Recognizing and Utilizing Queer Pedagogy

Jeffrey D. Zacko-Smith & G. Pritchy Smith

The world is not divided into sheep and goats. Not all things are black nor all things white. It is a fundamental of taxonomy that nature rarely deals with discrete categories. Only the human mind invents categories and tries to force facts into separated pigeon-holes. The living world is a continuum in each and every one of its aspects. The sooner we learn this concerning sexuality the sooner we shall reach a sound understanding of its realities.

—Alfred Kinsey, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, 1948

Rationale for Knowledge Base Evolution

It is the year 2010, and we are still "trying to force facts into separated pigeonholes," as described by the famous American biologist Alfred Kinsey in the quote above. Although more than 60 years have passed since Kinsey published his

Jeffrey D. Zacko-Smith is an assistant professor and coordinator of the Leadership Minor Program in the International Center for Studies in Creativity of the School of Professions at the State University of New York College at Buffalo, Buffalo, New York; G. Pritchy Smith is a professor in the Department of Foundations and Secondary Education of the College of Education and Human Sciences at the University of North Florida, Jacksonville, Florida.

then controversial work, at a time when issues related to sexuality were topics even more taboo than they are today, there is still a great deal to be considered when it comes to defining and positioning sexuality, sexual orientation, and gender in our postmodern world, and particularly in our schools and classrooms. In many ways, not only racially, but also economically, religiously, politically, and sexually, our society is more segregated than at any other time in human history (Kozol, 2007).

It can be viewed as a matter of form and function. Over and above the moral implications that arise from this understanding, people are increasingly interacting with one another, and, quite often, then witnessing the friction that occurs when form, which can be understood as representing our interactions with one another, does not match function, which can be understood as the desired outcome or outcomes we are striving for (Zacko-Smith, 2009). We are striving for, as an example, equity in our classrooms and schools, but often failing to genuinely interact with each other (and our institutions and systems) in ways that support this goal.

As educators and, in fact, simply as human beings, all of us are being called to operate in what can only be described as "hyper-diverse" environments (Zacko-Smith, 2009); we are connected to other cultures, ideas, beliefs, values, and practices in unprecedented ways and with never before seen speed, and the relational complexity created by these connections multiplies rapidly, blurring boundaries, contravening established frameworks, and often creating confusion and misunderstanding. Are educators completely prepared to embrace the new ways that people are relating to each other, and are they prepared to deal effectively with the issues that arise from a necessary and life-enriching "full embrace" of diversity?
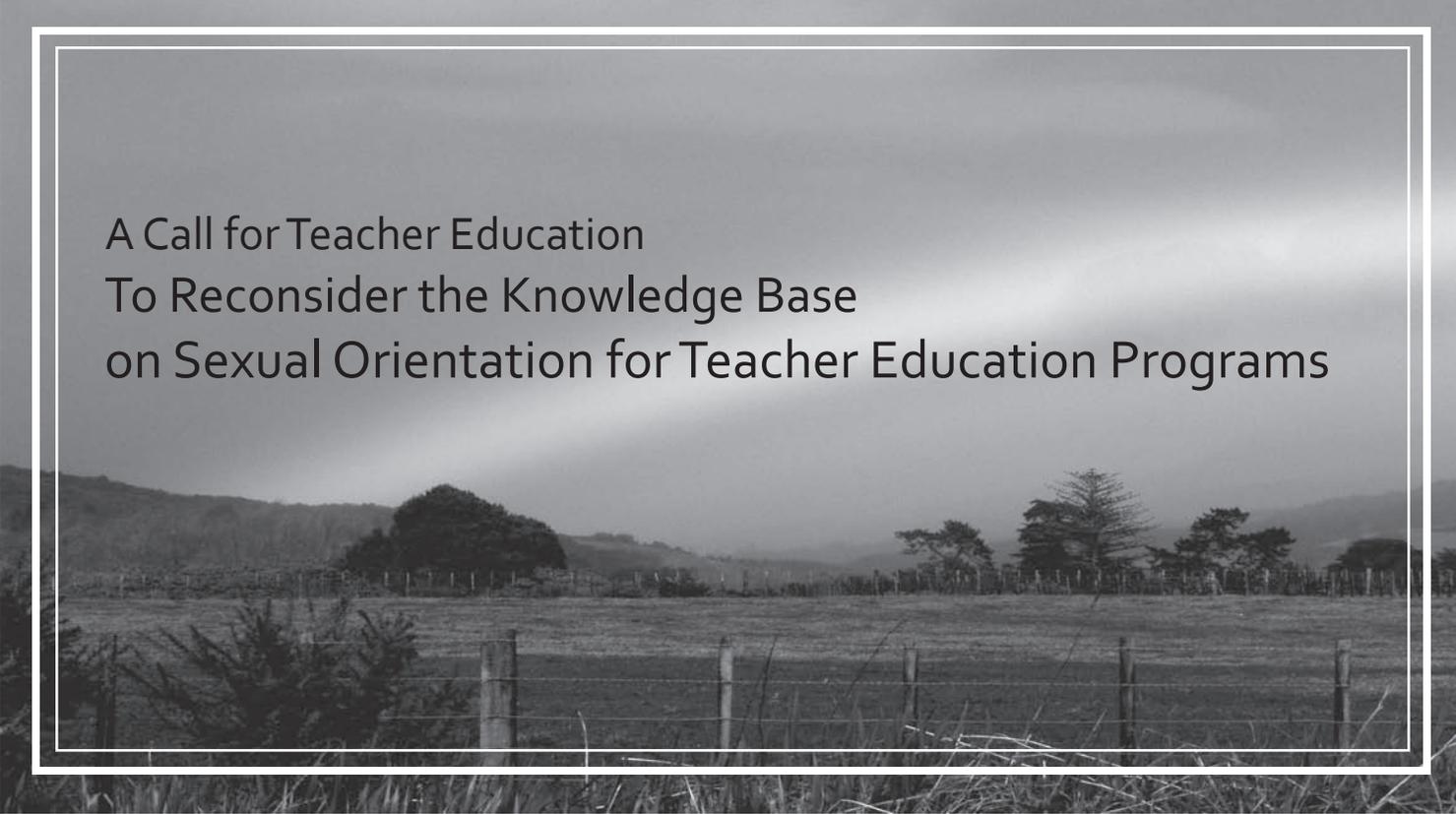
In order to teach effectively in hyper-diverse contexts, if effective teaching is considered to be the creation of knowledge, the transmission of ideas, and the "growing" of human beings intellectually, morally and socially, educators at all levels, but particularly those who are new to the field, must be well-versed in multiculturalism and diversity. They must also be unafraid to immerse themselves in the world as it concurrently unfolds and evolves around them.

