'Boys think it's just a hairless hole': Young people's reflections on binary and heteronormative pedagogies in school based sexualities education

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Chapter 11

'Boys Think It's Just a Hairless Hole': Young People's Reflections on Binary and

Heteronormative Pedagogies in School Based Sexualities Education

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Abstract:

This chapter uses material from qualitative research with LGBTQ+ young people to explore the ways in which heteronormativity, heterosexism and gender binarism are legitimated and perpetuated in sexualities education in school settings. The research suggests that LGBTQ+[1] young people experience oppression at two levels, in the content of sex and relationships education, which reproduces gender as binary and sexuality as primarily heterosexual and reproductive, and at the level of institutionalised heteronormativity, and homophobic and transphobic bullying and victimisation. Despite these restrictions, LGBTQ+ young people often develop critical knowledge that allows them to challenge heteronormativity and gender binarism, particularly when supported by other sources such as inclusive and holistic youth groups, peers and media. This leads us to argue that a critical pedagogies approach would enter into dialogue with young people's critical capacities and knowledge in order to understand, challenge and ultimately transform heteronormativity and gender binarism in both SRE content, and schools as institutions.

Keywords: gender binary, heteronormativity, heterosexism, gender fluidity, pedagogy, LGBTQ+, homophobia, transphobia, discrimination, bullying

Introduction

Critical pedagogy equips students with the capacity to resist forms of knowledge that 'perpetuate or legitimate an unequal status quo', and in so doing resist their 'power effects'

(Burbules & Berk, 1999, p. 46). This chapter takes extracts from empirical studies in the north of England to illustrate practices in school settings that legitimate wider contexts of heteronormativity experienced at two levels: 1) in the content of sex and relationships education (SRE) which reproduces gender as binary and sexuality as heterosexual and reproductive, and 2) at the level of homophobic and transphobic bullying and victimisation.[2] Despite these challenges, LGBTQ+ young people are shown through the data to have critical capacities and knowledges that they draw upon to resist their teachers' and some peers' hegemonic notions of gender and sexuality, and replace them with counter-discourses that legitimise their social truths, diverse and fluid identities and rights to more inclusive education.

With this in mind, we argue that a feminist critical pedagogical approach (Ellsworth, 1989; Loutzenheiser & Moore, 2009; Luke & Gore, 2014) is uniquely positioned to simultaneously address the challenges of restrictive SRE and homophobic and transphobic oppression, and that it might do so by entering into dialogue with young people's own criticality. A central principle of critical pedagogy is that educators and students should be able to question taken for granted social truths not merely as an intellectual exercise, but as part of a process of advocating and enacting structural social change (Freire, 1970). Oftentimes, the structure that needs to transform to enable justice is the educational institution itself. The data shows LGBTQ+ young people being failed, not only by a limited, normative, exclusionary SRE curriculum, but also by institutional practices that ignore and perpetuate transphobic and homophobic victimisation. Critical pedagogy in SRE has the potential to empower educators to radically change their practice and critically challenge the institutional values and structures within which they work (Smyth, 1989). Moreover, in contexts where young people seek information about sex from other sources, including family, peers, youth groups, or the media (Attwood, Barker, Boynton, & Hancock, 2015),

critical pedagogy might allow teachers to enter into dialogue with young people's ideas, legitimating their knowledge and experiences while using the classroom as a space to problematise and discuss sources and content of information. Entering such a dialogue would inaugurate what Freire and Macedo (2003) describe as the 'language of possibility' whereby oppressed people are empowered by the conviction that their own discourses are legitimate, *and* sit alongside multiple other discourses with which they can become competent and critical.

Following description of sources of data and study methods, young people's narratives are presented in three analytic themes. The first condenses experience of the limited binary, biological focus of SRE, and the second focuses on wider institutional encounters with discrimination and persecution based on heteronormativity and gender binarism. The third section explores young people's critical capacities and sources of alternative knowledge. The chapter concludes with thoughts on how these experiences might be utilised to create a critical pedagogy that would enter into dialogue with young people's knowledge and criticality, and in so doing challenge and change the exclusion of LGBTQ+ young people both in teaching, and in the realm of institutionalised discrimination.

