



A reluctant manifesto for welcoming LGBTQ sexuality into education

What is this research about?

Sexuality is controversial, especially in schools. Teachers, parents and administrators worry that sexuality will infect the innocence of children. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) issues pose a particular problem for schools. These issues are seen as existing outside of the classroom and as an interruption to teaching and learning. However, sexuality, including LGBTQ sexuality, is also integral to the experience of learning. It affects the ways students see themselves, make friends, and learn about the world. Schools need to go beyond thinking of LGBTQ sexuality as a “time of difficulty”, when worries over homophobia shape the classroom. Instead, welcoming LGBTQ issues into schools requires that education adopt an expansive view of sexuality. That is, education must show goodwill to whatever and whoever turns up in the classroom.

What did the researcher do?

The researcher began by outlining her understanding of “hospitality”, based on the work of Jacques Derrida. She noted that, for Derrida, hospitality is complex. We must commit ourselves to the goal of an unconditional welcome in schools. And yet, we must create rules and policies that enact that welcome even though, in doing so, we

What you need to know:

In order to welcome LGBTQ students, families and teachers into schools, we need to embrace the risk that comes with the confusion, tensions or imperfection of inclusion.

inevitably violate our commitment to an unconditional welcome. Three examples were used to address how the paradoxes of hospitality affect the welcome of LGBTQ issues receive in education.

- 1) Marriage equality and public education: Debates about same-sex marriage require teachers to explore the shifting nature of family life.
- 2) Transgender youth and public education: Welcoming transgender youth into schools requires something more than creating anti-homophobic and anti-transphobic classrooms. The challenge is to understand conflict and confusion as part of learning.
- 3) LGBTQ issues in teacher education: To welcome LGBTQ sexualities into education, we also must encounter our own limits. Hospitality emerges between what we imagine and what we can do; between the ideal of the perfect lesson and the unexpected.

What did the researcher find?

From these examples, the researcher proposed a five point manifesto for welcoming LGBTQ issues into schools. This manifesto challenged the idea that any program could cure schools of social hatred, but proposed changes in school approaches to welcoming LGBTQ issues.

- 1) There is no single strategy to eliminate homophobia and transphobia in education. We must anticipate the range of possible ways that sexuality can emerge in schools. But sexuality will always reveal the limits of our knowledge.
- 2) Every action and gesture to make schools inclusive to LGBTQ students, families and teachers counts. We must welcome both formal actions (like curriculum) and informal or unplanned events in our attempt to create positive environments.
- 3) We need to increase our capacity to hear and use the words lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender in a school environment. It teaches everyone that language and meaning is important. It also demands that we go beyond using these words in reference to bullying or sexual health alone.
- 4) LGBTQ issues need to go beyond looking at the problem of bullying. Schools need to create a full range of stories of human experience that include narratives of LGBTQ life. They also need to go beyond referring to LGBTQ topics only in health and sex education.
- 5) Efforts to protect and support LGBTQ youth and families also should extend to protect LGBTQ teachers. Their working and learning conditions are impacted by issues of hostility and fear of being openly identified as LGBTQ.

How can you use this research?

This research may be useful for those working in any institutional body, but especially those in educational spaces. It offers a major insight and reflection on the limits of existing strategies to create inclusion and equity in schooling. For educators and administrators, it also offers suggestions on how to address the informal or unanticipated events when sexuality is encountered in the classroom. For policymakers, this research may inform efforts to develop and receive feedback on the way inclusive education or sex education is received in Ontario.

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