CHAPTER ONE

"But I'm Not Gay": What Straight Teachers Need to Know about Queer Theory

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Introduction

Most scholars and educators steer clear of queer theory because the word "queer" has a long history of being a pejorative term for gays and lesbians or anyone perceived to be different. What many people do not understand is that in the past twenty years, this term has been actively under reconstruction and has been infused with new meanings and applications. Although "queer" is still often used with the intent to harm, in scholarly contexts it has come to represent new concepts that, when applied in the school setting, can have a liberatory and positive influence on the way schools work today.

Another common misunderstanding about queer theory is that it is a synonym for gay and lesbian studies. Although queer theory emerged from the work of scholars in this field, it has evolved to become much more broad and encompassing than gay and lesbian studies. Queer theory goes beyond exploring aspects of gay and lesbian identity and experience. It questions taken-for-granted assumptions about relationships, identity, gender, and sexual orientation. It seeks to explode rigid normalizing categories into possibilities that exist beyond the binaries of man/woman, masculine/feminine, student/teacher, and gay/straight. Queer theory offers educators a lens through which educators can transform their praxis so as to explore and celebrate the tensions and new understandings created by teaching new ways of seeing the world. This chapter will introduce some key tenets of queer theory and describe how the application of these ideas by all educators can create classrooms that are more liberatory, inclusive of diversity and socially just.

The first section describes how the persistence of homophobia and the related tool of sexism in schools harm everyone in the community and how the most basic expectation of school safety for all cannot be attained until these issues are addressed. The second section describes how gender codes work to limit the opportunities available to students and teachers in schools and society. The third section addresses the concepts of language and discourse and how understanding this form of power is essential to understanding how to transform school cultures. The fourth section explains several of the key ideas in Queer Theory that are most relevant to educators working in schools today. Finally, this chapter concludes with a brief summary of key points and a description of how queer theory and an application of queer pedagogies can move schools toward being more liberatory, inclusive, and socially just.

The Harmful Effects of Homophobia and Heterosexism

In recent years there has been growing attention paid to the important issue of violence in schools. The issue of bullying and harassment is one aspect of school violence that has received a significant amount of attention from the media as well as from school officials and community members. It is encouraging that this important issue is getting widespread attention, but much of the information about bullying and harassment is flawed because it fails to address some of the underlying social forces at work. As Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2003) point out in their study of masculinities, *So What's a Boy?: Addressing Issues of Masculinity and Schooling*, the problem of bullying has been depoliticized and examined as isolated acts of teasing or violence rather than as a form of policing and enforcing the norms of our culture. They explain that, "bullying needs to be understood in terms which acknowledge the regime of normalizing practices in which sex/gender boundaries are policed for adolescent boys" (p. 54). These same processes shape adolescent girls' behaviors and relationships as well (Brown, 2003; Duncan, 2004). Since much of the bullying that occurs in schools is discriminatory in nature (Coalition, 2004; Harris, 2001; Kosciw & Diaz, 2006; Reis, 1999; Reis & Saewyc, 1999), it is clear that these behaviors act to create and support a social hierarchy that privileges mainstream identities and behaviors over marginalized ones.

This form of school violence is closely linked to the problems of homophobia and sexism in schools and has resulted in several court battles over how families, students, and teachers who do not conform to traditional notions of

heterosexual masculinity and femininity are allowed to participate in schools. A sample of recent North American cases includes the questions of censoring literature that represents same-sex families in a positive light ("Chamberlain v. Surrey School District No. 36," 2002); to educators being fired for being gay, lesbian or bisexual ("Vriend v. Alberta," 1998; "Weber v. Nebo School District," 1998); to the right of student groups to meet and discuss issues relating to relationships, sexuality, and sexual orientation ("East High Gay/Straight Alliance v. Board of Education of Salt Lake City School District," 1999); to students being violently and repeatedly harassed with homophobic taunts and slurs ("Nabozny v. Podlesny et al," 1996; "School District No. 44 v. Jubran," 2005). These cultural battles are being waged everyday in schools. Educators need to have accurate information and support to educate their students and communities around issues of gender, sex, sexual orientation, and how discrimination based on any of these grounds harms everyone in schools. By developing a more critical understanding of gender, 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.

