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Gender and Sexual Orientation in the Elementary Classroom: Teachers Negotiating Critical Literacies and Queer Pedagogies

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GENDER AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION IN THE ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM: TEACHERS NEGOTIATING CRITICAL LITERACIES AND QUEER PEDAGOGIES

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Abstract

Drawing from queer theoretical perspectives, this thesis examines the extent to which teachers address sexual orientation and gender identities in Ontario Elementary classrooms, reflecting recent curricular revisions regarding antidiscrimination education and social justice; moreover, it investigates some of the influences that affect teachers' pedagogical practices. This inquiry's significance can be seen through social constructionism which emphasizes the teachers' role in reinforcing or disrupting discourses of normalcy. Queer Theory offers a method for deconstructing and challenging identity categories such as the heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy or gender normative frameworks.

Findings indicate an apparent tension for teachers in negotiating personal and parental beliefs and pedagogies that reflect gender and sexual identities. Professional development is recommended to assist teachers with this complexity and alleviate bullying and harassment experienced by students who exhibit non-normative expressions of gender, question their sexuality, or come from families headed by same-sex parents.

Key Words: gender identities, sexual orientation, curriculum, pedagogy, antidiscrimination education, social justice

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my brother Jeff and his partner Charles; my cousin Justin and his partner Matt; my good friends Meg and Frieda, Bobby, Alicia and Jenny, and Stephanie. May you always be proud to be who you are and not have to challenge norms surrounding gender and sexuality on your own, but know there are allies who work to open eyes, minds and hearts.

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Like many novice teachers, I began my educational journey supply teaching. I consider myself fortunate that after two years of supply teaching, I received a full-time long term occasional position teaching a grade five and six split, which led to a second full-year long term occasional position teaching the same grades. Within these two years of classroom teaching, several experiences had a lasting impact on my view of teaching and ultimately shaped the direction of my current graduate research.

One experience was parental surveillance that silenced me in a way I did not expect. A letter had gone home about an upcoming health unit covering sexual health. While there was no direct reference to sexual orientation in the letter, a parent voiced her concerns about the possibility of sexual orientation being mentioned in class. She made it clear to me that she did not want her daughter "thinking gay is okay." She then lowered her voice and nudged my shoulder whispering, "You know what I mean", seeking my agreement.

Thinking on my feet, I responded with an analogy. The grade five Social Studies curriculum covers a unit on the government and political parties. I told her that while students are informed of the various political stances, as an educator, I remain neutral and do not persuade the students to form an opinion one way or another. My job is simply to educate about what exists and provide the tools for critical thinking that will allow students to make informed decisions. Similarly, if content about homosexuality were to surface, I would acknowledge homosexuality as well as heterosexuality, but I would not

be engaging discussion of right or wrong. That is a moral debate and my responsibility is to educate, not pass judgement on moral grounds.

The parent seemed pleased by the response and I didn't press the matter further for fear of 'disrupting the peace.' But I was not satisfied and felt there was something wrong about not being able to address sexual orientation in the classroom in a normative way. Furthermore, I began asking whether a neutral position exists in teaching.

Freire (1970) argues that teaching is a political act which requires 'humility' (p.127). He says, "It is not our role to speak to the people about our own view of the world, not (*sic*) to attempt to impose that view on them, but rather to dialogue with the people about their view and ours" (p.129). He notes that one cannot dialogue if one is offended by the contributions of others (p.126). Freire suggests that true dialogue requires critical thinking, which he describes as "thinking which perceives reality as process, as transformation, rather than as a static entity" (p.127). This description involves movement in thinking from what you know and what you think you know through new and sometimes uncomfortable learning. He identifies that this kind of education leads to an awareness of reality and self-awareness that liberates one's character.

Similarly, Kumashiro (2000) argues that learning often involves unlearning and can place the learner in a crisis as he or she works through new knowledge and views of the world. Receiving information that challenges one's current worldview can be upsetting and lead to further resistance in accepting new understandings. In recognizing the difficulty in negotiating different ways of thinking, both authors stress that learning

requires putting your common-sense view of the world aside and opening yourself up to new possibilities.