Educators must also accept their role as mentors who help to define reality for those they are educating, and they must commit to redefining that reality as dictated by demands for social justice and equity. To ignore these continually emerging requirements means that educators will quickly become outdated and ineffective at best, and damaging and socially unjust at worst, neither of which are acceptable outcomes for those who are truly committed to the profession.

A Call for Teacher Education
To Reconsider the Knowledge Base
on Sexual Orientation for Teacher Education Programs

As has been described in the literature on multicultural and diversity education over the last two decades, we, as global citizens, can no longer afford to teach or, in fact, to do anything at all, in cultural, sexual, economic, ideological, religious or political isolation. We are recognizing the transdisciplinary nature of virtually every field (Stokols, 2006), and education is no exception. Our schools are at least partially responsible for cementing societal norms and for defining what is considered "normal," and, as Johansson (2007) indicates, "if hegemony is to be upheld, people in the culture must be constantly reminded of the natural and rational [that is] inherent in what it [the culture] advocates. Through these constant reminders, a certain normality is segmented in people's consciousness" (p. 2).

Viewed through such a lens, educators are understood to be either upholding the status quo or to be defining/redefining what is classified as "normal" in their classrooms, and thus in the larger society as well. Continually bringing this responsibility to the attention of educators, as well as giving them the tools to begin to expand definitions of what is and what is not considered "normal" in the realm of sexuality and gender, can go a long way towards achieving equity and, in particular, can help mitigate student's anxiety when it comes to dealing with their own sexual orientation and gender issues.

A Comprehensive Update

While much has been written about multicultural education from ethnic, racial economic, social, gender/gender-identity and sexual-orientation perspectives, the authors of this article have found it necessary to provide a comprehensive update for educators when it comes to the latter categories: gender/gender identity and sexual orientation. Being supporters of diversity means that, as educators who are a part of students' daily lives, we must keep up with the changing ways that our students both define and express themselves. Sexual orientation and gender/gender-identity issues have evolved from the simple fight for acceptance prevalent in the 1960s through the 1980s, to a burgeoning redefinition of sexual identity and sexuality itself.

As Nieto and Bode[1] (2008) point out, becoming a multicultural teacher requires becoming a multicultural person first, and that becoming a multicultural person requires learning to see reality from a variety of perspectives; teachers must cease adherence to the extremes of "black and white," and embrace all the shades of grey that lie between. Thus, if educators care about treating all of their students equitably, and since educators will certainly have gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and questioning students in their classrooms and peers in their schools, they have a responsibility to become educated on the issues that are a part of their daily lives. It is not a responsibility that should be ignored.

The book *Common Sense About Uncommon Knowledge: The Knowledge Bases for Diversity* (Smith, 1998) was one of the first efforts to outline, in any truly comprehensive way, a set of knowledge bases deemed crucial for educators and those being prepared for positions that place them on the "front lines" in educational contexts. Quite obviously, however, many authors contributed significantly to the effort to describe such knowledge bases both before and after the publication of *Common Sense* by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education in 1998 (see, for example, Reynolds, 1989; Gay, 1993; Larkin & Sleeter, 1995; Sikula, 1996; Murray, 1996; Irvine, 1997; Sleeter, 2006), and the academic literature has both expanded upon and redefined each knowledge base over the last decade.

