, C. (2006). More than words? Delving into the substantive meaning(s) of "social justice" in education. *Review of Educational Research.* 76(4), 507-536. https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543076004507

Pallotta-Chiarolli, M. (2005). *When Our Children Come Out: How to Support Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered Young People.* Sydney, NSW: Finch Publishing.

Parke, R. (2013). *Future families: Diverse forms, rich possibilities.* Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118602386

Pascoe, C. J. (2007). *Dude, You're a Fag: Masculinity and Sexuality in High School*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Patton, M. (2002) *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Payne, E. & Smith, M. (2014). The big freak out: Educator fear in response to the presence of transgender elementary school students, *Journal of Homosexuality* 61, 399-418. https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2013.842430

Pearce, J., Gardiner, V., Cumming-Potvin, W. & Martino, W. (2016). *Supporting gender and sexual diversity in high schools: Building conversations for LGBTQI human rights in the English classroom.* Retrieved from http://www.the-rainbow-owl.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Pearce-et-al.-2016.-Supporting-Gender-and-Sexual-Diversity-in-High-Schools.pdf under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0. Full terms at http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/

Phillips, L., Kristiansen, M., Vehvilainen M. & Gunnarsson, E. (2013). Tackling the tensions of dialogue and participation. In L. Phillips, M. Kristiansen, M. Vehvilainen & E. Gunnarsson (Eds.). *Knowledge and power in collaborative research. A reflexive approach* (pp 1-20). New York, NY: Routledge.

Rawls, J. (1971). *A theory of justice*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Rennie, J. (2009). Diversity in different times. *Literacy Learning: the Middle Years*, 17(3), 11-17.

Rhodes, D. (2009). Out of the silence: Bridging the queer divide in Australian secondary English classroom. *English in Australia*. 44(2), 43-52.

Richard, G. (2015) The pedagogical practices of Quebec high school teachers relative to sexual diversity, *Journal of LGBT Youth* 12, 113-143. https://doi.org/10.1080/19361653.2014.969866

Robinson, K., Bansel, P., Denson, N., Ovenden, G. & Davies, C. (2014). *Growing Up Queer: Issues Facing Young Australians Who Are Gender Variant and Sexuality Diverse*. Melbourne: Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre.

Sandercock, T. (2015). Transing the small screen: loving and hating transgender youth in *Glee* and *Degrassi*, *Journal of Gender Studies,* 24(4), 436-452. https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2015.1021307

SBS (2015). *At-a-glance: Same-sex marriage around the world.* Retrieved from SBS News: http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2014/10/07/glance-same-sex-marriage-around-world

Sen, A. (2000). Social justice and the distribution of income. In A. Atkinson & F. Bourguignon (Eds.), *Handbook of Income Distribution* (Vol. 1, pp. 59-85). Oxford: Elsevier. https://doi.org/10.1016/S1574-0056(00)80004-4

Sen, A. (2010). *The idea of justice*. London: Penguin.

Smyth, J. (2011). *Critical pedagogy for social justice*. London: Continuum.

Snapp, S., McGuire, J., Sinclair, K., Gabrion, K. & Russell, S. (2015). LGBTQ-inclusive curricula: why supportive curricula matter, *Sex Education* 15(6), 580-596. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2015.1042573

Skelton, A. (1997). Studying hidden curricula: Developing a perspective in the light of postmodern insights. *Curriculum Studies*, 5(2), 177-193. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681369700200007

Taylor, C., Peter, T., Campbell, C. Meyer, E., Ristock, J. & Short, D. (2015). *The every teacher project on LGBTQ-Inclusive education in Canada's K-12 schools: Final Report*. Winnipeg: Manitoba Teachers' Society.

Thompson, G. (2013) NAPLAN, MySchool and accountability: teacher perceptions of the effects of testing. *International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives* 12(2), 62-84.

Ullman, J. (2015). *Free to Be? Exploring the schooling experiences of Australia's sexuality and gender diverse secondary school students.* Penrith, NSW: Centre for Educational Research, Western Sydney University.

United Nations (2016). *World Day of Social Justice*. http://www.un.org/en/events/socialjusticeday/ Accessed 1 August 2016.

Varjas, K., Dew, B., Marshall, M., Graybill, E., Singh, A., Meyers, J. & Brickbichler, L. (2008). Bullying in schools towards sexual minority youth. *Journal of School Violence* 7(2), 59-87. https://doi.org/10.1300/J202v07n02_05

Valentine, M. (2012). The danger of efficiency and conformity. *Principal Matters*, 92 (Spring) 36-38. Retrieved from http://0-search.informit.com.au.prospero.murdoch.edu.au/fullText;dn=206683;res=AEIPT

Vallance, E. (1991). Hidden curriculum. In A. Lewy (Ed.), *The international encyclopedia of curriculum* (pp. 40-42). Oxford: Pergamon Press.

Winans, A. (2006). Queering pedagogy in the English classroom. *Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition and Culture* 6(1), 103-122. https://doi.org/10.1215/15314200-6-1-103

Young, I (1990). *Justice and the politics of difference*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Young, I. (2001). Pushing for inclusion: Justice and the politics of difference. In R. Terchek & T. Conte (Eds.), *Theories of democracy: a reader* (pp. 268–278). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Youth Gender Action Project (2009). *Trans youth at school.* Retrieved from http://www.ctys.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/YGAP_School.pdf

Acknowledgements