Another aspect of my teaching practice that resonated was critical literacy. It is a component of elementary language programs that encourages students to think critically about worldviews expressed in texts and develop skills to form opinions about these views with a focus on social justice and equity issues. The updated *Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1-8: Language, Revised* (2006)—which I will hereafter refer to as OCL (2006)—defines critical literacy as the following:

> the capacity for a particular type of critical thinking that involves looking beyond the literal meaning of texts to observe what is present and what is missing, in order to analyse and evaluate the text's complete meaning and the author's intent. Critical literacy goes beyond conventional critical thinking in focusing on issues related to fairness, equity, and social justice. Critically literate students adopt a critical stance, asking what view of the world the text advances and whether they find this view acceptable. (p.152)

This exact definition can also be found in a paragraph within the *Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1 – 8: Health and Physical Education, Revised Interim Edition* (2010)–OCH (2010)–under a section entitled *Critical Thinking and Critical Literacy in Health and Physical Education* (p. 62). Following this definition, this section continues to articulate the goals of a critically literate student:

> Critically literate students understand that meaning is not found in texts in isolation. People make sense of a text, or determine what a text means, in a variety of ways. Students therefore need to be aware of points of view (e.g., those

> of parents and students), the context (e.g., the beliefs and practices of the time and place in which a text is read or written), the background of the person interacting with the text (e.g., upbringing, friends, school and other communities, education, experiences), intertextuality (e.g., information that a viewer brings to a text from other texts read previously), gaps in the text (e.g., information that is left out and that the reader must fill in), and silences in the text (e.g., voices of a person or group not heard). (p.62)

A significant aspect of critical literacy is determining multiple points of view, understanding context, and evaluating bias and missing voices in text. These aims attempt to achieve social justice in education through representing and appreciating many perspectives while situating the self amongst various identities in an equitable manner, so that no identity is omitted or treated as inferior.

Also in the OCH (2010) is a section called *Equity and Inclusive Education and Physical Education*, which states:

> In an environment based on the principles of inclusive education, all students, parents, and other members of the school community – regardless of ancestry, culture, ethnicity, sex, physical or intellectual ability, race, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, or other similar factors – are welcomed, included, treated fairly, and respected. Diversity is valued, and all members of the school community feel safe, comfortable, and accepted. (p.57)

Similarly, the OCL (2006) has a section entitled *Antidiscrimination Education in the Language Program* which states:

> The implementation of antidiscrimination principles in education influences all aspects of school life….It encourages staff and students alike to value and show respect for diversity in the school and the wider society. It requires schools to adopt measures to provide a safe environment for learning, free from harassment, violence, and expressions of hate. Antidiscrimination education encourages students to think critically about themselves and others in the world around them in order to promote fairness, healthy relationships, and active, responsible citizenship. (p.28)

This section continues to explain that, "In the context of antidiscrimination, critical literacy involves asking questions and challenging the status quo, and leads students to look at issues of power and justice in society" (p.29). This language encourages students to become engaged in promoting equity for all by thinking critically about their position among peers and "issues of power and justice."

The OCL (2006) and the OCH (2010) are the basis for what informs my research inquiry. After an investigation of outdated and updated curriculum documents of various subjects, these documents have been purposefully selected, as they are the most "information-rich" (Patton, 2002, p.230) and demonstrate observable changes in vocabulary regarding antidiscrimination education and equity and social justice compared to previous working documents. Furthermore, both documents contain sections dedicated to critical literacy and stress the importance of addressing multiple worldviews and identities within a critical literacy program.

Reflecting on my experience with the parent, and bridging my interests between social justice education and critical literacy, I began to question my role as an educator in

fostering dialogue among students regarding multiple points of view despite personal beliefs in the classroom and community. In cooperating with a parent who requested I silence the voices of queer identities, I began to question consciously omitting aspects of human identity and limiting students' constructions of knowledge. Is this a non-neutral stance? Who decides what perspectives or worldviews to offer children in a critical literacy program? Should critical literacy be an opportunity to provide a voice to students struggling with gender expression, sexual identity, or coming from families with same-sex parents? Are these students reflected in classroom literature? Do they see themselves as part of the classroom discourse?

As the OCL (2006) indicates in its introduction:

> Language is a fundamental element of identity and culture. As students read and reflect on a rich variety of literary, informational, and media texts, they develop a deeper understanding of themselves and others and of the world around them. If they see themselves and others in the texts they read and the oral and media works they engage in, they are able to feel that the works are genuinely for and about them and they come to appreciate the nature and value of a diverse, multicultural society. They also develop the ability to understand and critically interpret a range of texts and to recognize that a text conveys one particular perspective among many. (p.4)

Was omitting issues of gender identities and sexual orientation in the elementary classroom equitable or socially just? If language is "a fundamental element of identity" where students "develop a deeper understanding of themselves and others", leaving out aspects of identity could have detrimental consequences for how students come to

understand their identity and that of others. If a student does not feel that "works are genuinely for and about them" the student may come to understand that his or her identity lies outside of what is acceptable or normal.