Sources of Data

Data are taken from two studies. The first, Hirst (2015), ostensibly an evaluation of local sexual health services, revealed the significance of formal and informal schooling experiences in perceptions of the in/adequacy of sexual health education and service provision. This led to a follow-up study by Marshall and Hirst (2017) that focused on young people who attended a LGBTQ+ youth group to seek data on their experiences of school based SRE. Each of the studies used loosely structured qualitative interviews with an aide memoire devised in consultation with a project steering group and piloted with young people.

In practice, interviews were conducted as conversations and led by the interviewee/s, where possible (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Participants chose to be interviewed individually and/or in groups,[3] and participants' ages ranged from 15 to 25 years.[4] In both studies participants were asked to self-describe their sexuality and gender in their own terms. Reductionist conceptualisations often segregate gender into female or male, or, offer three options of male, female or trans (which erroneously conflates gender and sexuality). Neither option embraces the fluidity or non-binary nature of genders and sexualities described by our young people, hereafter abbreviated following the pseudonym and age for each participant.[5]

Findings

Young people's criticisms of SRE as patchy, too late, narrow, and focused on reproduction with neglect of relationships, are well documented by international scholars (see review in Ingham & Hirst, 2010) and the UK Government's own evaluation (MacDonald, 2009). Our findings echo previous research and offer insight through the inclusion of young people who are not heterosexual and/or cisgender. We focus particularly on accounts of gendered and heteronormalising discourses, practices of gender segregation, homophobia, transphobia and bullying. While successive UK governments have owned up to SRE not meeting young people's needs (Ofsted, 2007) this should be qualified as not meeting the needs of straight young people and resolutely failing to meet the needs of LGBTQ+ young people.

Periods, Pregnancy and Hairless Holes: Gendered and Heterosexist Pedagogies

Replicating findings from other studies (Allen, 2011) those identifying as female were taught about menstruation and those identifying as male received nothing on female anatomy, biology or reproduction and instead discussed wet dreams and masturbation. These quotes are archetypal:

Girls learn about periods…the guys talked about masturbation. (Alice F/Bi/16)

The boys didn't do stuff about women, like nothing on periods and stuff. (Tom M/G/18)

This approach reinforces the gender binary, constructs female reproductive organs as primarily functional, and male organs as primarily for pleasure (prioritising male pleasure and invisibilising female pleasure) and potentially creates an awkward stigma around menstruation and indoctrinating shame about bodily functions. For some, this was exacerbated by the failure of teachers to challenge belittling comments from peers:

Like if you leave class with your bag, then the lads say stuff like, 'why you taking your bag? You on t'blob [menstruating]?' The boys didn't get the same education [as girls] and they're still immature about it. (Kat F/A/PR/15)

Yeah, teachers never say anything. They just gloss over it. (Kira F/L/16)

Many versions of sexualities education embraced a discourse of silence on anatomy:

At school we don't talk about the vagina or proper names…boys think it's just a hairless hole. (May F/PS/17)

Input on safer sex was limited to contraception and focused on women's role in preventing pregnancy by male partners, thereby dismissing same sex relationships, sex for reasons other than reproduction and indicting women for the 'perils' of sex. For some, this ideology was secured to such an extent that boys could only observe, and not participate, in a session at school on *'how to put a condom on'*:

Lasses put condoms on a banana and a cucumber. [Teachers] wouldn't let us [boys] have a go. (Kris M//St/18)

With affirmation from others, Kat summed this up:

> Sex education is really only about women as pregnancy machines. They try and
>
> make out it's the women's fault. They say, like 'Alice did this with so and so'.
>
> Why is it *her* fault? (Kat F/A/PR/15)

While young women were aggrieved at the overtly sexist and functional responsibility

placed on them, several young men wanted to feel better informed:

> Being a man is a disadvantage in getting to know about sexual health and sexuality. I
>
> didn't realise how much I didn't know. Women are way ahead of us. (Cole M/St/21)
>
>
> Yes, it's knowing about gender. Women need different things to men. I still
>
> don't know much about periods and that. (Tom M/G/18)

