

Chapter 9

Trusting Teachers: Resisting Censorship and Recognizing Euphemisms in Educational Policy and Curriculum Development

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ABSTRACT

*In this chapter, the authors explore a single case study where the graphic novel anthology *Love is Love* was censored at a Texas high school. When the teachers sought engaging texts on topics directly affecting their students' lives, they were astonished when the entire graphic novel set was removed two days before the unit began. What ensued was a complete disregard for district policy, euphemism-riddled language and deceit to hide the anti-LGBTQ+ views of leadership, and the distrust in teachers as curriculum planners. The events led to the district creating a new, stricter policy for texts not already approved by the district. The authors explore research that makes it clear: students perform better in all the language arts when their teachers modified, changed, and developed the curriculum based on the students' needs, including providing diverse and high interest materials to support student learning.*

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes events that unfolded in an urban district in Texas when two ninth grade teachers planned and acquired funding for a curricular unit with a literature circle that included an LGBTQ+ text during the spring semester of 2018. The chapter is organized into three sections. The first provides the rationale from the point of view of the teacher-classroom curriculum developers and the research that supports this role in relation to the needs of LGBTQ+ students. It describes the concerns that teachers have when introducing diverse texts in non-inclusive districts, ways to make space for LGBTQ+-friendly pedagogy, the research on the needs of LGBTQ+ students in schools, and some suggestions for improving the oppressive environments that discourage teachers and isolate students. The next section describes the steps that the teacher-classroom curriculum developers used to create, fund, and finally advocate for a literature unit that was taken from their classrooms leading to the eventual banning of the LGBTQ+ graphic novel, *Love is Love*. The final section connects these events to an analysis of policy and ends with implications for policy and curriculum development, as well as practical implications for teachers who have similar struggles as they work to incorporate LGBTQ+ texts in their classrooms.

The setting for this case study is a school with over 2,500 students in grades 9-12. Seventy-three percent of the students at this school come from economically disadvantaged homes, and though 83% of the students identify as Hispanic, only 27% are receiving services as English learners. The district curriculum was developed by an administrative team with the support of two to three representative teachers from each grade level, though none of these teachers were employed at the school where these events took place. In general, the official curriculum relied primarily on traditional texts that rarely represented the diversity of the students in the classrooms and was organized and presented to the teachers just two weeks before each term, adding an additional challenge for teachers who wanted to plan and meet the unique needs of students in their classrooms.

Data Sources

The data for this chapter were collected from the time the graphic novels were selected in March 2018 until April 2019 when the open-records request was completed. The sources included emails, charts, the graphic novels, emails between the district attorney and the local LGBTQ+ advocacy group, and a collection of verbal replies.

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