Feeling silenced by the voice of a parent during my teaching experience, I wondered whether other teachers maintained a silence surrounding issues of gender and sexual identities in their pedagogies and how this affects students. If teachers are addressing gender and sexual orientation in the classroom, how do they incorporate these discussions? This struggle between serving social justice and accommodating personal and parental beliefs regarding gender identities and sexual orientation motivates my research. My research questions are as follows:

1. To what extent do teachers address sexual orientation and gender identities in their classrooms to reflect the modern health and language curricula?
2. What are the influences affecting whether and how teachers include or exclude material addressing sexual orientation and gender identities in pedagogical practices?

Framing the Research Problem

Curriculum documents are cultural artefacts that speak to the values and beliefs of a society at a particular moment. They are socially constructed texts that shape the knowledge that students will receive. Rothenberg (1993) describes the significance and impact curriculum choices have on student learning. Her comments potently remind us that:

> The curriculum is enormously powerful. It defines what is real and what is unreal, what counts and what is unimportant, who or what is normal and natural

> versus who or what is abnormal or deviant. It determines where the margins or peripheries are and who occupies them. It has the power to teach us what to see and the power to render people, places, things, and even entire cultures invisible. (p.1)

Debate over what should or should not be included in curriculum is ongoing. As recently as 2010, the original health curriculum—*Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1 – 8: Health and Physical Education, Revised* (2010)[1]—that was scheduled for printing was held back and revised due to lobbying from conservative groups which deemed its content regarding gender and sexual orientation inappropriate. Expectations such as the following, under a heading of *Human Development and Sexual Health*, were removed:

> Assess the effects of stereotypes, including homophobia and assumptions regarding gender roles and expectations, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity or culture, mental health, and abilities, on an individual's self-concept, social inclusion, and relationships with others, and propose appropriate ways of responding to and changing assumptions and stereotypes. (p.164)

The heading *Human Development and Sexual Health* was also omitted and the section entitled *Growth and Development* from the 1998 document was left intact.

Recognizing the tensions surrounding inclusion of gender and sexual orientation in elementary curriculum, it is significant to note how the rest of the revised OCH (2010), as well as the revised OCL (2006), frame aspects of equity and social justice in reference to

[1] This document was replaced by the *Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1-8: Health and Physical Education, Revised Interim Edition* (2010).

gender identity and sexual orientation, among other categories of identity. In contrast to the older OCL (1997) and OCH (1998), neither of which made reference to sexual orientation or gender, nor did they address diversity, antidiscrimination, or issues of social justice, these revised documents reflect changes in our society and how we are constructing our reality. This shift in discourse showcases the political stance Ontario is taking, alongside other recent political decisions such as the legalization of same-sex marriage, or Anti-bullying Bill 13, which allows the existence and naming of Gay-Straight Alliance groups in all Ontario high schools.

In addition to the changes occurring in curriculum, teachers and administration are now required to address sex- and gender-based bullying and harassment in Ontario based on school policy legislation. The Ontario Ministry of Education Code of Conduct (2007) indicates that all members of the school community must "respect and treat others fairly, regardless of their race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age or disability" (Standards of Behaviour section, bullet 5). On June 4, 2007, the *Education Amendment Act – Progressive Discipline and School Safety* was passed; it reinforces the Code of Conduct by ensuring proper steps are taken to deal with students who do not contribute positively to the safe atmosphere of the school (Ministry of Education, 2007).

Changes made to curriculum and policy regarding issues of social justice and equity are only significant if teachers actively engage these issues in their classrooms. Kumashiro (2003) notes that curriculum is "what we teach" while pedagogy is "how we teach" (p.7). Research needs to investigate curriculum, as well as how it is implemented. Evaluating curriculum without evaluating pedagogy misses a crucial element of teaching.

If the Ontario Ministry of Education is prioritizing 'antidiscrimination education' and 'equity and inclusive education' in the OCL (2006) and OCH (2010) respectively, it seems the next logical step in this process is inquiring whether teachers' pedagogies also reflect these priorities.

Examining elementary teachers' pedagogies regarding the inclusion of gender and sexual identities, as well as how they discuss issues of social justice and equity is important because of their direct impact on the views and beliefs legitimized in our schools and perpetuated by students in formative years. A great deal of research identifies the harassment many students experience based on expressions of gender identities or assumed sexuality (Kehily, 2002; Kehler, 2007, 2009, 2010; Kumashiro, 2002, 2003; Martino, 1995, 2001, 2006, 2009; Pascoe, 2008; Thorne, 1993).