It should be noted, however, that the 13 knowledge bases outlined in *Common Sense* are still critically important to teacher education programs, in that they still identify informational and experiential areas deemed crucial to effective and equitable educational practice in today's classrooms and schools. The knowledge bases are described as follows: Foundations of Multicultural Education; Sociocultural Contexts of Human Growth and Psychological Development in Marginalized Ethnic and Racial Cultures; Cultural

and Cognitive Learning Style Theory and Research; Language, Communication and Interactional Styles of Marginalized Cultures; Essential Elements of Culture; Principles of Culturally Responsive Teaching and Culturally Responsive Curriculum Development; Effective Strategies for Teaching Minority Students; Foundations of Racism; Effects of Policy and Practice on Culture, Race, Gender, and Other Categories of Diversity; Culturally Responsive Diagnosis, Measurement, and Assessment; Sociocultural Influences on Subject-Specific Learning; Gender and Sexual Orientation; and Experiential Knowledge.

Each knowledge base is related to and drawn from a wealth of material that every educator should be familiar with; teacher preparation programs are, thankfully, increasingly including multicultural and diversity education in their curricula, contributing to an evolution in practice. However, there is still much work to be done.

A Continually Evolving Understanding

The goal of this article is to supplement and update Knowledge Base 12: Gender and Sexual Orientation, bringing it in line with what can only be described as a continually evolving understanding of gender, gender-identity, and sexual orientation. While Smith (1998) stated "Most preservice and inservice teachers are woefully undereducated and underprepared by traditional teacher education programs to deal with educational issues related to sexual orientation" (p. 88), progress has been made since the late 1990s when the book was published.

For example, the literature has become much more "specific" and direct in addressing issues of sexuality and gender when it comes to developing teaching materials and dealing with students, and many more institutions are implementing "safe space" training programs for their faculty.[2] Again though, recent events show that there is still work to be done in preparing educators to work in socially just ways with sexually diverse populations. The lines that define gender and sexuality are increasingly blurred, and issues that the LGBTQ[3] community could not afford to be concerned about earlier, when they were far from achieving simple social acceptance and decreasing the violence that often accompanied that hard-fought struggle, can now be worked with openly and energetically.

It is easy to find examples that illustrate the need for educators to be aware of sexual orientation, gender, and gender-identity issues. A simple internet search will lead educators to a plethora of stories, statistics, and experiences that demonstrate that problems still exist for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and questioning youth in 2010. Such a search will also highlight the many times these problems are associated with or embedded within educational settings.

For example, harassment and bullying based on sexual orientation remains persistent in schools in California despite an anti-harassment law that took effect in 2000. According to a study released in 2004 by the California Safe Schools Coalition (CSSC),[4] 7.5 percent of California's middle and high school students had been or were targets of harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation. That equals more than 200,000 students who are harassed per year in the State of California alone as little as SIX years ago.

Additionally, in its 2005 National School Climate Survey, the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN)[5] found that:

◆ 75% of LGBTQ students heard derogatory remarks such as "faggot" or "dyke" frequently or often at school, and nearly nine out of ten (89%) reported hearing "that's so gay" or "you're so gay"—meaning "stupid" or "worthless"—either frequently or often.

◆ A third (37.8%) of LGBTQ students experienced actual physical harassment at school based on orientation, and more than a quarter (26%) based on gender expression.

◆ Nearly one-fifth (17.6%) of LGBTQ students had been physically assaulted because of their sexual orientation and over a tenth (11.8%) because of their gender expression.

◆ LGBTQ students were five times more likely to report having skipped school in the last month because of safety concerns than the general population of students.

◆ LGBTQ students who experience more frequent physical harassment were also more likely to report they did not plan to go to college. Overall, LGBTQ students were twice as likely as the general population of students to report they were not planning to pursue any type of post-secondary education.

◆ The average GPA for LGBTQ students who were frequently physically harassed was half a grade lower than that of LGBTQ students experiencing less harassment.

A Continuing Need for Education and Allies

During the past 20 years the issue of sexual orientation has been widely discussed and studied; rights for gays and lesbians have increased and attitudes have become quite a bit more progressive and accepting (in other words, we've done a decent job of teaching tolerance). In addition, the LGBTQ population, and their accompanying issues, have become more prominent and "mainstream," thanks to a level of "legitimacy" lent to them through the popular media and the internet.

However, despite these generally positive developments, many young people still feel some hesitation when participating in discussions that revolve around homosexuality and/or sexual orientation. It seems that there are still tendencies to associate LGBTQ students with "abnormality," and that "the kind of intimacy (students) develop with their peer group—homosociality—consists of a complex mix of longing for intimacy . . . and the need to maintain borders in relation to their surroundings. In this mix, homophobia is often present" (Johansson, 2007, p. 43).

As will be seen, when homophobia is tolerated in schools it not only has immediate and negative effects, but we see those effects ripple outward, contaminating the whole school, community, and the larger society. Although over a decade old, a study by Gilbert and Gilbert (1998) described how "contempt for homosexual, feminine, and otherwise different men is interwoven with views on school and even on particular school subjects" (cited in Johansson, 2007, p. 31).

And, while the association between sexual orientation and school has progressed toward being one of tolerance and/or acceptance, it is still evident that educational contexts significantly contribute to the perpetuation of stereotypes and negative attitudes (Pascoe, 2007) towards gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and questioning students (see the 2008 study[6] by GLSEN for one example). As educators, we are responsible, at least in part, for helping to counter these socially unjust understandings, helping to define and redefine students' attitudes regarding sexuality, gender, and sexual orientation.