How Gender Works to Limit Students' Opportunities

The first aspect of queer theory that is important for teachers to understand is the function of traditional heterosexual gender roles in reinforcing and maintaining harmful power dynamics in schools and society. Many people have never questioned or examined how gender shapes our daily behaviors. The invisible nature of how masculinity and femininity are taught to children contributes to its strength. The purchasing of gender-"appropriate" toys and clothes for babies and young children is one way adults perpetuate these lessons. This is a good example of how hegemony works. Antonio Gramsci's concept of *hegemony* explains how groups in power are able to maintain structures that benefit them through gaining the consent of subordinate groups (1995). It is not done through overt or forceful means, but rather through subtle, yet powerful, messages that repeatedly permeate daily life.

Madeline Arnot (2002) explains that, "one of the ways in which male hegemony is maintained is obviously through schooling, where it is most easy to transmit a specific set of gender definitions, relations and differences while appearing to be objective" (p. 119). She describes how gender categories are

taught in schools and provide evidence for how these "arbitrary social constructs" (Arnot, 2002, p. 118) are reproduced through various social structures such as schools, families, religious institutions, and the media. One example of this is the role of adults in schools actively reinforcing these gender norms. It is not uncommon for students to be told to act more feminine if they are a girl, or more masculine if they are a boy in order to blend in and avoid harassment and discrimination at school. One student said that when she reported harassment, "they told me to get over it. That maybe if I acted more like a girl that I wouldn't get harassed so often" (Kosciw & Diaz, 2006, p. 39). This is why it is important for all educators to understand how gender codes function and how we can work against these narrow definitions that hurt us all.

Judith Butler's (1990) groundbreaking work *Gender Trouble* provides a framework for understanding how the social category of gender works. She takes a poststructural understanding of gender and explores it in-depth. Her concepts of gender performativity and the heterosexual matrix are of significant interest to understanding how homophobia and sexism work in schools. Butler shows how gender has been theorized as a "performance" of identity and how the narrow structures—or matrix—of heterosexuality contribute to our existing notions of gender. What this means is that our daily behaviors that signify our gender (separate from, but often related to, biological sex), such as clothes, hairstyle, manners of speech and body language, are external representations that are chosen and fall within a wide spectrum of masculinities and femininities. When these representations adhere to traditional expectations of a masculine male who partners with a feminine female, they are never questioned. However, if just one aspect of this equation is changed (for example, two masculine males walking together holding hands, or simply an androgynous or gender nonconforming person alone), the individuals become curiosities and are often subject to harassment or other unwanted attention.

Children learn very early in their lives about what cues represent boys and girls in our culture. They begin their school careers with this knowledge and work alongside their teachers to practice and perform these gender norms. Gender theorist Sandra Bem recounts an illustrative tale about when her son first attended nursery school. She prefaces the story by explaining the fact that she has taught her children that "being a boy means having a penis and testicles; being a girl means having a vagina, a clitoris, and a uterus; and whether you're a boy or a girl, a man or a woman, does not need to matter unless and until

you want to make a baby" (Bem, 1993, p. 149). She goes on to tell about the following experience:

> Both the liberation that can come from having a narrow biological definition of sex and the imprisonment that can come from not having such a definition are strikingly illustrated by an encounter my son, Jeremy, had when he naively decided to wear barrettes to nursery school. Several times that day, another little boy insisted that Jeremy must be a girl because 'only little girls wear barrettes.' After repeatedly insisting that 'wearing barrettes doesn't matter; being a boy means having a penis and testicles,' Jeremy finally pulled down his pants to make his point more convincingly. The other boy was not impressed. He simply said, 'Everybody has a penis; only girls wear barrettes.' (p. 149)

This anecdote demonstrates that children learn at a very early age that it is not biological sex that communicates one's gender to the rest of society; rather it is the signifiers we choose to wear that will identify us as male or female. These choices are informed by codes that are explicitly and implicitly taught to children. Some examples of explicitly taught rules include comments like, "boys don't wear dresses" or "Mommies wear makeup to look nice." Implicitly taught, dress codes are more invisible and pervasive and include the layout of clothing stores, models in the media, and parental and peer influences.

