Educate not Titillate: LGBTQ+ Issues in Sex Education
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What led me to this research?

* Personal experience (queer, genderqueer person of colour; unlearning and shifting identities)

* Political climate and educational changes in Ontario
Research Question: What are teacher perceptions regarding their role in challenging the heteronormative discourse of sex education in schools, to better represent LGBTQ+ students? (Sub questions: beliefs, practices and barriers)
Methodology

- Interviewed two Ontario educators
- Semi-structured interviews
- Recruited via Twitter (vibrant and outspoken sex education community on the platform)

Used queer theory and thematic analysis to look at the collected data.

- disrupt and challenge the traditional modes of thought in sex education (hetero-cis normative)
- helped analyze how teachers are questioning and replacing heteronormative narratives that are deeply embedded in sex education
Possibility Models
“...the students who, as far as we know, are heterosexual, often define sex in such a limited way that they're putting themselves at risk, right? So when we again, adopt that universal design, we're reducing STI transmission with straight kids who never realized that they could get chlamydia from oral. That helps break down the binaries of what “sex” is and helps broaden our overall understanding...because if we don't create possibility models for our students, then we're basically telling them that they don't exist or that they shouldn’t exist...”
Possibility Models

(Goldstein, Russell & Daley, 2007; Grove, Morrison-Beedy, Russell & Hess, 2018; hicks, 2017)

* creating classrooms and educational content that reaches everyone in a classroom

* multiple opportunities to learn in a variety of formats that address the classroom needs

* adopting a UDL approach to teaching sex education can broaden everyone’s understanding of sexual activity, gender identity and sexual orientation to create possibility models for all students.

* student identity can shift over time and if/when that happens, they are still prepared with the information they need for themselves or to be an advocate and ally
1. Closed Box (hetero-cis normative; 1998)

2. Open Box (showing content; “inclusive”; 2015/2019)

3. Dumping the content of the box out youth choice built in (possibility models; queering)

*Throwing the box away?
Queering Educational Spaces

(Meyer, 2007; Britzman, 1995; Bryson & De Castell, 1993; Shlasko, 2005; Kumashiro, 2000; Snapp et al, 2015; Schmidt, 2010)

- Basic and fundamental beginning to queering sex education (still not being done)
- Explicitly questioning the content to break heteronormative assumptions
- Asked their students to question themselves, their positionality, their ideas and where those ideas came from.
- Integrating discussions of sex education across the curriculum (removes the idea that identity is taught and contained within one area of the curriculum)
- Makes all teachers responsible of teaching those topics, not just educators who teach sex education.
- Moves us away from this idea of the “other”
“I go into my classes and I automatically assume that everyone is queer and has gender fluidity, because I think it’s ridiculous that only queer and trans people have to prove themselves and disclose their identities. *Yeah, I kind of reverse the closet.* My students are still growing and learning and their identities are shifting ... so the challenge with sexual health education specifically with queer and trans students is that they don’t have the information because it was presented in a heterosexual context so they tune out.”
Queering Educational Spaces

(Meyer, 2007; Britzman, 1995; Bryson & De Castell, 1993; Shlasko, 2005; Kumashiro, 2000; Snapp et al, 2015; Schmidt, 2010; hicks, 2017)

* “Reversing the closet” — queering space.
* By “reversing the closet” the teachers flipped the assumed discussion about straight-cis sex ed upside down
* Reaches both queer and trans students, as well as straight-cis students whose identities may shift.
* Challenging our assumptions of who identifies as what; making spaces free of labels, judgements and assumptions.
* Creates space for “expecting” all identities (hicks, 2017)
Co-constructing Student-Driven Spaces

"My ideal classroom and the classroom I’m lucky to have is absolutely an ongoing collaboration. I think it’s a bit ridiculous to assume that I know what’s best for my students and that they should blindly follow me. Working with my students, instead of talking at them, means that I’m able to tap into what they know and don’t know, guide my lessons so that they’re interesting and informative, but also so that it reaches the students like the students who are at risk, or who are struggling with their sexuality or gender identity... inviting them into a learning space made just for them is powerful stuff."
Co-constructing Student-Driven Spaces in Sex Education

(Owis, 2019; Allen & Rasmussen, 2017; Coll, O’Sullivan & Enright, 2018; Johnson et al., 2016, 2017; Quinlivan, 2018)

* Pedagogical approach to teaching sex education
* Places a high value on centring student voices, experiences and involvement to create queer and trans-inclusive sex education
* Need to co-create a space where the binaries between students as consumers and teachers as knowledge keepers are challenged.
* Creates agency and empowerment
* Is invitational in nature (possibility models)
Implications

Need for a pedagogical shift in approaching LGBTQ+ content in sex education to dismantle the heteronormative overtones to the current sex education taught in Ontario (OME, 2015; OME, 1998).

Teachers need to include their students in the content and direction of their learning so that students are the ones guiding their sex education.

There is a lack of participatory research on LGBTQ+ inclusive sex education in schools despite awareness that it is missing (Allen, 2005; Allen, 2001; Ninomiya, 2010; Cohen, Byers & Sears, 2012; Begoray, Wharf-Higgins, & MacDonald, 2009; Byers, Sears & Foster, 2013; Gowen & Winges-Yanez, 2013)

Note: There are many “needs assessments” that have been done in the community and in school -- however no actual action has been implemented.
- Just want to focus on pedagogy? What about content?
- What students are at the center of my research?
- Where do I want to do this research?
- Where does radical knowledge exist?
- Who is preventing me from doing this research?

PhD Research: What happens when queer and trans youth of colour work collectively to reimagine, recreate and resist the privileging of whiteness, and cis-heteronormative content and pedagogical approaches in the Ontario “sex education” curriculum?
Research Areas: gender and sexuality, critical youth participatory action research, critical race studies.

Methodology:

Critical Youth Participatory Action Research:
*building off of third finding in MTRP study

- An ongoing collaboration with youth; working in a collective with them
- “Nothing about us, without us”
- They decide the research questions, how and what work is done, and what we do with the research.
- PAR work takes on different forms and models
- **Goals:** empower and restore agency
PhD Research (Year Two)

Study done in collaboration with tentatively Planned Parenthood Toronto

* Part One: Creating Community
  a. Asking questions, learning who we are, what we bring; learning more about the project
  b. What does it mean to *participate* in a critical YPAR study?
  c. Creating collective plan

* Part Two: Working with queer and trans youth of colour to *reimagine* the sex ed curriculum.
  a. dismantling, organizing, planning (*queering*)
  b. *What do you want to learn? How do you want to learn it? Who do we want involved?* (community orgs)
PhD Research (Year Two)

Study done in collaboration with tentatively Planned Parenthood Toronto

* Part Three: Working with queer and trans youth of colour to recreate the sex ed curriculum.
  a. creating a new curriculum document with focused topics; finalize and use document.

* Part Four: Teaching and learning the new curriculum
  a. workshops with community partners (Nuance, A Bad Subject, Canvas, PPT, 519, SOY, etc)

* Part Five: Analyzing and Disseminating (resist)
  a. Focus groups, reflections, mobilizing communities through art-based methods (photographs, etc)
  b. Sharing the research beyond the YPAR group
Long Term Goal:

a. Create one of many *possibility models* that could be implemented into classrooms
b. Implications for both curriculum and pedagogy (*what to teach, how to teach it*)
c. Have the process and products (art-based data) disseminated for the public