In the preface to *Getting Ready for Benjamin: Preparing Teachers for Sexual Diversity in the Classroom* (Kissen, 2002), James T. Sears, series editor of the Curriculum, Cultures, and (homo)Sexualities Series published by Rowan and Littlefield, indicates, "there has been no single resource targeted specifically for pre-ser-

vice teachers that places sexual diversity squarely within multicultural education" (p. xi). And, while we have seen the increasing emergence of sexuality and LGBTQ topics in the multicultural literature, the subject still remains both controversial (primarily because of the erroneous linkage between sex and sexuality established and reinforced by society, including educators) and difficult for teachers to discuss openly with one another and, most certainly, with students in the classroom.

Unless this changes, and educators can begin to address these topics openly and honestly in some capacity, LGBTQ students will continue to experience harassment and will not receive the education that they deserve. On March 8, 2008, the *Ventura County Star*[7] in California reported the following story after a student shooting at a public middle school,

Melissa Castillo urged hundreds of her fellow students Friday to show compassion for each other, no matter where they come from or who they are.

"Whether we understand it or not, we all have a social responsibility to each other," Castillo, the associate student body president at E.O. Green School in Oxnard, said to students during a tribute on Friday to former classmate Larry King.

King, 15, was gunned down in class, allegedly by another student, on February 12 and was pronounced dead the next day. King's classmates said he was openly gay and was teased by some students at the middle school.

"In this great tragedy that happened here at our school, there are really two victims and two great friends we have lost," Castillo said of King and Brandon McInerney, the 14-year-old student suspected of the shooting.

"My hope would be that we can all take this incident and be able to build, learn, grow and pave the way for a better future," the eighth-grader told students as they sat on the ground in back of the school under a warm afternoon sun.

This is one of many recent events that make it clear that, although things have most certainly improved for LGBTQ students, past efforts are likely not enough to get us to a tipping point (Gladwell, 2000) where we see harassment and violence significantly decline, acceptance significantly

increase, and new "acceptable" definitions of gender and sexuality emerge. Research clearly shows that slurs are still uttered, harassment still occurs, and fear, violence, and even death remain a part of everyday reality for many LGBTQ students.

While gay, lesbian, transgender, questioning, and other students face much less actual physical and emotional violence today than they have in the past, Jane Page and Delores Liston (as cited in Kissen, 2002, p. 71) indicate that "symbolic violence [is still] perpetrated against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people on a regular basis." In the year 2010, discrimination against the LGBTQ community remains for the most part acceptable and unacknowledged by American society, and as educators, mentors, and educational administrators, it is up to us to work to continue to change this dynamic (Pascoe, 2007). We have the power to redefine reality in our classrooms and in our schools, which contributes to redefining the reality that LGBTQ students face every day of their lives. We must make use of the opportunities presented to us!

New Frameworks for Education

Early on, efforts to promote diversity and multiculturalism generally fell into the "melting pot" paradigm popular in the 1950s and 1960s, when the stated desire was to create homogeneity, "sameness," and equality. However, as the years passed and the field of multicultural and diversity education matured (Kissen, 2002), efforts drew less upon integration, assimilation, and simple acceptance, and more upon equity and the recognition that differences should not (and can not) be "melted away," but need to be respected and used to enrich the educational experience. Clearly our society has moved into an era where identities need to be celebrated and seen as valuable tools that positively contribute to our globalized world; human differences should not simply be acknowledged but also destigmatized and used in positive ways.

The knowledge base that has developed around sexual orientation, gender, and gender-identity is a rich one. The scholarship

and research that emerged in the field in recent decades suggests that the minimal necessary elements of a teacher knowledge base on sexual orientation ought to include the following (Smith, 1998):

(a) foundation knowledge about human sexuality including gay, lesbian, and bisexual identity development and personal empowerment;

(b) the unique psychological, emotional, and educational needs of gay, lesbian, and bisexual students, including research studies on internalized homophobia, alienation, and other psychosocial aspects of peer, family, and societal rejection and acceptance;

(c) contemporary survey profiles and literature that present public attitudes regarding homosexuality;

(d) a study of the personal lives and voices of gay, lesbian, and bisexual teachers and students;

(e) an examination of gay and lesbian sexual orientation in a variety of cultural contexts, i.e., African American, Hispanic American, Asian American, American Indian, European American, etc. and in the context of other diversity variables such as social class, gender, and religion;

(f) a history of case law on gay and lesbian teacher dismissal and credential revocation and on gay and lesbian students; and

(g) examination of and knowledge about curriculum and school materials suitable for instruction about the historical contributions to society of notable gay and lesbian persons, instruction for developing self-acceptance among gay and lesbian students and peer acceptance and tolerance for gay and lesbian classmates, and instruction in HIV education.

While this knowledge bases offers a highly useful perspective regarding sexual orientation, sexuality, and sexual identity for today's educators, and while integrating sexual orientation subject matter into

---

Early on, efforts to promote diversity and multiculturalism generally fell into the "melting pot" paradigm popular in the 1950s and 1960s, when the stated desire was to create homogeneity, "sameness," and equality.

curricula (see, for example, Harbeck, 1992; Jennings, 1995; Kissen, 1996; Sears, 1987, 1990; Unks, 1995) is more the norm, there are multiple developing trends that should also be examined and used by educators in today's schools. For example, educators should look seriously at ways to stem homophobia, investigate ways of changing the definition of "inclusion," take time to explore heterosexual privilege, have conversations revolving around gender identity and transgender issues, and explore the social construction of sexuality, sexual orientation and gender.