The fact that most people wear clothes and accessories that are consistent with the gender role expectations for their biological sex demonstrates the strength of hegemony in the gender codes that we have been taught. Lyn Mikel Brown (2003) describes the harmful impacts of these codes in shaping young women's experiences in school,

> By high school, many girls have become practiced in voicing these misogynistic cultural stereotypes of girls and women and ascribing them to other girls. It's as though girls become voluntary spokespersons for the status quo, missionaries for the heterosexual script when they claim that 'other' girls are 'hos' and 'bitches.' 'Other' girls are those held up to and judged through a male gaze, against male standards of behavior and beauty, cast in those now familiar derogatory roles: good girls or bad, Madonnas or whores. Cultural messages and childhood patterns of girlfighting have become crystallized for adolescent girls; they have become social reality. (p. 138)

All individuals are constrained by these gender codes. The strict expectations that accompany them severely limit girls' opportunities to be assertive, physically strong, and competitive; boys' opportunities to be creative, sensitive, and cooperative; and gender nonconforming youths' opportunities to express their

gender freely. A nationwide study conducted in the United States by the Human Rights Watch supports this assertion,

> It quickly became obvious from our research that the abuse of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth is predicated on the belief that girls and boys must strictly adhere to rigid rules of conduct, dress, and appearances based on their sex. For boys, that means they must be athletic, strong, sexist, and hide their emotions. For girls, that means they must be attentive to and flirtatious with boys and must accept a subordinate status to boys. Regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, youth who violate these rules are punished by their peers and too often by adults. (Bochenek & Brown, 2001, p. 49)

Gendered harassment, which includes homophobic harassment, (hetero) sexual harassment and harassment for gender nonconformity, is one very clear way that society polices and reinforces this heterosexual matrix. By targeting students who openly identify as gay or dress and act in gender non-conforming ways, heterosexual male hegemony is supported and marginalized identities continue to be oppressed. Additionally, when schools fail to intervene or punish perpetrators appropriately, the structure of the school system is supporting these psychologically harmful policing behaviors in order to support existing dominant ideologies. The psychological harm caused by these behaviors has tangible and long-term effects. Students who are targeted for harassment in schools have been shown to have increased feelings of depression, lower self-worth, and are at a greater risk to abuse drugs and alcohol as well as to attempt suicide (Bond, Carlin, Thomas, Rubin, & Patton, 2001; GLSEN, 2005; Hand & Sanchez, 2000; Reis & Saewyc, 1999). Schools also actively silence and censor any discourse that could be seen as positive toward homosexuality. These concepts of power and control lead us into a discussion of how the use of language and activities of surveillance in schools contribute to homophobic attitudes and to reinforcing the heterosexual norm.

How Ignoring Homophobia Teaches Intolerance

Language is power. The ability to name and create concepts through discourse is a form of control and domination. These concepts were introduced by such theorists as Derrida (1986a; 1986b), Lacan (1957/1986), and Foucault (1975, 1980, 1986a, 1986b). They explored the power of words as signifiers to constitute a subject and his/her experiences as well as the structures in society

that police and reinforce the dominant ideology through discursive practices. McLaren (1998) clarifies how these forces work:

> discourse and discursive practices influence how we live our lives as conscious thinking subjects. They shape our subjectivities (our ways of understanding in relation to the world) because it is only in language and through discourse that social reality can be given meaning. Not all discourses are given the same weight, as some will account for and justify the appropriateness of the status quo and others will provide a context for resisting social and institutional practices. (pp. 184–185)

Historically, society has constructed homosexuality as an illness, a deviance, and a sin. This discourse was created through psychological research, religious ideologies, and the political and financial privileging of heterosexual and monogamous family structures by the state. This discourse has been disrupted and challenged by the gay rights movements that gained momentum in the 60s and 70s. Many authors have examined the social, historical, and political forces that have worked together to construct the idea of the homosexual and then demonize it (Bem, 1993; Foucault, 1980; Jagose, 1996; Sears, 1998; Weeks, 1985).