This section illustrates that, four decades since Jackson's (1978) observations on sex

education, young people continue to highlight an enduring sexism and patriarchy, and young

men, as in other studies (e.g. Epstein, O'Flynn, & Telford, 2003; Hilton, 2003) feel sex

education focuses on women and are uneasy with their sense of not knowing 'enough'. These

examples indicate "the power of normative gender discourses to define what is thinkable, and

perceived as probable, regarding gender identity in the classroom" (Allen, 2011, p. 33). In the

ensuing discussion, we develop this, highlighting more examples of schools as

heteronormalising spaces that can marginalise and silence LGBTQ+ young people.

Heteronormalising Schooling

To credit Warner (1993) 'heteronormativity' describes assumptions of heterosexuality as

synonymous with human experience, wherein, as Allen notes (2011, p. 3), it serves as an

"organising principle of social life which presumes desire, sexual practice and identity are

universally heterosexual". Pedagogies that appropriate SRE as a vehicle for

heteronormativity are well documented (Epstein et al., 2003; Garcia, 2009). Like LGBTQ+

students in other studies (Formby, 2015), participants described mechanisms for inscribing heteronormativity in SRE:

> I've not heard the words 'gay' or 'lesbian' mentioned in a classroom. It's not something they talk about, they just assume everyone's straight. (Rachel F/PS/15)

> It was extremely heterosexual. You put penis into vagina and that's how sex happens. (Harry TM/G/17)

> Someone asked about what gay people do and the teacher didn't answer. (Ben M/NS/16)

Though SRE needs improvement, explicit mechanisms of normalisation and exclusion were witnessed in other spaces in schools through adherence to maintaining the gender binary of female or male and policing this through segregation, bullying, misgendering and deadnaming.

Segregation and exclusion

Non-binary and transgender participants said segregating students by gender was commonplace and that this was a source of frustration and indignity. For example, Jack, a trans young man, described his school's policy to separate boys and girls for maths lessons (a strategy for improving attainment) and that he was miss-assigned to an all-girls class, and felt so uncomfortable that he frequently absented from lessons. Similarly, physical education (PE) classes were divided by gender, and types of sports restricted by stereotypical expectations of gendered preferences, which some attempted to defy:

The boys never did dance or trampolining and the girls never did football or cricket. When people brought it up teachers said, 'The boys don't want to do it'. Well, have you asked them? (Harry TM/G/17)

A few participants reported successful challenges to sexist practices in PE so all students could engage in a variety of sports. But inclusion goes beyond opening up options, and was nominal for trans and non-binary students if changing rooms remained segregated. Two participants reported that being forced to use gendered changing rooms, or not wanting to 'out' themselves by requesting an alternative changing room, terminated their attendance in PE lessons. Two trans participants did convince their school to provide an alternate space, but not without a struggle and external support:

[they agreed after] they'd been visited by an LGBTQ+ youth group three times, because they were just giving up, just letting me do what I wanted because they could not be arsed with the protest. (Harry TM/G/17)

School toilets were also problematic for trans and non-binary students, and fulfilling basic needs became fraught. Students' toilet use was policed by both staff and peers:

When I first started wearing makeup and stuff, I had this teacher who laughed at me. I'd go to the toilet with the girls but wait outside. I wouldn't go *in* the toilet because I knew they'd have a problem with it. That teacher would always check in the toilet and he was really rude to me. Whenever he saw me in the corridor he'd smirk or he'd start giggling to himself and put his head down. He just made me feel like crap. (Jasmine TF/Het/16)

Others adopted deliberate strategies to avoid surveillance and abuse:

I just went to the toilet when they were all in lessons. It's much quieter. It's much easier. (Luke TM/Bi/17)

Disabled toilets were the alternative changing room offered to trans/non-binary students. Trans is not a disability, and this maintains the marginalisation that attempts to keep binarism in place. As Slater (2015) points out, young people who are disabled are stripped of their chosen gender through having to use non-assigned, genderless toilets. Politically, socially and culturally, trans people are becoming more visible (Truitt, 2016) but in practice, this inclusion and acceptance can depend on individual willingness or ability to 'pass' (Namaste, 2006) within a gender binary through dress, demeanour or surgery. As Luke laments:

For people that are non-binary, they didn't have anything. (Luke TM/Bi/17)

Bullying

Experiences of bullying and/or fear of harm were not uncommon for transgender people, as in other studies (Greytak, Kosciw, & Diaz, 2009). Harry recounted how a transgender friend had been cornered and assaulted in the changing rooms by a group of boys, who felt 'he and his "biologically female" body should not be there'. Millie's friend was pushed down some stairs for 'being gay'. The spotlight on identity was amplified when LGBTQ+ issues came up in lessons:

You can feel people watching you. (Luke TM/Bi/17)

I always felt different to everyone else […]. It's constantly on your mind. In R.E. they'd always mention gay marriage or moral issues…a lot of people there are religious, they wouldn't agree with gay marriage or other LGBTQ+ related things.

You'd feel awkward, like everyone has got their eyes on you. (Jasmine TF/Het/16)

Sometimes this was more explicit, and LGBTQ+ students felt physically and emotionally unsafe:

I would hear them sniggering in the background behind me or when I was walking

somewhere. I think that makes you a lot more conscious because things are happening constantly so you're less likely to want to go to your lessons. (Jack TM/NS/17)

On the way to school, people would start shouting, 'faggot' and 'gay' at us. In school, obviously there's certain areas that you can't go to, just because the people there would try to hurt you or shout stuff at you. (Millie F/Bi/16)

Transphobia was less likely to be confronted than other phobias:

[Support staff] were good about anything that was discriminatory against religion or any racism, even homophobia… If you needed to talk about your mental health, that was fine. If you needed to talk about being not straight, that was fine. But, if you went to talk about trans things, they just threw a leaflet in your face and that was about it. (Luke TM/Bi/17)

In parallel, some experienced overt homophobia and transphobia from teachers in SRE lessons, and felt that reporting concerns was pointless, as schools did not act on complaints:

They'd hired a really dodgy person who was really homophobic. So in year ten, or year nine, when they were showing 'FIT[6]' to my friend's class, he said, 'so this is about LGBTQ gay stuff, but I don't agree with this'. *And*, if you were gay, he'd give you more detentions. (Millie F/Bi/16)

Trans participant Jasmine recounted being repeatedly harassed, intimidated, and mocked by one teacher. Some were given the impression that bullying was seen as part and parcel of coming out at school, or as Ringrose and Renold (2010, p. 573) describe, a 'normative cruelty'.

Everybody seems to have been conditioned to believe that you've just got to put up with it. (Jack TM/NS/17)

The older teachers have been taught that it's wrong […] They knew people that got beaten up and it was illegal…they've stayed in that mind-set of, 'we can't do anything. It's not something that we can deal with'. (Luke TM/Bi/17)

Misgendering and deadnaming

Two other explicitly heteronormalising regulatory techniques which demeaned trans students were misgendering[7] and deadnaming[8]:

We were in PSHE and my teacher, who knew I was openly trans said, 'Get in mixtures of boys and girls'. I was in one of all girls and the teacher came over and went, 'Come on, you can't have all girls'. (Harry TM/G/17)

[School] changed the names [of trans students] on the register and changed the gender on the register. But not all teachers would use the [chosen] pronouns for either case. (Millie F/Bi/16)

Institutionalised homophobia

The ingrained nature of homophobia within school culture and practice was demonstrated by experiences wherein LGBTQ+ teachers were persecuted by students:

A teacher in charge of checking people were dressed correctly also happened to be lesbian. Girls [said], 'she can't do that, she's a lesbian. She's checking us out'. (Ben M/ NS/16)

One of our dance teachers was gay and people were like, 'he's hitting on you' to all the boys. (Alice F/Bi/16)

Challenges to homophobic comments were often left to the LGBTQ+ students. One example was the frequent negative usage of the word 'gay' to intimidate and mock LGBTQ+ students, with little consequence:

> Teachers didn't take people using 'gay' as an insult – they didn't take that seriously, wouldn't address it. Someone would shout, 'Ha! Gay!' and the teacher would just carry on. And I had to shout at that child myself. (Ben M/NS/16)