The Field of Queer Theory

One very recent, and also somewhat controversial but important movement that has emerged is associated with the field of Queer Theory. This movement is valuable because, as a theoretical paradigm, Queer Theory asserts that sexual "identity [is] neither fixed nor unitary, but multiple and

by society to everyone in their classroom. This practice or assumption then causes fear and repression among any students who cannot define their family this way, and serves to contravene a students' educational experience, which, of course, is hardly either equitable or just.

The true innovation that the use of Queer Theory provides educators is that it changes the focus from understanding LGBTQ students as an "other," prompting a reexamination of what it means to view sexuality without the use of the strict labels and "organizing terms" that have become all too easy to associate with it, and which ultimately serve as a mechanism for harassment, discrimination and, occasionally, violence. Thus, this article seeks to add a new element to the teacher knowledge base on sexual orientation: educators should have a general understanding of Queer Theory and be cognizant of its ability to promote tolerance and help transform their classrooms and their schools. Queer-

the classroom each and every day; actively monitor the language they use. Such monitoring seeks to redefine (or at least prompt students to question) the meaning of words, terms and concepts that serve to reinforce socially defined characterizations of "normal" and thus help to create the labels and binary categorizations that are the root of the discrimination. Efforts to reclaim the word and concept of "queer" certainly owe their success to such actions. Language is powerful, and, in a postmodern world, it is certainly acknowledged that it "positions us to act" and that it exerts a very real, very substantial impact on our lives and the lives of those we teach and work with (Burr, 2003; Gergen, 1999).

In their highly useful and enlightening book *Queering Straight Teachers: Discourse and Identity in Education* (2007), edited by Nelson Rodriguez and William F. Pinar, educators will find a very approachable examination of the history and implications of queer theory, as well as

---

Queer Theory advocates one extremely simple thing that all future and current educators can do to make a difference in the classroom each day and every day: actively monitor the language they use.

---

shifting" (Kissen, 2002, p. 5). This change in the definition of sexual identity would, by implication, call on educators to understand and promote sexual orientation and gender as concepts that are flexible and flowing, and not static and fixed. It also serves to eliminate labels and the stigmatization that results from labeling.

Besides the need to reclaim the word "queer" from the negative and hurtful connotations it has been associated with since it became a pejorative slur (Kissen, 2002) back in the early 1920s, it is also a powerful way to reject the strict categorization upon which all discrimination and harassment are based. Since heterosexuality is assumed (not only here in the United States but in most other cultures as well), and is thus a societal norm, queer theory asks that educators approach students "assumptionless," and, by example, begin to re-create what is deemed "normal."

A dominant culture sends all of us messages of inferiority on multiple levels. For example, a teacher may assume that a student has a mother and a father, the heterosexual stereotype that defines family in the United States and much of the rest of the world, and will thus act and interact with students based on this assumption, sending a message regarding what is normal, expected, and accepted

ing straight educators requires neither a change in personal sexuality nor an overt display of sexuality at any level. It simply calls for the education of educators and requires their active participation regarding how "normalcy" is defined.

A Queer Theory Primer for Educators

I do not aim to offer strategies that work. Rather, I hope to offer conceptual and cultural resources for educators and researchers to use as we rethink our practices, constantly look for new insights, and engage differently in anti-oppressive education . . . (Kumashiro, 2002, pp. 25-26)

Most educators, and, in fact, most people in general, have problems approaching queer theory due to the fact that the word "queer," as mentioned earlier, has long had pejorative, controversial and negative connotations attached to it. Over the past two decades, and, in particular over the last decade, and with the help of Queer Theory itself, the LGBTQ community has come a long way toward reclaiming the word, and changing the way its use is viewed.

Queer Theory advocates one extremely simple thing that all future and current educators can do to make a difference in

various interpretations (ranging from the highly extreme and activist to the more theoretical and "soft") that surround it. In Chapter One: "But I'm Not Gay: What Straight Teachers Need to Know About Queer Theory" (pp. 15-31), Elizabeth J. Meyer provides an excellent overview of the subject, discussing the harmful effects of homophobia and heterosexism, outlining how ignoring homophobia actually teaches intolerance, and shows teachers how queer pedagogy can help to transform schools (making them not only more equitable, but also more safe).

The authors of this article, however, would change the classification of teachers that Meyer addresses, since both straight and LGBTQ teachers can benefit from an understanding of Queer Theory, particularly because simply being queer and having a working knowledge of Queer Theory are not necessarily related, primarily because of its newness as a theoretical paradigm.

A major misunderstanding about Queer Theory is that it is the same as gay and lesbian studies, and "Although queer theory emerged from the work of scholars in the field it has become much more encompassing than gay and lesbian studies" (Meyer, 2007, p. 15). Thus, it is Queer

Theory that pushes us to go beyond mere acceptance and tolerance, and asks that educators take a more active stance when defining the realities that surround sexuality, sexual orientation and gender for the students in their classrooms. Ultimately, it asks that educators help expose the "rigid normalizing categories" and expand them "beyond the binaries of man/woman, masculine/feminine, student/teacher, and gay/straight" (Meyer, 2007, p. 15) in an effort to create more equitable, relatable, safe and socially just environments in which students can learn.

