

Introduction to Themed Articles

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As I began writing my Introduction to this special collection on LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer) issues in education and teacher education, the announcement that many of us had been waiting for came over the newswires: Judge Vaughn Walker issued his position reversing Proposition 8, the ban on same-sex marriage, passed 18 months ago in California. He stated:

California's obligation is to treat its citizens equally, not to "mandate [its] own moral code . . . what is left is evidence that Proposition 8 enacts a moral view that there is something 'wrong' with same-sex couples . . . [the passage of proposition 8 is] a desire to advance the belief that opposite-sex couples are morally superior to same-sex couples" . . . Because California has no interest in discriminating against gay men and lesbians, and because Proposition 8 prevents California from fulfilling its constitutional obligation to provide marriages on an equal basis, the court concludes that Proposition 8 is unconstitutional. (Perry v. Schwarzenegger, 2010)

Why write about Proposition 8 in a journal devoted to issues in teacher education? The stark contrast between Judge Walker's opinion and the current issues affecting LGBTQ students and staff are revealed in this special collection. The authors of these articles highlight the stigma

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experienced by LGBTQ students, the need to address LGBTQ issues in teacher education, what constitutes an identity-supportive classroom, the role of visibility of LGBTQ issues in teacher education programs, and the intersectionality of teacher education, gender studies, and queer pedagogy. This issue concludes with an insightful review of two new books on the identity of gay and lesbian teachers and LGBTQ students.

Elizabeth Payne and Melissa Smith's article, "Reduction of Stigma in Schools (RSIS): An Evaluation of the First Three Years," is an evaluation of a program to bring an increased awareness of LGBTQ youth's experience into schools. The authors thoughtfully discuss the institutionalization of traditional gender arrangements, heterosexuality, and romance that pervades both middle and high schools. Language is a powerful and ubiquitous weapon for targeting and policing gender non-conformity, and, as Payne and Smith note, "hate speech produces a social, not just an individual, effect," and in this way, the hate speech act—"faggot," "dyke," "homo"—targets both the individual and the larger group of gender and sexual non-conforming students and positions them within social hierarchical structures.

In my recent work on "lesbian identity," I argue that naming language, such as Payne and Smith identify, is a colonizing practice, i.e., heteronormativity, of the dominant culture. Colonizing practices emerge through language use, and, in this example, language is used for gender policing. The use of homophobic hate speech, as articulated by Payne and Smith and others in this collection, "constitutes one of the most predominant categories of abusive language among young adolescents" (Thurlow, as cited in Payne and Smith), and of critical importance is that this language is used without forethought. In other words, it is embedded in the culture of adolescence to help construct socially appropriate heteronormative behavior.

Timothy G. Larrabee and Pamela Morehead's article, "Broadening Views of Social Justice and Teacher Leadership: Addressing LGB Issues in Teacher Education," concerns teacher leaders addressing homophobia in classrooms or schools as part of a social justice component in their teacher education programs. Their findings support those of Payne and Smith that preservice teachers want to learn more about LGB¹ issues as well as acknowledge their lack of awareness of the insensitive remarks or actions of their own students in the classroom. Many were surprised that numerous states lack laws including LGB people as a "protected class." An important finding from Larrabee and Morehead's study was the "apparent disconnection between acknowledging inequities confronting LGB students and accepting personal responsibility for redressing them." Pertinent to this study, according to the authors, is its location,

the Midwest, an area of conservative religious ideology with fewer LGB people, among other demographic characteristics. The authors make the point that, when we begin to learn and understand about others, we are less willing to engage in marginalization.

Michael Sadowski's article, "Core Values and the Identity-Supportive Classroom: Setting LGBTQ Issues within Wider Frameworks for Preservice Teachers," moves beyond Larrabee and Morehead's study, focusing on the core values that students bring to teaching, and then incorporates research about LGBTQ youth and schooling-related issues. Sadowski's approach "emphasizes the placement of LGBTQ issues within larger ideals that reflect generally agreed-upon beliefs about public schooling." Thus, he incorporates LGBTQ students into the overall curriculum rather than focusing on them as separate from other students. His approach is supported by Payne and Smith's research on the professional responsibility of teacher educators to deconstruct the "hidden curriculum of heteronormativity."