Equally, as Foucault (1976) proposed, homophobic terms could be subverted, and used between close friends and romantic partners as terms of endearment or group belonging:

> The boys I'm friends with – they do it, and I call them names back, and it's just funny. (Ellie F/L/16)

Some teachers struggled to deal with the complexity of a term that could be used both positively and negatively. Rather than seeking advice, 'gay' simplistically became the equivalent of an insult or 'four letter word'. The word was 'banned from school' and student's public documents. For instance, Ellie had the phrase 'It's okay to be gay' deleted from her yearbook entry without her knowledge by the deputy head teacher. Such actions reinforce notions of sexuality as something to be hidden. Indeed, part of the power and pervasiveness of heteronormativity is that it is often invisible and unquestioned (Mullholland, 2011). Furthermore, it demonstrates a reductive and reactive approach to addressing institutional homophobia. As we suggest below, young people's critical skills and knowledge might be a better starting point from which to challenge homophobia in schools.

LGBTQ+ Young People's Critical Capacities

Despite the many ways in which students' identities were undermined, their reflexive agency in calling teachers to account can be seen in the following examples from English Literature lessons:

> A woman who [wrote] the poem and was a suffragette and wore typically male clothing. Our teacher [said] 'well she was a lesbian.' What? Was she? All you know is that she wore a suit instead of a dress. It doesn't mean she's gay. (Jack TM/NS/17)

In another instance, a teacher appeared resolutely resistant to Shakespeare's description of same sex attraction despite numerous corrections from students:

> I compare thee to a summer's day [by] Shakespeare was written for a man. The teacher kept saying, 'He was explaining to the woman', and I was like, 'No he wasn't. He was explaining to a bloke!' Other people started correcting her and then later on [she said], '*He* was saying to *her*' and everyone was going, '*Him*'! You could see her consciously saying *her* and everyone would be like, 'No, it was a dude going after a dude'. (Harry TM/G/17)

These examples demonstrate young people's ability to critically reflect upon the restrictive content of their education and directly challenge the exclusion or oppression of LGBTQ+ identities. They also show that, despite the institutional separation of SRE from other subjects, young people experience learning about sex, sexualities and genders holistically across the curriculum, the potential of which could be harnessed by a critical pedagogies approach to SRE. Through their scepticism towards taken for granted truths about gender and sexualities in history and literature, these students are questioning the traditional pedagogical relationship, where the teacher is a narrator who 'fills' students with knowledge (Freire, 1970). If teachers were to enter into these dialogues, there is opportunity for them, like some of their students, to understand and challenge the ways in which 'educational policy and practice are connected to the relations of exploitation and domination' (Apple, Au, & Gandlin, 2009, p. 4). Our research demonstrates that students are already beginning to do this without institutional support, and we can only imagine the possibilities for more reflexive partnerships between teachers and students, in which both could become more empowered to

critically challenge binary and heteronormative institutional values and structures (Smyth, 1989). Such an approach would also serve as recognition that schools will never be the only source of sexualities education, but it does have the potential to be a crucial space in which to critically discuss and filter other sources of material. The media has increasingly become a source of information for young people frustrated with the limitations of sex education, particularly in an age of personalised media consumption (Albury, 2013; Attwood et al., 2015). While online media, particularly pornography, is often a source of concern around what young people might be learning about sex – a fear reproduced in the CSE (child sexual exploitation) agenda (UK Government, 2015) – it can also be a valuable source of information for all young people, but particularly LGBTQ+ students who are most comprehensively failed by current SRE provision. While all our participants were familiar with various online media, they cited two that they frequented: the 'NHS website' was checked for information about STIs and clinics, and YouTuber 'Laci Green' was said to offer more informal, 'friendlier' information and advice. Inclusive resources like Laci Green "make the needs of young people central" and "present them with options about what kind of sex they may want to have (if any)" (Attwood et al., 2015, p. 533). Our participants responded to questions about media in ways that pointed towards its ubiquity and saturation in their everyday lives, but their responses also suggested that they perceived media consumption as wholly separate to sex education. Although the availability of such information is a good thing, it lacks the interactive engagement and dialogue that might be possible in 'real life' learning environments. Moreover, if these spaces took a critical pedagogies approach, they might allow educators to bridge the gap between education and other sources of information about sex, providing a space for a critical dialogue that fosters media literacy (Albury, 2013; McKee et al., 2010).