Heterosexism, compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1978/1993), the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990), and gender polarization (Bem, 1993) are all different terms that seek to explain the discursive practices that present opposite-sex attraction and sexual behavior as the dominant and assumed social practice. The concept of homosexuality, and subsequently, heterosexuality by oppositional definition, is just over a century old (Jagose, 1996, p. 17). 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. 81). Sandra Bem explains how the cultural lens of *gender polarization* works to reinforce heterosexuality by serving two major functions, "first, it defines mutually exclusive scripts for being male and female. Second, it defines any person or behavior that deviates from these scripts as problematic...taken together, the effect of these two processes is to construct and naturalize a gender-polarizing link between the sex of one's body and the character of one's psyche and one's sexuality" (1993, p. 81).

These powerful social discourses are generated through various institutions including schools. Educational structures wield extraordinary ideological power due to their role in teaching what the culture has deemed as important

and valuable to future generations. Ministries of Education, textbook publishers, and teachers determine what lessons are passed on to students and whose knowledge or "truth" is valued (Apple, 1990, 2000). Subsequently, schools are important sites that contribute to the normalization of heterosexual behavior. In Richard Friend's article, "Choices, Not Closets," he exposes two ways that such lessons are passed on in schools through the processes of systematic inclusion and systematic exclusion. Systematic inclusion is the way in which negative or false information about homosexuality is introduced in schools as a pathology or deviant behavior. Systematic exclusion is "the process whereby positive role models, messages, and images about lesbian, gay and bisexual people are publicly silenced in schools" (Friend, 1993, p. 215). Ironically, schools make efforts to desexualize the experience of students while they simultaneously affirm heterosexual behavior and punish those who appear to deviate from it. Epstein and Johnson explain,

> Schools go to great lengths to forbid expressions of sexuality by both children and teachers. This can be seen in a range of rules, particularly those about self-presentation. On the other hand, and perhaps in consequence, expressions of sexuality provide a major currency and resource in the everyday exchanges of school life. Second, the forms in which sexuality is present in schools and the terms on which sexual identities are produced are heavily determined by power relations between teachers and taught, the dynamics of control and resistance. (1998, p. 108)

These acts of surveillance are rooted in Foucault's (1975) concept of the Panopticon—an all-seeing, yet completely invisible source of power and control. This type of surveillance and control is particularly effective because we all unknowingly contribute to it unless we actively work to make it visible by questioning and challenging it. Another example of this panopticonic power is seen in what Mills (1996) calls "containment discourses." He explains how these methods of control are employed to limit work by teachers that push the boundaries of what is "comfortable,"

> The discourse of teacher 'professionalism' is one of the most powerful educational discourses in its containment of teacher-student challenges to the existing heteronormative order. It regulates and monitors the boundaries between students and teachers so that much remains deliberately unspoken or unconsciously unseen. Teachers who resist the heteronormativity of the school, of one's teaching peers, are liable to be accused of unprofessional activity or have their careers ended. (cited in Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003, p. 227)

This is one of the most powerful ways that schools reinforce heterosexism. Through the surveillance and policing of bodies and language, school structures mandate hyperheterosexuality using the curriculum and extracurricular activities. The heterosexuality of the curriculum is invisible to many, but some examples include: the exclusive study of heterosexual romantic literature, the presentation of the "nuclear" heterosexual two-parent family as the norm and ideal, and teaching only the reproductive aspects of sexuality and abstinence-only sex education. Other forms of relationships and the concept of desire, or *eros,* are completely omitted from the official curriculum (Britzman, 2000; Pinar, 1998). Extracurricular functions that teach this hyperheterosexuality include Valentine's Day gift exchanges, kissing booths at school fairs, and deeply entrenched prom rituals that include highly gendered formal attire (tuxedos and gowns) and the election of a "king" and a "queen." This prom ritual has begun to be subverted by alternative proms often organized by gay-straight alliances and community youth groups. At these events there are sometimes two kings (a male king and female "drag king") and two queens (a female queen and a male "drag queen").