Gender expression is crucial to the construction of one's identity. Masculinity, for example, must be delicately constructed to portray the right amount of 'masculine' traits to be accepted as a 'real man', and not a 'wimp' or 'sissy'. Thorne (1993) writes that the label "sissy" suggests that a boy has ventured too far into the contaminating "feminine" (p.111). She continues: "Put simply, a sissy is a person whose character, interests, and behaviour partake too much of qualities, such as timidity, passivity, and dependence, that are stereotyped as childish, and as female" (p.116). Furthermore, being deemed a 'wimpy man' is inextricably linked to assumptions about one's sexuality. A correlation is often made between wimpy men and homosexual men, where both groups are often socially ranked outside the accepted identity of 'manhood'. In an analysis of how homophobic remarks have contributed to many high school shootings, Kimmel and Mahler (2003) illustrate how homophobia has become not only the discomfort felt

towards homosexuality, but also "the terror that others will see one as gay, as a failed man" (p.1446). Similarly, Thorne writes, "In short, a 'sissy' is a failed male" (p.116). As a result, it becomes common practice among men to ensure a strong *performance* of masculinity to *pass* as a real man and avoid oppressive consequences. This specific focus on masculinity and its relationship with homosexuality is particularly interesting to me, and remains a prominent theme within my research.

As Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli (2003) write, homophobia "is about heterosexuality and normalization – it is about compulsory heterosexuality" (p.75). This dichotomy between homosexuality and heterosexuality places homosexuality as a deviant expression of sexuality in contrast to heterosexuality. The expectation that heterosexuality is the norm is referred to as heteronormative; heterosexuality is naturalized and any other sexual expression is situated as 'other'.

The roots of the term 'compulsory heterosexuality' are in feminist theory, as Rich (1980) argues heterosexuality is an institution that upholds men's power over women, convincing women they are to be reliant on men economically and to serve men sexually. She suggests that heterosexuality "needs to be recognized and studied as a *political institution"* (p.182) and, further, that it is a "man-made institution" (p.182) and "women have been convinced that marriage and sexual orientation toward men are inevitable" (p.185). She notes, "One of many means of enforcement is, of course, the rendering invisible of the lesbian possibility" (p.191). Similarly, homosexual relationships between men are thought to be sexually deviant and unacceptable in heteronormative discourse, which maintains the power held by heterosexuals, and, specifically, versions of masculinity that maintain power over women. This dominant form of masculinity, or

hegemonic masculinity, perpetuates stereotypes such as males being aggressive, enjoying sports, and dating women. Dalley-Trim (2007) suggests hegemonic masculinity is the version of masculinity at the top of a hierarchy of masculinities; those who exhibit this dominant form of masculinity claim the highest status and therefore exercise great influence and authority among other men about what it means to be a "real man" (p.201).

Butler (1990) describes this relationship between gender and heterosexuality through the "heterosexual matrix", or:

> a hegemonic discursive/epistemological model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality. (p.151)

In this way, heteronormativity maintains normative gender roles in a binary structure of masculinity and femininity, where each identity category consists of various behavioural and physical traits specific to each construct. The pressure to fit within social categories of gender and sexuality are upheld through hegemonic or dominant practices that are privileged in a hierarchical structure.

Martino (2009) notes teachers can challenge masculinities, notions of gender norms, and homophobia, thereby addressing harassment as well as boys' school performance through literacy. Martino (2001) indicates how pressures to perform various masculinities over others is a significant factor in boys' literacy achievement, as doing well in school, particularly in literacy, is not part of the 'acceptable' masculine code among boys.

Under constant self-regulation and peer surveillance, it can be difficult for a student to be true to who he or she is when surrounded by fear about abnormal or unacceptable identity (Epstein, 1997; Heasley, 2005; Kehily, 2002; Kehler, 2007; Kimmel, 2004; Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2001, 2003, 2005; Renold, 2004; Robinson, 2005). Recognizing the pressures experienced by youth who exhibit non-normative gender or sexual identities illustrates the significance for educators to teach in socially just ways by addressing gender and sexual orientation and the discourses that surround these identities in the elementary classroom. As Meyer (2007) argues:

> By continuing to live within prescribed linguistic and behavioural 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 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. (p.24)

Queer theory provides a lens through which to interrogate the binaries of masculinity/femininity and homosexual/heterosexual. In disrupting discourses of normalcy, such as heteronormativity or hegemonic masculinity, Britzman (1995) articulates how queer theory illuminates "the production of normalization as a problem of culture and of thought" (p.154) and aims to "examine differential responses to the conditions of identities on terms that place as a problem the production of normalcy and

on terms that confound the intelligibility that produces the normal as the proper subject" (p.157). She argues queer theory offers "the rethinking of pedagogy and the rethinking of knowledge" (155), and with these possibilities in mind I use queer theory as a conceptual base for my study.