Youth groups and holistic sexualities education

Some participants received more affirming sexualities education in a 'real life' space by attending a youth group. Without exception, there was praise and gratitude for youth workers:

> I just really needed help and someone to talk to. It was big stuff. They accepted you as you are. (Cole 21/M/St)

> It can be a way to express yourself, away from your family. Especially if your family's not supportive. Like, if you're surrounded by people who get that you are what you actually are. (Chris M/G/15)

In adopting a more holistic approach, youth groups provided a space for broader concerns:

> Most important thing is how it affects your mental health. Physical health is important but the effect on your mental health is more massive. (Dan M/G/21)

> You can't function if you're worried about something that you daren't tell anyone. An infection or other sex things…they're all a biggy. Talking to someone you can absolutely trust…[puts his head on table]…it's so important. (Cole M/St/21)

Hallmarks of empowering support embraced the relationship between knowledge, sexual health, confidence and communication:

> Getting rid of my ignorance about sexuality and sexual health made me so much more confident. I can talk to my friends about anything. That wasn't how I was, the previous me. (Dan M/G/21)

> If you feel good about your sexual health, it's such a weight off your mind. (Tom M/G/18)

If you can talk about sex you can talk about anything. (Lola F/St/17)

Opportunities to learn from non-judgemental peers and practitioners and enter into non-hierarchical dialogue were valued:

I was made to feel really comfortable and people are really friendly. I could speak openly without any problems [or] feeling shy. (Tara F/ST/18)

It's had a massive impact on what I know. Having knowledge shapes you as a person…just knowing how much better it is to be accepting and understanding makes me happier in myself. (Tara F/ST/18)

It's so good in helping me to build my confidence. (Cole M/ST/21)

Here we see the potential for a more inclusive dialogue-based pedagogical approach in a non-judgemental space where young people can question gender and sexual norms. Although youth group workers weren't taking a structured critical pedagogy approach, these spaces do show the benefits of some aspects linked to CP, such as peer learning and critical dialogue. These accounts demonstrate the benefits of SRE environments that give young people the opportunity to talk openly and be heard, and the benefit of being amongst other young people who were at least curious and open about non-heteronormative and binary identities.

However, these environments were not accessible to all, and had to be sought out. Others had to rely on support from school, which as we have identified, was frequently inadequate or even damaging. It is important to note though that a minority of participants had teachers who were making efforts to be more inclusive:

I think they *are* trying to include diversity. It's a lot better, but it's hard for them'. (Tom M/G/18)

Like Tom, others showed a reflectivity and sympathy for their teachers and offered explanations, such as, 'it's not their fault', 'they're trying to do their best', 'they're not trained', 'they're forced to do it', or, 'I don't think many teachers get educated on a lot of LGBTQ+ stuff'. Indeed, there was broad acknowledgement from young people that educator training was crucial:

> You just have to educate the teachers. It's the most important thing you can do for us
>
> as young people. (Finn, M, G, 17)

The data has shown that challenges persist at an institutional school level. The attempts of individual educators to provide holistic and inclusive sex education can only achieve so much. In contrast, a critical pedagogical approach could present a united and effective solution to the related problems of heteronormative sex education content and practice, and institutionalised heteronormativity and gender binarism.

Concluding Remarks

Some of the young people in our studies are fortunate in having had support from youth services, well-intentioned individual teachers, peers and parents, or inclusive media, to help them develop their critical capacities. For others, developing a sense of sexual subjectivity, sexual competence, emotional well-being and relationship ethics might be more difficult. To return to our title, perhaps the comment, 'boys think it's just a hairless hole' serves as a sad epithet, but not one that merely signifies the images seen in pornography as might be assumed. Instead, our participants' accounts point to 'education' where knowledge is almost deliberately obfuscated, and bodies, relationships, identities and practices have no names, no context, and no opportunity for dialogue. Critical pedagogy starts by asking 'who benefits' from a particular system of belief or action (Burbules & Berk, 1999). The current SRE agenda has little 'benefit' beyond maintaining ideologies of patriarchy, binary gender and

heteronormativity. By contrast, a critical pedagogy of sex education would allow educators and students to understand, critique, and ultimately take action against the inequalities perpetuated through social 'truths' (Burbules & Berk, 1999) perpetuated by traditional sexualities education.

