


Chapter 1

Crossing Borders, Finding Voice: A Queer Autoethnography of Gay Identity, Pedagogy, and Mobility in a Transnational Educational Context

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents a queer autoethnographic account of a Filipino gay educator whose professional journey spans educational institutions in the Philippines, the United Arab Emirates, and Thailand. Drawing on narrative memory work, reflective documentation, and reconstructed scenes from institutional life, it examines how sexual identity, pedagogy, and transnational mobility intersect within culturally diverse yet heteronormative educational environments. Grounded in queer theory and intercultural perspectives, the analysis foregrounds interviews, classrooms, staffrooms, and strategic silences as sites where legitimacy and belonging are negotiated. The chapter advances three findings: disclosure functions as a situated professional practice shaped by risk and trust; professionalism operates as an uneven regulatory discourse; and transnational mobility intensifies identity work through ongoing embodied recalibration. By centering lived experience, the chapter reframes pedagogy and inclusion as relational and ethical practices shaped by informal institutional norms.

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3373-7194-8.ch001

INTRODUCTION

Educational spaces reflect the policies, practices, and expectations of the institutions and communities in which they operate (Ball, 2017; Deal & Peterson, 2016). They can also be shaped by unspoken assumptions about who educators are allowed to be and how they should appear, speak, and exist within professional life. Such assumptions regulate not only pedagogical practice but also educators' bodies, voices, and identities, often privileging particular forms of comportment and relationality as markers of legitimacy and professionalism (Ball, 2017; Reeves, 2018). As a result, schools and universities function as sites where power is exercised not only through policy and curriculum but also through everyday interactions, silences, and informal judgments that shape access, recognition, and belonging (Ahmed, 2017; Posselt et al., 2017).

For queer educators, educational spaces frequently become sites of ongoing negotiation. Research on lesbian and gay teachers' workplace experiences shows that disclosure and professional self-presentation are often managed strategically in response to hetero/cisnormative expectations and institutional climates (Connell, 2015). In language education settings, these dynamics also shape how sexuality becomes speakable or unspeakable through everyday classroom and workplace relations (Paiz, 2019). Recent research further highlights how workplace relationships shape queer educators' experiences of visibility and belonging in language education contexts (España-Delgado & Viáfara-González, 2025). These negotiations are rarely explicit or formally acknowledged; prior studies suggest that they may unfold through subtle forms of self-monitoring, including the management of voice, appearance, language, and personal disclosure in relation to perceived institutional norms and risk (Ferfolja & Ullman, 2017a; Reeves, 2018).

These negotiations become even more complex when teaching careers unfold across national borders. Scholarship on LGBTQ international educators emphasizes that experiences of inclusion, safety, and belonging are context-dependent and often resist uniform categorization (Mizzi et al., 2021). Moving from one context to another often requires ongoing recalibration of professional identity—what can be said, how one can appear, and which aspects of identity must be emphasized, muted, or strategically withheld (Bhopal & Henderson, 2019). Research further highlights that inclusion is frequently enacted informally through workplace practices and relationships rather than secured through explicit institutional policy (Mizzi, 2022).

This chapter is informed by my professional trajectory as a gay educator whose career has unfolded across educational contexts in the Philippines, the United Arab Emirates, and Thailand. Rather than offering a comparative account of national cultures, the chapter examines how experiences of inclusion and exclusion are shaped through institutional practices and everyday professional life. In doing so,

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