Queer Theory

Queer theory, a relatively young perspective in the academy, arose in the early 1990s to problematize the implied inherent stability of categories of identity like male and female. These ideas stem from poststructuralist and postmodern currents in the late 20th century where the subject is a product of discourse, both unstable and without essence (Jagose 1996; Plummer, 2011; Rodriguez, 2007). Queer theory recognizes the theoretical and political implications of the heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy and, in general, creates a "greater openness in the way we think through our categories" (Plummer, 2011, p. 201).

Queer theory refuses practices of 'normalcy' and socially established 'norms'. Butler (2004) notes that, "A norm operates within social practices as the implicit standard of *normalization*" (p.41). Her concept of normalization suggests:

> The norm governs intelligibility, allows for certain kinds of practices and action to become recognizable as such, imposing a grid of legibility on the social and defining the parameters of what will and will not appear within the domain of the social. (p.42)

Norms are established through social behaviours and discourses. For example, students come to understand normative behaviours for girls and boys through units such as sexual health or puberty, which are often delivered within a heteronormative

framework. A book that attempts to widen students' understandings of sexuality, attraction, and gender is "It's Perfectly Normal" by Harris (1994). The book stresses that all aspects of sexual health, changing bodies, and heterosexual and homosexual desire are natural and normal, hence its title that attempts to redefine what is considered normal. Given the omission of the section *Human Development and Sexual Health* from the OCH (2010), it is evident that controversy remains about what should be addressed in schools, and unfortunately, books like these are rarely used in schools. As a result, specific norms such as heterosexuality are reinforced and specific topics are made 'acceptable'; furthermore, children are socialized to understand this knowledge.

Children are continually navigating the parameters of 'normal' as they attempt to stay inside the boundaries of what is deemed 'acceptable' behaviour amongst their peers and not be labeled as 'other'. Consequently, students learn very quickly how to self-regulate 'performance' of social norms to ensure they blend seamlessly into the crowd. This notion of performance is attributed to the works of Judith Butler.

Butler's research informs my research as she examines the intersection between gender and heterosexuality within the context of queer theory. Her articulation of gender as a social construction and performance has important implications for how gender is understood and how discourses of normalcy are maintained. She describes how "gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self" (p.402). Butler (1993) argues that performance is not a singular act, but rather "it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of

norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition" (p.12).

As an institution, school is a social environment where gender performances are reproduced and enacted every day. As early as kindergarten, children begin to perpetuate gender binaries and make decisions about what is 'boy' and what is 'girl'. Students who exhibit behaviours or appearances that do not seem to represent 'normative' gender identities or sexuality often face oppression and what Meyer (2008) has called "gendered harassment" (p.555).

Queer theory is helpful in unpacking the social constructions of 'boy' and 'girl', and identifying how each category is merely a collection of gender codes that signify either 'performing boy' or 'performing girl'. Meyer (2007) argues:

> 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…All individuals are constrained by these gender codes. (p.19)

Similarly, Bailey (1993) writes about the visible markers that are used to define gender. She notes, "Research on play behaviours suggests that young children rely heavily on visible markers to indicate maleness or femaleness, basing their judgements on hair length, the presence or absence of hair adornments, clothing, jewellery, and make-up" (p.27). In recognizing that gender is not something you are, but rather something you do and portray, educators can disrupt the stereotypes that are reinforced in school environments where these performances take place. As Meyer suggests, "Queer theory

offers educators a lens through which [they] can transform their praxis so as to explore and celebrate the tensions and new understandings created by teaching new ways of seeing the world" (p.15). Furthermore, Britzman (1995) argues queer theory "offers methods of critiques to mark the repetitions of normalcy as a structure and as a pedagogy" (p.153). She continues by praising queer theory for creating opportunity in education to imagine difference, investigate knowledge versus ignorance, and deconstruct "hegemonic discourses of normalcy" (p.154).

While queer theory has been critiqued for the inclusion of heterosexuality within a discourse of non-normative sexualities (Rodriguez, 2007), Butler demonstrates how queer theory utilizes heterosexuality and the norms shaped within it as a means to challenge identities and institutions that reinforce these limiting discourses of normalcy. Butler challenges the sex/gender divide through her articulation of the heterosexual matrix, and in understanding how heterosexuality frames certain ways of doing 'boy' or 'girl'.

Critical Literacy and Queer Pedagogy

Accepting that norms are socially constructed and govern a way of being and interacting that establishes acceptable and unacceptable identities, Britzman (1995; 2003) suggests that the production of 'normalization' and the repetition of these normalizing practices need to be disrupted through 'queer pedagogy'. She defines it as:

> one that refuses normal practices and practices of normalcy, one that begins with an ethical concern for one's *own* reading practices, one that is interested in exploring what one cannot bear to know, one interested in the imaginings of a sociality unhinged from the dominant conceptual order. (p.165)

Queer pedagogy is a pedagogy that addresses issues of equity and social justice; all identities are represented, contextually understood, and situated among diverse cultural perspectives and world-views. It challenges discourses that frame social categories and position some individuals as outside the 'norm'.