In concluding our chapter on what these experiences might mean for a critical pedagogy of sexualities, dialogue is a reoccurring theme. Didactic methods were scorned both for the content and teacher's unwillingness to engage in debate. Freire (1970) emphasises the importance of not "explaining to" but rather "dialoguing with" students, arguing that the oppressed must themselves be the ones to develop ideas and models for change (p. 53). Teachers must find the confidence in themselves and their students, believing young people can teach them about sexualities and gender (Freire, 1970). At the same time, as Giroux (2001) emphasises, "radical educators" need to be self-reflexive about their own histories and identities and how these shape their thoughts and actions (p. 241), a process that may be challenging for some when it comes to gender and sexualities. Educators may need to radically challenge their own 'comforting illusions' about how heteronormative society is constructed and the means for achieving justice (Apple et al., 2009, p. 3). Alongside this, students will need to see changes at practice and policy levels, in the implicit and explicit curriculum if they are to believe in the possibility of social justice.

The approach we are arguing for, then, is one described by Loutzenheiser and Moore (2009) as feminist critical pedagogy, where education is harnessed as a space through which to challenge gender and sexuality based stereotypes, and to foster social change. This approach recognises that schools too often understand sexism and homophobia as an individualistic problem that only requires individualised solutions, and fail to recognise the systemic construction of gender and sexual norms (Loutzenheiser & Moore, 2009), a trend that is borne out by participants' accounts in this chapter. Critical pedagogies are crucial in

order to deconstruct and challenge the power relations that perpetuate gender and sexual

normativity, not just in the curriculum and classroom, but as part of teacher development and

institutional policy (Loutzenheiser &Moore, 2009). Through belief in, and support for, a

critical pedagogy of sexualities, young people's critical capacities can be harnessed to enable

students and educators to contest, and ultimately transform, the perpetuation of

heteronormativity and a gender binary through sexualities education, and homophobic and

transphobic discrimination and persecution in schools.

Notes

[1] Acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Questioning, and others with gender identities or sexual orientations that are not heterosexual or cisgender.

[2] Incidents of homophobic and transphobic bullying, persecution or victimisation were not always described as such by young people; instead they referred to being 'pushed around' and so on in ways that suggested such acts were often minimised or normalised, and not dealt with adequately by the school (Ringrose & Renolds, 2010).

[3] In the first study (Hirst, 2015) 29 young people took part in 16 individual interviews, one small group (involving 2 people) and one larger group (12 people) interview. Two people participated in a large group and subsequent individual interview. The second study (Marshall & Hirst, 2017) comprised three individual and two small group interviews.

[4] In the first study (Hirst, 2015) nineteen participants were aged 15 to 18, and ten were aged 19 to 25 years. In the second study (Marshall & Hirst, 2017) all eleven participants were aged 15 to 17.

[5] Genders included trans (hereafter abbreviated to T), female (F), male (M), neutral (N), non-binary (NB) and fluid (FL). Sexualities were described as bisexual (abbreviated to Bi), bi and open (Bi & Op), pansexual (PS), panromantic (PR), asexual (A), Lesbian (L), gay (G), Straight (St), heterosexual (Het). The second study saw the addition of trans male (TM), trans female (TF), and not stated (NS) for participants who chose not to share their sexuality.

[6] A film produced by LGBT rights charity Stonewall (FIT, 2010).

[7] Misgendering involves the deliberate and incorrect use of a pronoun, means of address or action that does not reflect the gender that the individual identifies with.

[8] Deadnaming refers to refusing to acknowledge a transgender person's chosen identity by using their birth name instead of their chosen name.

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