Taking even small steps toward understanding the harm that homophobia, heterosexism, socially proctored gender norms, and the subtle and insidious influence that language exerts on our lives can go a long way towards achieving sexual orientation and gender identity equity; clearly feminism and women's studies are evidence that such evolutions in understanding matter (though, admittedly, there

episodes that have taken place in schools here in the United States.

Unfortunately, however, "much of the information about bullying and harassment is flawed because it fails to address some of the underlying social forces at work" (Meyer, 2007, p. 16). Overlooked time and again is the fact that so much of the bullying and harassment that takes place in our school systems stems from "the policing and enforcing [of] the norms of our culture" (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003), and is not, as often speculated, simply the result of isolated or "exceptional" events. In other words, our implicit or explicit enforcement of established social norms regarding what is masculine and what is feminine, for example, leads directly to harassing behavior, and as Meyer (2007) points out, "it is clear that these behaviors act to create and support a social hierarchy that privileges mainstream identities and behaviors over marginalized ones" (p. 16).

paradigm that has caused so much damage to so many students; educating self first is a necessary step towards educating others.

The social construction (Gergen, 1999) of family, gender, sexuality, disability, and leadership, an area of research of one of this article's authors, extols the reality-creating ability of language and, in fact, classifies language as "extremely powerful" in this arena. Language fashions our understandings, positions us to take action, and exerts an influence on our day-to-day lived realities; using it carelessly can certainly lead to oppression, injustice and violence. In particular, theorists such as Foucault (1980) demonstrated how language can be used to dominate and control, which is echoed by liberatory education theorists like McLaren (1998), and requires that educators pay attention to the ways words, both written and spoken, impact the lives of students and the greater community.

From a historical perspective, our society has not only classified homosexual-

All educators must strive towards an understanding that both gender and sexuality lie on a continuum, with no particular point on that continuum being any better or worse than any other.

---

is still work to be done to ensure gender equity in educational and all other settings). Becoming familiar with Queer Theory can help educators "point to disjunctures between pairings thought of as natural and inevitable" (Pascoe, 2007, p. 11), allowing them to be questioned, deconstructed and redefined within whatever contexts and ways are relevant.

Though numerous researchers have done important work in the field of Queer Theory (see Britzman, 2000; Jackson, 2001; Jagose, 1996; Kumashiro, 2002, among others) and Critical Pedagogy (see Foucault 1986a, 1986b; Friere, 1970; Kanpol, 1994), as educators we feel that those new to the field will benefit from the introduction to the subject provided by Meyer (2007) due to the practical nature of the material and it's synthesis of the major discourses surrounding the subject.

The stories highlighted earlier in this article help justify a warranted and growing concern with violence in our schools, and thus add to calls to expand the knowledge base on sexual orientation. In particular, the issue of bullying and student harassment (which is a form of emotional violence) has received quite a bit of attention given the presence of such activities in multiple recent violent

Creating Change

There are several things educators can do to create change. Simply making sure that the language used and the resources (books, videos, workbooks, etc.) chosen for classes do not support the sexual orientation and gender identity status quo is one step that all educators can take that will make a difference. Such actions work to break down the "normalization" of socially constructed categories (Gergen, 1999), establishing more flexible understandings in their place. In addition, educating students (again, either implicitly or explicitly) about LGBTQ issues and "truths" (i.e., presenting an alternative picture of the family, for example, and working to "normalize" same sex parental structures) can go a long way towards breaking down the power of the binary.

Again, Meyer (2007) gets it right when stating "By developing a more critical understanding of . . . sex, sexual orientation and how these identities and experiences are shaped and taught in schools, educators can have a profound impact on the way students learn, relate to others, and behave in schools" (p. 17). Thus, simply reading this article and personally starting to work with this material is a positive step towards changing the label-intensive educational

ity as an "abnormality," it classified it as a mental illness up until 1973. An examination of the psychological, religious, and political forces that served to construct homosexuality in this manner goes beyond the scope of this article, but it is readily apparent that our society has actively defined heterosexuality as "normal" and, at best, homosexuality as "abnormal," and that "The resulting prejudice against those who deviate from this social script has been carefully developed by institutional heterosexism through the powerful institutional discourses of organized religion, medicine, sexology, psychiatry, and psychology (Bem, 1993, p. 91 as cited in Meyer, 2007).

We would go a step further in this article, however, adding education to the list of powerful institutional discourses that help to create and maintain prejudice. As Meyer (2007) states, "Educational structures wield extraordinary ideological power due to their role in teaching what the culture has deemed as important and valuable to future generations" (pp. 21-22). Thus, educators and educational administrators have a special responsibility to help counteract (or at least not perpetuate) these socially created and sanctioned definitions of "normalcy".

Counteracting such definitions can

be done, though perhaps not easily, by exposing and dismantling the often hidden heterosexism found in school curricula and educational materials. Educators can, for example, supplement books that paint the standard picture of romance and dating with books that show that boys can date boys and have the same types of relationships, levels of excitement over love, and relationship problems that accompany opposite sex relationships. Educators must also begin using language, stories, and materials that do not reinforce sexuality and gender stereotypes (i.e., it is amazing how many heterosexual men won't wear pink, for example, simply because it's been long identified as a "girl's color" and classified as "not masculine," both of which are socially constructed and empty beliefs that highlight the power of societal sanctioning).