Art Lipkin's (1999) groundbreaking work, *Understanding Homosexuality, Changing Schools*, provides in-depth accounts of the discrimination experienced by gay, lesbian, and bisexual educators as well as the painful and enduring stories of students who were emotionally and physically harassed for their perceived or actual nonheterosexual, nongender conforming performance of identity. In other words, schools are not safe for "guys who aren't as masculine as other guys" or "girls who aren't as feminine as other girls" (Coalition, 2004). Although the people in control of the school are not directly inflicting the harassment and harm on the nonconforming students (in most cases), it is their lack of effective intervention in cases of homophobic and sexual harassment (Coalition, 2004; Harris, 2001; Kosciw & Diaz, 2006; NMHA, 2002) along with the invisible scripts of the school that are reinforced through surveillance and discipline that sends the message that these borderland identities are not valued or welcomed.

Heterosexism and its more overt partner, homophobia, are very clearly linked to cultural gender boundaries and are informed by the imbedded practice of misogyny. The most effective challenge to any boy's masculinity is to call him "gay," "homo," "fag," or "queer" (Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Mac an Ghaill, 1995; Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003). What is being challenged is his masculinity—his gender code—but it is being done by accusing him of be-

ing gay, which is equated with being "feminine." Girls are also subject to similar kinds of policing (Brown, 2003; Duncan, 2004), but research shows that it is much more prevalent among male students (Coalition, 2004; Harris Interactive, 2001). It is for this reason that some activists and educators are pushing for a deconstruction of gender codes and delabeling of sexual orientations. By continuing to live within prescribed linguistic and behavioral matrices, the hierarchical binaries of male-female and gay-straight remain unchallenged. This work of dismantling socially invented categories is necessary to create educational spaces that liberate and create opportunities as opposed to limiting and closing down the diversity of human experiences. We must move toward understanding identities and experiences as falling on a continuum of gender expressions and sexual orientations. In order to move in this direction, understanding the work of liberatory educational theorists is essential to initiating educational practices that seek to transform oppressive educational spaces.

How Queer Pedagogy Can Transform Schools

South American educator and activist Paulo Freire (1970/1993) is widely recognized for advancing the concepts of liberatory pedagogy and consciousness-raising, or conscientização. He worked with oppressed groups to resist and counteract social structures in order to critically interrogate and transform them. This concept of education as praxis was influential for many educators and activists who shared Freire's ideals of creating a nonoppressive and equitable society. Although Freire has been widely criticized by feminists for his sexist language and assumptions, many thinkers have taken his ideas and built upon them to include antisexist and antiracist work as a form of liberatory pedagogy. In education, feminist pedagogy has built on Freire's concepts to work toward more liberatory educational experiences for all students. In her article, "Rereading Paulo Freire," Kathleen Weiler (2001) points out many of the similarities in the feminist and Freirean pedagogies. She writes, "Like Freirean pedagogy, feminist pedagogy emphasizes the importance of consciousness raising, the existence of an oppressive social structure and the need to change it, and the possibility of social transformation" (p. 68). She goes on to make the distinction that feminist pedagogy is different in that it includes an analysis of patriarchy and attempts to develop an education that is supportive to women. Many scholars of color, lesbian scholars, and Marxist theorists have critiqued much feminist work as being narrowly centered in the realm of

white, middle class, heterosexual privilege. Gay and lesbian researchers have also had a history of working from a white, middle class, patriarchal perspective. Although many poststructural feminists and critical theorists have worked to address these issues, queer theory has learned from this history. Queer theorists have consciously worked to understand the many intersecting layers of dominance and oppression as possible. Liberatory pedagogy and queer pedagogy are mutually reinforcing philosophies that share a radical vision of education as the path to achieving a truly equitable and just society.