Critical literacy investigates the voices missing from a text and what stereotypes and biases are perpetuated within it. Furthermore, it asks students to remain conscious of the author's perspective, their own perspective, and the many perspectives espoused by their peers. While critical literacy recognizes the multiplicity of identities, queer pedagogy complements critical literacy through deconstructing binary thinking about identities (i.e., boy versus girl, heterosexual versus homosexual) and disrupts these categories that limit the spectrum of gender and sexual identities. Britzman (2003) illuminates the complex relationship between learning to teach and impacting education itself. She explains how learning to teach is an individual experience, yet teaching is socially negotiated and political in nature. Teaching has the power to challenge discourses of normalcy and contribute towards social justice. The OCL (2006) A*ntidiscrimination Education in the Language Program* states, "Critical literacy involves asking questions and challenging the status quo" (p.29). Kumashiro (2002) argues, however, that "disruptive knowledge" can be unsettling and lead to a "pedagogy of crisis" (p.63), and further:

> education is not something that involves comfortably repeating what we already learned or affirming what we already know. Rather, education involves learning something that disrupts our commonsense view of the world. The crisis that results from unlearning, then, is a necessary and desirable part of anti-oppressive

education. Desiring to learn involves desiring difference and overcoming our resistance to discomfort. (p.63)

Queer pedagogy suggests that educators embrace the discomfort that may accompany disrupting 'normal' practices, and encourages a reading of texts that challenge us to suspend what we consider common-sense, so that we may come to appreciate the social construction of these understandings and dialogue about the many worldviews that exist. Within this process, heteronormative discourse can be understood as an oppressive social structure that limits identities.

Anti-Oppressive Education

Kumashiro (2003) strives to articulate the challenge and the responsibility educators have to teach critically with astute awareness of the social structures that oppress individuals. He identifies this method of instruction as anti-oppressive education, where oppressive structures are identified and disrupted. He argues we must consider the frameworks we use to contemplate difference, and comments, "If the traditional frameworks for thinking and identifying and acting in this world (that privilege certain groups) remain stable in the curriculum, then merely including differences into that framework will not change binaries in society" (p.6). He suggests we must also look at "how the processes of inclusion and exclusion require that people enact identities (and be 'who they are') in normative ways" (p.5).

Many students and adults alike make significant efforts to maintain certain identities in social environments such as school institutions to avoid harassment or unwanted assumptions; however, if the silence surrounding the social discourse that leads

to self-regulation and performativity could be disrupted, a dialogue could occur that would disrupt normalization of certain identities over others. As Butler (1993) notes:

> Performativity cannot be understood outside of a process of iterability, a regularized and constrained repetition of norms. And this repetition is not performed *by* a subject; this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject. This iterability implies that 'performance' is not a singular 'act' or event, but a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint… (p.95)

Upon recognizing that performances of gender require constant construction and repetition of norms, educators can empower students to create new, acceptable discourses and norms. Meyer (2007) argues, "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" (p.24); furthermore, she writes:

> 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…In order to move past this, teachers must learn to see schooling as a place to question, explore, and seek alternative explanations. (p.27)

Kumashiro (2000) suggests that antioppressive education has four perspectives: education for the other, education about the other, education that is critical of privileging and othering, and education that changes students and society (p.25). Education for the other calls on institutions such as school to provide various spaces that accommodate

oppressed individuals in different ways. He argues for safe spaces, separate spaces, supportive spaces, and empowering spaces. He emphasizes, however, that educators cannot simply focus on the treatment of oppressed individuals, but also must recognize "ways in which oppression plays out in schools" as well as how students are "marginalized on the basis of more than one identity" (p.29). He argues that sometimes efforts to focus on the oppressed in fact lead to a perspective that "tends to view the Other as the problem" so by understanding oppressive structures and challenging the ways institutions frame issues of social justice, we can pay attention to discourse and spaces that educate and serve the needs of all students.

In educating about the other, Kumashiro (2000) focuses on ways that schools contribute to a partial knowledge about marginalized individuals that perpetuates stereotypes and myths. He argues for understanding what society defines as 'normal' or 'normative' and for assisting students to grasp different ways of being. He notes, however, that we must be careful when developing this knowledge not to situate the 'other' as the expert; instead, he suggests, "students need to learn that what is being learned can never tell the whole story" (p.34). In refusing an 'us' versus 'them' binary, he argues the goal of knowledge is not satisfaction and verification, but disruption and change in recognition of knowledge as neither homogenous or static.