Heterosexism and homophobia are clearly linked, and it is easy to see that "the most effective challenge to any boy's

learning, not closure and satisfaction" (p. 43, as cited in Meyer, 2007, p. 26). Queer Theory and queer pedagogy go beyond simply challenging "traditional understandings of sexual identity by deconstructing the categories . . . and the language that supports them" (Meyer, 2007, p. 25); it prompts educators to take a journey with their students.

By making part of the educational experience of those in our classrooms and schools about exploring the power of language and identifying the sources of stereotypes, norms, and labels, and by promoting the school as "a place to question, explore, and seek alternative explanations rather than a place where knowledge means 'certainty, authority and stability'" (Britzman, 2000, p. 51), educators help create very real changes not only in our schools but in the larger world. One way that educators, and administrators in educational contexts, can start processes that

theory and practice. Evolving beyond transactional leadership (which is about what each person "gets"), through transformational leadership (which is about both leader and follower in relationship; exploring how they are changed through their interactions with one another, and how they impact their larger context) and into the newest paradigm of transcendent leadership (Gardiner, 2006), which asks that both leader and follower transcend themselves and look to affect the larger world, this type of education fully implicates educators and administrators in the fight for societal and global change. Just as our increasingly flat world (Friedman, 2005) requires highly flexible and diversity-centered leadership, our educational system requires that educators begin to move beyond educational paradigms that are based on stable, rigid, and binary understandings of gender, sexuality and sexual orientation in an effort to realize

Queer pedagogy offers a number of opportunities
for us to directly transform our schools . . .
"learning is about disruption and opening up
to further learning, not closure and satisfaction."

masculinity is to call him 'gay,' 'homo,' 'fag,' or 'queer'" (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003). Educators on the front lines are fully responsible for intervening in these kinds of situations, since, if they neglect this responsibility, "the hierarchical binaries of male-female, gay-straight [and others] remain unchallenged" (Meyer, 2007). Language creates reality, and allowing language such as this to go unquestioned means that teachers are a part of the problem and not a part of the solution.

All educators must strive towards an understanding that both gender and sexuality lie on a continuum, with no particular point on that continuum being any better or worse than any other. Achieving this understanding starts with our willingness to stop enforcing the outdated and damaging definitions of sexuality, sexual orientation and gender that society has become accustomed to.

New Realities

Queer pedagogy offers a number of opportunities for us to directly transform our schools. Besides working to change the language and representations associated with gender and sexuality that are used everyday, educators can make sure, as Kumashiro (2002) indicates, that "learning is about disruption and opening up to further

will help their students and peers redefine their understandings of sexuality, sexual orientation and gender is by bringing the oppression that results from labeling and "categorization" to the forefront of daily classroom and school dialogue.

Kumashiro (2002) offers four unique approaches that allow educators to expose oppression in schools. He views these approaches as "examinations" revolving around the "education of other," the "education about other," the "education that is critical of privileging and othering," and the "education that changes students and society"; explicitly examining how we individually and collectively create "other" (a term and concept that carries connotations of "different" with it, which, in turn, generally carries negative associations) as part of the classroom experience. This can happen in a variety of ways, through direct discussion, through an interweaving of critique of othering into specific subject matter, and/or through the implicit embedding of critique of othering into general classroom interactions and discussions.

Since educators are both leaders and students of leadership, whether by position, intention or default, such critical and holistic approaches to educating can be seen as relating to current and emergent understandings of leadership

social justice and enhance pedagogical effectiveness.

In summary, Queer Theory is an important extension of critical pedagogy, social constructionism, postmodern feminism, and liberatory/emancipatory education, and it calls "on educators to question and reformulate [using] a queer pedagogical lens; (1) how they teach and reinforce gendered practices in schools, (2) how they support traditional notions of heterosexuality, and (3) how they present culturally specific information in the classroom" (Meyer, 2007, p. 28).

Poet and activist Audre Lord has said "It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences." Incorporating Queer Theory into the knowledge base on sexual orientation for teacher education programs is one more step towards achieving schools that celebrate differences rather than using them as tools of oppression and violence, recognizing that nature provides us with all the diversity that is required for us to thrive if we accept each other unconditionally and with grace.

Notes

[1] Nieto and Bode provide a great starting point for multicultural educators to become acquainted with gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans-

gender, and questioning students' issues in Chapter 6 of their book, *Affirming Diversity: The Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Education* (2008), particularly in the case study of Rebecca Florentina found on pages 217-227.

  [2] See http://www.glsen.org/binary-data/ GLSEN_ATTACHMENTS/FILE/294-2/PDF

  [3] LGBTQ refers to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, and, as an acronym, will also be represented as GLBTQ. The term often varies, and, in its short form is seen as LGBT/GLBT and, in a longer form is LGBTQ2 (with "Q2" meaning "Queer and Questioning").

