

Chapter 10

Queering K–12 Classrooms Through Literature Discussion and Dialogue

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ABSTRACT

Schools are heteronormative and gendernormative spaces that reinforce a narrow range of experiences and identities. Creating classroom spaces that empower LGBTQ+ identities is critical in supporting K-12 learners to become thoughtful and empathetic learners. LGBTQ+ students continue to experience bullying, stereotyping, discrimination, and marginalization. This chapter focuses on supporting pre-service teachers' understanding of how to queer classroom spaces through the integration of intersectional children's and YA literature that affirms LGBTQ+ identities and experiences. Bishop's framework of mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors is used with the addition of prisms. The prism provides a critical action to expand the notion and expectation of normal through intersectional representation.

INTRODUCTION

Early in 2021, two elementary teachers experienced backlash for incorporating Kyle Lukoff's (2019a) *Call Me Max*, a picture book about a transgender boy exploring his identity. In February, parents and the school board in Murray, Utah criticized a third-grade teacher who shared the book. The district clarified that the book was not part of the approved diverse books list and promised to "do better." Only two queer texts were included this district's list. Similarly, in March, a fourth-grade teacher in Austin, Texas

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read Lukoff's text aloud and faced backlash. Parents called for the teacher to be fired. The district called the book "inappropriate" and offered counseling to students who listened to the read aloud. These two incidents reflect the pervading anti-LGBTQ+ sentiment that precludes inclusion of queer identities in education.

Pre-service teachers (PSTs) can significantly change the experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and a range of Fluid, Non-Conforming, and Defined identities (LGBTQ+) students by helping to create supportive and inclusive classrooms. Teacher educators (TEs) are tasked with developing PSTs' confidence and multicultural competence to champion diversity, equity, and inclusion (Miller & Mikulek, 2014; Taylor et al., 2017). Despite multicultural approaches and pedagogies embedded into teacher curriculum, PSTs enter their first classroom feeling unprepared and fearful of the backlash they may experience from administrators, colleagues, and student families should they include LGBTQ+ concepts in their classes. Fear of including queer texts is substantiated by narratives of teachers who experience angry families, and leadership fails to support inclusivity (Brant & Willox, 2020; Kumashiro, 2004). Added pressure comes through media coverage.

TEs can use the above narratives as case studies to better prepare PSTs to incorporate LGBTQ+ children's and Young Adult (YA) literature in their future classrooms. LGBTQ+ resources and content for queering curriculum is prevalent, yet there is a disconnect in PSTs understanding the importance and relevance of incorporating LGBTQ+ concepts (Page, 2017a). This book chapter queers education through inclusion of LGBTQ+ texts, builds on the work of Bishop (1990) to provide a prism metaphor for filtering PST experiences through LGBTQ+ children's and YA literature, shares an inventory for selecting queer texts, and identifies literacy strategies to queer classrooms.

BACKGROUND

Climate of Schools and Classrooms

K-12 schools remain unsafe and unwelcoming for LGBTQ+ students and families (Kosciw et al., 2020). Some progress has occurred. Twenty-one states have anti-bullying policies that prohibit students from being discriminated against due to sexual orientation or gender identity (Kosciw et al., 2020). In states where religious conservatism is deeply embedded, LGBTQ+ identities are less protected. Seven states have adopted anti-LGBTQ+ legislation. In these states, queer students are more likely to experience harassment or abuse, less likely to find accepting peers and supportive educators, and less likely to experience LGBTQ+ representation in curriculum. For nearly 20 years, GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network) data continues to emphasize the need for progress and change within school environments. In the past year, approximately 65% of LGBTQ+ students reported no representation or inclusion of LGBTQ+ concepts within their learning; only 16% of LGBTQ+ students were taught positive lessons involving queer history, people, or events; and 15% of LGBTQ+ students experienced negatively presented queer concepts within the classroom (Kosciw et al., 2020).

Queering Curriculum and Teacher Preparation

The concept of queering refers to shifting what has been deemed "normal" to examine, critique, and present a reality that validates sexuality and gender across the spectrum (Britzman, 1995; Dilley, 1999).

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