Education that is critical of privileging and othering appreciates the complexity of identities and the intersectionalities of oppression. Kumashiro (2000) notes it is important for students and teachers alike to

> examine not only how some groups and identities are Othered, that is, marginalized, denigrated, violated in society, but also how some groups are

> favoured, normalized, privileged, as well as how this dual process is legitimized and maintained by social structures and competing ideologies. (p.35-36)

In this way, students may come to understanding the ways they contribute to forms of oppression when they privilege certain identities over others.

When students learn to recognize their role in challenging oppressive structures and participating in queer pedagogy that unsettles common-sense understandings, they can be led towards action and social change or, as Kumashiro (2000) writes, "education that changes students and society" (p.40). In this last perspective on anti-oppressive education, students and teachers can interrupt the hierarchy between heterosexuality and homosexuality, and the binary categories of boy and girl, by working against repetitious performances that reinforce normative discourse and oppressed identities.

Thesis Overview

This thesis examines elementary teachers' pedagogies in relation to personal attitudes and beliefs about the inclusion of gender and sexual identities in the elementary classroom. In reviewing recent curricular changes made specifically to the OCL (2006) and the OCH (2010), it is clear that issues of equity and social justice are a priority in today's classrooms. Data indicates various factors influence teachers' ability to address non-normative gender or sexual orientation in the classroom. The largest factor expressed by participants is the cultural or religious diversity that influence parental beliefs about the inappropriateness of addressing such material in the classroom.

Chapter One outlines how heteronormative discourse creates a dichotomy between heterosexuality and homosexuality, as well as gender normative categories of male and female. I articulate how these structures are oppressive for youth who question

their sexuality, exhibit non-normative expressions of gender, or are raised by same-sex parents. These issues are important in light of the bullying and harassment these students experience.

Social justice and equity calls on educators not only to disrupt norms and use literature in their classrooms more reflective of the possible spectrum of identities, but to teach children the skills to understand issues of power and justice and their role in contributing to or deconstructing socially constructed categories of identity. Critical literacy empowers children to be active citizens in anti-oppressive education, and recognize multiple world-views. Queer theory offers a method to challenge discourses of normalcy such as heterosexuality, masculinity, or femininity, and disrupt binary ways of thinking about identity, while queer pedagogy brings these aims to the classroom. The work of authors such as Butler (1993, 1997, 2004), Britzman (1995, 2003), and Kumashiro (2000, 2002, 2003), contribute to this discourse and inform my research.

Chapter Two consists of a literature review of research studies that frame my work. I begin by examining research that illustrates how heteronormativity operates within the school. I then move to studies that explore teachers' pedagogical practices and beliefs surrounding gender and sexual orientation in the classroom. Last, this chapter focuses on studies that examine the relationship between homophobia and violence and the consequences that result from heteronormative discourses.

Chapter Three explains my methodology and study design, as well as my approach to data analysis by drawing on queer theory. In recognizing gender and gender norms as social constructions, a social constructionist approach is used to analyze data

through highlighting the teachers' role in contributing to social discourse and knowledge. I also acknowledge self-reflexivity in data analysis in interpreting data through this lens.

Chapter Four presents the data collected from participants via interviews, observations, and field notes. Meaningful interpretations have been expressed through various themes: heteronormativity, critical literacy, and pedagogical practices. In particular, participants shared understandings of gender and sexual orientation in the elementary classroom, and the prime factor influencing such discussions: parents. In a discussion about social justice and equity in education, I have outlined various issues faced by participants.

Chapter Five provides conclusions, as well as an overall discussion reviewing the implications of this work and recommendations for future research.

Chapter Summary

Beginning by situating myself and how my interests in equity and social justice in elementary education arose, I have expressed the relationship between social justice and critical literacy. Through my experience gained as a classroom teacher, I developed an understanding of critical literacy and the opportunities for equitable discussion in the classroom. Upon further investigation of the curriculum documents, I became particularly aware of the changes made to the OCL (2006) and OCH (2010) and how the Ministry of Education is prioritizing issues of social justice and equity.

Research indicates how heteronormative discourse permeates elementary schools and the impact this has on individuals who do not conform to gender norms or normative sexual identities. Furthermore, as changes are occurring regarding legal rights for gay and lesbian couples and marriage, the school population of students and parents is

increasingly diverse. This change in the student and home community population is important and powerful, particularly as teachers begin navigating the curricular demands and respond to the demands of parents and students from complex and diverse backgrounds.