  [4] See http://www.casafeschools.org/ 20040112.html

  [5] See http://www.tolerance.org/teach/activities/activity.jsp?p=0&ar=821&pa=2

  [6] http://www.glsen.org/cgi-bin/iowa/all/ news/record/2294.html

  [7] http://www.venturacountystar.com/

References

Britzman, D. (2000). Precocious education. In S. Talbut & S. Steinberg (Eds.), *Thinking queer: Sexuality, culture and education* (pp. 33-60). New York: Peter Lang.

Burr, V. (2003). *Social constructionism*. New York: Routledge.

Foucault, M. (1980). *The history of sexuality, volume I: An introduction*. New York: Random House.

Foucault, M. (1986a). The discourse on language. In H. Adams & L. Searle (Eds.), *Critical theory since 1965* (pp. 148-162). Tallahassee: University Press of Florida.

Foucault, M. (1986b). What is an author? In H. Adams and L. Searle (Eds.), Critical theory since 1965 (pp. 138-148). Tallahassee, FL: University Press of Florida.

Friedman, T. (2005). *The world is flat: A brief history of the twenty-first century*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

Friere, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum.

Gardiner, J.J. (2006). Transactional, transformational, and transcendent leadership: Metaphors mapping the evolution of the theory and practice of governance. Kravis Leadership Institute, *Leadership Review*, *6*, 62-76.

Gay, G. (1993). Building cultural bridges: A proposal for teacher education. *Education and Urban Society, 25*(3), 285-299.

Gergen, K. J. (1999). *An invitation to social construction*. London, UK: Sage Publications.

Gilbert, R., & Gilbert, P. (1998). *Masculinity goes to school*. New York: Routledge.

Gladwell, M. (2000). *The tipping point: How little things can make a big difference*. London, UK: Little Brown.

Harbeck, K. M. (Ed.). (1992). *Coming out of the classroom closet: Gay and lesbian students, teachers and curricula*. Binghamton, NY: Teachers College Press.

Irvine, J. J. (Ed.). (1997). *Critical knowledge for diverse teachers and learners*. Washington, DC: American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education.

Jackson, J. (2001, April 10-14). Come out, come out, wherever you are: A synthesis of queer research in education. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, Seattle, WA.

Jagose, A. (1996). *Queer theory: An introduction*. New York: New York University Press.

Jennings, K. (Ed.). (1995). *One teacher in 10: Gay and lesbian educators tell their stories*. Boston: Alyson Publications.

Johansson, T. (2007). *The transformation of sexuality: Gender and identity in contemporary youth culture*. Hampshire, UK: Ashgate Publishing.

Kanpol, B. (1994). *Critical pedagogy: An introduction*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.

Kinsey, A., Pomeroy, W., & Martin, C. (1948). *Sexual behavior in the human male*. Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders Company.

Kissen, R. M. (1996). *The last closet: The real lives of lesbian and gay teachers*. Porthmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Kissen, R. M. (Ed.). (2002). *Getting ready for Benjamin: Preparing teachers for sexual diversity in the classroom*. Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield.

Kozol, J. (2007). *Letters to a young teacher*. New York: Crown Publishers.

Kumashiro, K. (2002). *Troubling education: Queer activism and antioppressive pedagogy*. New York: Routledge-Falmer.

Larkin, J. M., & Sleeter, C. E. (Eds.). (1995). *Developing multicultural teacher education curriculum*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

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

McLaren, P. (1998). *Life in schools: An introduction to critical pedagogy in the foundations of education*. New York: Longman.

Meyer, E. (2007). But I'm not gay: What straight teachers need to know about queer theory. In N. Rodriguez & W. Pinar (Eds.), *Queering straight teachers: Discourse and identity in education*. New York: Peter Lang.

Murray, F. B. (Ed.). (1996). *The teacher educator's handbook: Building a knowledge base for the preparation of teachers*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Nieto, S., & Bode, P. (2008). *Affirming diversity: The sociopolitical context of multicultural education*. Boston: Pearson Education.

Pascoe, C. J. (2007). *Dude, you're a fag: Masculinity and sexuality in high school*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Reynolds, M. C. (Ed.). (1989). *Knowledge base for the beginning teacher*. New York: Pergamon.

Rodriguez, N, & Pinar, W. (Eds.). (2007). *Queering straight teachers: Discourse and identity in education*. New York: Peter Lang.

Sears, J. (1987). Peering into the well of loneliness: The responsibility of educators to gay and lesbian youth. In A. Molnar (Ed.), *Social issues and education: Challenge and responsibility* (pp. 79-100). Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Sears, J. (1990). Problems and possibilities in homophobia education. *Empathy, 2*(2), 61.

Sikula, J. (Ed.). (1996). *Handbook of research on teacher education*. New York: Macmillan.

Sleeter, C. (2006). *Un-standardizing curriculum: Multicultural teaching in the standards based classroom*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Smith, G. P. (1998). *Common sense about uncommon knowledge: The knowledge bases for diversity*. Washington, DC: American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education.

Stokols, D. (2006). Toward a science of transdisciplinary action research. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 38*, 63-77.

Unks, G. (Ed.). (1995). *The gay teen: Educational practice and theory for lesbian, gay and bisexual adolescents*. New York: Routledge.

Zacko-Smith, J. D. (2009). *The leader label: Leadership in a hyper diverse world. Saarbrucken*, Germany: VDM Verlag.