In April 2004, the Lesbian and Gay Studies Special Interest Group (SIG), at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, voted to change its name to Queer Studies. This marked an important shift in focus and demonstrates where the work in the area of sexual orientation, gender, and education is headed. In her review of the literature, *Come Out, Come Out, Wherever You Are: A Synthesis of Queer Research in Education*, Janna Jackson (2001) demonstrates the evolution in research and language examining homosexuality and schooling. In studies predating 1990, she noted that they presented homosexual youth as victims, focusing primarily on the experiences of gay men, and none of the studies presented teachers as political agents. As research in this field evolved, later studies (1994–1996) began questioning the construction of gender roles and viewed youth as active agents in creating their own identities. Finally, Jackson noted that every study post-1997 addressed the hidden curriculum of schools, "transmitting dominant heterosexist ideology to the younger generation" (Jennings cited in Jackson, 2001, p. 26). Thus her review of research recorded how the field of gay and lesbian studies has made a radical shift from studying an imagined, unified experience of being gay in schools to a more broad and open understanding of how categories of gender and sexuality are learned and experienced in schools, and has clearly documented the epistemological and pedagogical effects of the emergence of Queer Theory.

Queer pedagogues have continued to build on the ideals of critical theory and feminism, but move them further into the realm of the postmodern. The concept of "queer" as a more inclusive and empowering word for the gay and lesbian experience emerged in the early 1990s as a controversial and deeply political term (Jagose, 1996, p. 76). "Queer" is understood as a challenge to traditional understandings of sexual identity by deconstructing the categories, the binaries, and language that supports them. Butler's *Gender Trouble* and Sedgwick's "Epistemology of the Closet" (1990/1993) were influential works

for this emerging school of thought. Jagose explains that queer theory's most influential achievement is to specify "how gender operates as a regulatory construct that privileges heterosexuality and, furthermore, how the deconstruction of normative models of gender legitimates lesbian and gay subject-positions" (Jagose, 1996, p. 83). What the concept of queer truly seeks to do is disrupt and challenge traditional modes of thought and, by standing outside them, examine and dismantle them. Deborah Britzman (1995), a leading theorist in this field, explains how she understands Queer Theory and its role in learning,

> Queer Theory offers methods of critiques to mark the repetitions of normalcy as a structure and as a pedagogy. Whether defining normalcy as an approximation of limits and mastery, or as renunciations, as the refusal of difference itself, Queer Theory insists on posing the production of normalization as a problem of culture and of thought. (p. 154)

In Kevin Kumashiro's (2002) work *Troubling Education: Queer Activism and Antioppressive Pedagogy*, he writes, "learning is about disruption and opening up to further learning, not closure and satisfaction" (p. 43) and that "education involves learning something that disrupts our commonsense view of the world" (p. 63). While marginalized groups employ new strategies to challenge dominant ideologies, these entrenched discourses push back. Resistance is offered up by the dominant structures of society to forces that try to change them. Britzman (2000) presents the queer theoretical approach to understanding this opposition in outlining three forms of resistance to sexuality: structural, pedagogical, and psychical. She asserts the need to challenge all forms of resistance. She specifically addresses how sexuality is currently inserted into the school curriculum. She notes, "this has to do with how the curriculum structures modes of behaviour and orientations to knowledge that are repetitions of the underlying structure and dynamics of education: compliance, conformity, and the myth that knowledge cures" (p. 35). *Structural resistance* is especially resilient to change as it refers to the "very design or organization of education" (p. 34). In discussing how to challenge *pedagogical* forms of resistance, she encourages educators to recognize the power that *eros* can play in teaching. By understanding sexuality as a force that "allows the human its capacity for passion, interests, explorations, disappointment, and drama" and "because sexuality is both private and public—something from inside of bodies and something made between bodies—we must focus on sexuality in terms of

its contradictory, discontinuous, and ambiguous workings" (p. 37). Finally, in addressing *psychical* forms of resistance, Britzman advocates working through internal conflicts and ambivalence toward sexuality in order to "raise rather serious questions on the nature of education and on the uses of educational anxiety" (p. 35).