As did Smith and Payne as well as Larrabee and Morehead, Sadowski informs preservice teachers about resources on both a local and national level, particularly the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) located in New York City. Finally, Sadowski acknowledges the difficulty that preservice teachers experience as they move into the "real world of K-12 schooling," where they are not drafting a plan for a professor but rather answering to administration, parents, colleagues, and, of course, their students. In many instances, these issues may be nearly insurmountable. Nonetheless, as each of our authors has so far concluded, in line with Judge Walker's ruling, LGBTQ students have an inalienable right to a safe, affirming school environment.

Stacey Horn, Pamela Konkol, Kathleen McInerney, Erica Meiners, Connie North, Isabel Nuñez, Therese Quinn, and Shannon Sullivan's article "Visibility Matters: Policy Work as Activism in Teacher Education" examines the visibility of LGBTQ issues in teacher education programs across the state of Illinois, including both public and private institutions. In particular, they asked, "Which institutions include sexual orientation and gender identity in their policies, and are sexual orientation and gender identity identified in teacher education programs' conceptual frameworks?" Conducting an electronic assessment of all teacher education programs in Illinois in 2009 and again in 2010, they issued "report cards" to create a "snapshot of the state context for queer university students, generally, and prospective teachers, specifically."

As I read this article, and I hope that you do as well, I wondered how my own campus as well as my college would fair. Horn et al. succinctly argue that, if we are to engage in activism in teacher education

programs, “visibility does matter.” I encourage you to critically reflect on your own public identity and your visibility as a teacher educator in your own teacher education programs. What messages are we, you, and I, giving to our teacher education students? Horn et al.’s article raised that question with me, and I hope that it will with you as well.

Our final article is an essay by Rita Ugena Whitlock, “Getting Queer: Teacher Education, Gender Studies, and the Cross-Disciplinary Quest for Queer Pedagogies,” about queer identity, queer pedagogy, queer theory, and being queer. Whitlock situates “queer” as more than identity, as in the LGBTQ acronym. Please let me say up front that I have difficulty with the word “queer.” I hear it as pejorative, as painful, and as a word I choose not to use in my identity. I am very uncomfortable with “queer,” but, and this is a big “but,” I must situate “queer” such that I, too, can engage in thoughtful, deliberative discourse about it. Whitlock engages me in this conversation, one from which I can no longer walk away. I invite you to engage as well. Students use “queer” in all the ways, shapes, and forms as does Whitlock. If we cannot or choose not to understand, to clarify, to question, or to support their conversations, how then can we create a safe learning environment? Whitlock does more than write about “queer,” however; she takes us on a journey, a journey for which many have no experience, a journey about being different, about being queer in the South. I, too, have lived in the South, first as a closeted lesbian and then as an out-of-the-closet lesbian. Neither identity was comfortable, but coming out in the South forced me to be honest and taught me even more deeply about the pain that many LGBTQ students experience on a daily basis.

Whitlock shares her journey of teaching as an openly gay person, a lesbian, both in a teacher education program and in a women’s studies program. Her narrative provides a rich description of the inequality that exists for LGBTQ students, not only in the South but also in the Midwest (Larrabee and Morehead), New York (Payne and Smith; Sadowski), Illinois (Horn et al.), and California (Wilson; Walker). She introduces us to two students whose narratives clearly depict the multitude of problems that teacher educators experience when teaching in a homophobic environment. She reminds, as did our other authors, that having uncomfortable conversations in a heteronormative environment is not easy nor is it often safe. But if we cannot have such conversations in our college classrooms, how can we expect our students to then have them in their K-12 classrooms?

Lastly, Barbara Garii’s review of two books opens the door to more resources, to more readings about LGBTQ issues in education. Her review of Janna Jackson’s *Unmasking Identities: An Exploration of the*

Lives of Gay and Lesbian Teachers and Elizabeth J. Meyer's *Gender and Sexual Diversity in Schools* provides a thoughtful introduction to new work in the area of LGBTQ students and teachers in schools.

I encourage you to read and reread these articles several times. Use them in your classes, and think of how to expand your thinking and your teaching about LGBTQ issues in your teacher education programs. Ask yourself how you, how each of us, can create a safe, affirming environment for all of our students.

Note

¹ Larrabee and Morehead used the acronym LGB (Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual) in this article because they addressed only these sexual identities in their presentation and did not believe that it was appropriate to use the more inclusive LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer) acronym.

Reference

Perry v. Schwarzenegger, No. C 09-2292 VRW (United States District Court for the Northern District of California, 2010).