

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

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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.

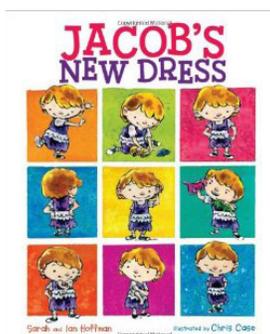
The description for *A Tale of Two Daddies* (Oelschlagel & Blackwood, 2010) demonstrates the lack of commitment required by such books: it “introduces a type of family increasingly visible in our society. Neither favoring nor condemning, this book reflects a child’s practical and innocent look at the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

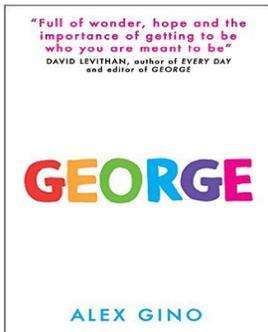
Several related frameworks fit into this category. Because they are closely related and often work in unison, it is useful to consider them together. An anti-homophobia framework implies a social justice approach, with the explicit goal of reducing homophobia. This framework generally assumes LGBTQ students 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.

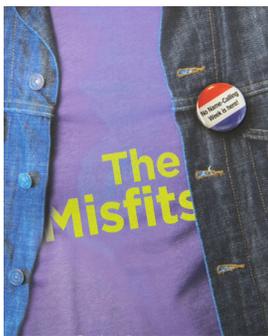
An anti-heterosexist framework seeks to convey an understanding (and critique) of the ways our society privileges heterosexuality and renders LGBTQ identities inferior or invisible. Methods include teaching numerous books with LGBTQ content; comprehensively including gay/lesbian history; calling students’ 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.

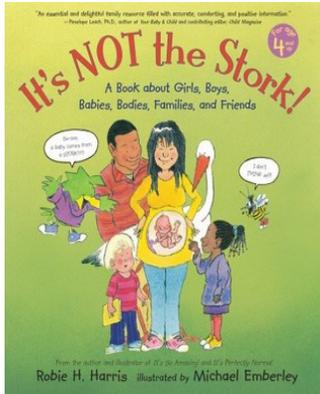
There’s also *Uncle Bobby’s Wedding* (Brannen, 2008), about Chloe, a girl—well, a guinea pig, actually—whose favorite uncle gets married (to another male guinea pig, incidentally). Chloe worries he won’t have as much time for her anymore.

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

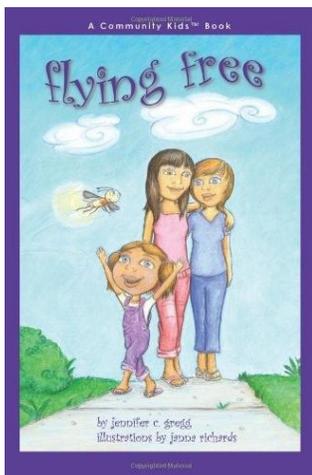
“Bobby and Jamie love each other,” said Mama. “When grown-up people love each other that much, they want to be married.”

“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.



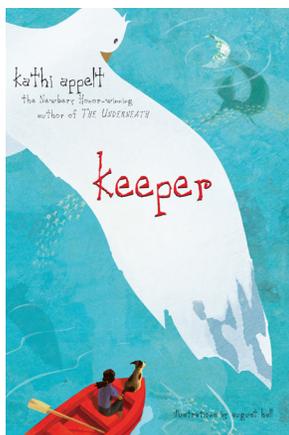
The *It's Not the Stork!* series (Harris & Emberley, 2008, 2014a, 2014b) of body books for kids (three titles, geared to ages four through teen) provides a rare example of non-heteronormative reference books. While most other body books describe only heterosexual feelings and encounters, Harris and Emberley 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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