This disruption and open discussion of previously taboo issues can be a very difficult one for teachers to navigate. A liberatory and queer pedagogy empowers educators to explore traditionally silenced discourses and create spaces for students to examine and challenge the hierarchy of binary identities that is created and supported by schools, such as jock-nerd, sciences-arts, male-female, white-black, rich-poor, and gay-straight. In order to move past this, teachers must learn to see schooling 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).

Kumashiro, an emerging leader in Queer Theory and antioppressive pedagogy, offers four different approaches that can be used to challenge multiple forms of oppression in schools: "education for the Other, education about the Other, education that is critical of privileging and Othering, and education that changes students and society" (Kumashiro, 2002, p. 23). He advocates most strongly for the application of the latter of these four approaches. In true postmodern fashion, Kumashiro explicitly states that his is not a prescriptive program. He explains,

> 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 antioppressive education...I encourage readers to think of reading this book as an event that constitutes the kind of antioppressive educational practices that I articulate throughout its discussion. It is queer in its unconventionality and it is activist in the changes it aims to bring about. In this way, my book is not a mere exercise, and not a final product, but a resource that I hope can be in some way helpful to the reader, as it was for the researcher, and as I hope it was for the participants. (Kumashiro, 2002, pp. 25–26)

In this explanation, he is challenging us to find our own ways of creating useful knowledges and understanding the world. He refuses to be placed in the position of authority where his work will be read unquestioningly and used as a one-dimensional text. Instead he is pushing educators to find new methods to destabilize traditional ways of learning and offers different tools with which we

can build that understanding. This is what a queer and truly liberatory pedagogy is about.

Conclusion

Historically, schools have been institutions that have filled an important cultural role of teaching children to learn what has been deemed important by the people in power. As a result, children emerge from schools having learned only the language, the history, and the perspectives of the dominant culture. The recent shifts toward critical pedagogy since the civil rights movement and the feminist movements of the 1960s have begun to question this type of schooling in search of a way to create students and citizens who will be critical, engaged, independent thinkers in order to move our society in a more egalitarian direction. In better understanding how the forces of hegemony and discursive power work to shape gender and sexual identities, educators will be more equipped to create classrooms that embody the ideals of a queer liberatory pedagogy.

Queer theory is just another step further down the road initially paved by critical pedagogy, poststructural feminism, and theories of emancipatory education. In calling on educators to question and reformulate through 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, we will be able to reduce and eventually remove all forms of gendered harassment and other related forms of discrimination from schools and, consequently, from most realms of society. Schools need to begin to challenge and disrupt traditional ways of knowing and encourage students to question and "trouble" all that is passively assumed and taken for granted in society. Institutions of learning must redefine themselves in order to move toward a truly liberatory and emancipatory learning experience. This project is building on and extending the work of critical pedagogy. Barry Kanpol (1994) affirms,

> the critical pedagogue always seeks just and fair ways to alter a system which, by and large, and despite seemingly good intentions, has effectively oppressed many of its members. Critical postmodernism, then, is not only about passive judgment but also about active engagement in change and reform issues that seek to sever inequalities and other forms of social and cultural injustices. (p. 33)

By doing away with the docile, submissive, "banking" style of learning in schools, we can open up more educational possibilities and socially just experiences for future citizens rather than confine them with ideologies of traditional hegemonic, heterosexist, gender roles. In order to move in this direction, it is important to apply the lenses offered by Queer Theory to creatively work through the current obstacles that prevent teachers from teaching passionately and connecting with their students and communities in meaningful ways.

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