Queer theory disrupts the binary structures of male/female and homosexual/heterosexual that establish gender roles and heteronormative environments that are oppressive to individuals who do not fit into these social categories. Teachers play an active role in fostering environments that allow for critical discourse through queer pedagogy and anti-oppressive education, and must be reflective of their own practice, opinions, and values, and how this affects the dynamics of the classroom. Rodriguez (2007) proposes that straight teachers become aware of their straightness through "queer critical care" which he defines as:

> the practice by which the straight self begins to understand and respond to the complex processes of heterosexual subjection and the ontological and epistemological limitations such subjection creates for living an ethical and more free life, both in relation to itself and in its relations with the GLBTQ 'Other.' (p.282)

Acknowledging that teachers' attitudes and beliefs directly affect their teaching pedagogies, it becomes significant to inquire how teachers feel about addressing non-normative sexualized and gendered identities in the elementary classroom. Posner (2010) highlights the interaction between a teacher's beliefs and the political nature of the classroom:

> The saying 'actions speak louder than words' might well have been written to describe the effects of teaching. Any teacher's perspective, if implemented, has consequences for learners. Teachers act in certain ways, based on their beliefs and on contextual constraints, and learners interpret a teacher's actions in both intended and unintended ways. The unintended meanings learners derive from a teacher's actions are part of the school's 'hidden curriculum'. (pp.72-73)

My research investigates how queer theory can impact classroom instruction and dialogue about knowledge and understandings through queer pedagogy. Critical literacy offers opportunities to read texts in ways that detect points of view and stereotypes that marginalize and oppress various identities. Queer pedagogy examines heteronormative school environments that privilege heterosexual identities and create gender roles of boy and girl within the framework of heterosexuality. In learning to disrupt social constructions of gender and normative sexuality, students become critically engaged in social justice and equity through opening up the possibilities for identity and disrupting oppressive structures.

In education for and about the other, and calling on educators and students to recognize the ways structures and discourse serve to oppress and marginalize some groups while privileging others, anti-oppressive education supports queer pedagogy with a call for action. Kumashiro (2000) writes, "Knowledge is but the first step of a larger process. Also necessary are thinking skills that students can use to formulate effective plans of action…Thus, when students have both knowledge about oppression and critical thinking skills they will be 'empowered' to challenge oppression" (p.37).

Chapter Two – Providing a Context: The Literature Review

Significant literature exists in the field concerning pedagogical issues related to addressing gender and sexual orientation in schools. The majority of studies outline the barriers that teachers face in working with this material, while others report situations where teachers were able to incorporate this content successfully into the classroom. A limited number of studies focus on gender and sexuality studies at the elementary level. Griffin and Ouellett (2010) outline historical trends in addressing queer issues in K-12 schools and suggest research is still needed on "the impact of school policy, practice, and curriculum on gender non-conforming children and how homophobic name-calling is used in elementary schools to enforce normative gender expression" (p.111).

This chapter begins by outlining some of the issues created in schools that operate within a heterosexual framework. The next section explores research that investigates pedagogical practices and how they are connected to teachers' beliefs and attitudes and, further, why it is critical teachers' experiences regarding addressing gender and sexual orientation at the elementary level are explored. Last, this chapter concludes with a brief overview of some of the harassment and violence that occurs on account of homophobic attitudes and pressures of 'acceptable' gender performances.

Heteronormativity and School Institutions

Petrovic and Rosiek (2007) identify how the concept of normal can imply that the opposite is deviant, and note, "The privileged categories in these oppositions are rendered invisible to the discourse community when it is normalized, while the marginalized or deviant category is rendered visible, but is malignantly ignored" (p.213). This standard of normalization results in many individuals feeling oppressed and outside the realm of

'normal' and unable to 'perform' acceptably; this often results in bullying and harassment (Butler, 1997; Kehler & Martino, 2007; Kumashiro, 2000, 2002; Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2001, 2003, 2005; Meyer, 2009). Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2001) identify the practices of self-regulation and surveillance that occur among young people as they learn to fashion themselves amongst their peers (p.87). Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli (2003) report interviews from students about "passing as straight" and draw attention to "how heteronormativity and homophobia in schools construct boundaries and hierarchies in regard to sexual identity and gendered classifications that impact upon self-ascription for boys" (p.88). Furthermore, Herr (1997) succinctly summarizes that "'passing' as heterosexual is one way to survive a hostile culture. As long as gays and lesbians are effectively hidden, the heterosexist culture can proceed unchallenged" (p.58).

Studies by Kehler (2007; 2009; 2010) illustrate these performances occurring in schools among boys. Kehler (2010) notes that, "Schools are sites in which gender is actively performed and negotiated in different contexts to protect or maintain gendered identities while deflecting public scrutiny or criticism" (p.353). A significant portion of his research is dedicated to understanding how boys negotiate masculinities in high school settings such as the boys' locker room, and the interplay between boys' bodies and behaviours that boys enact in efforts to maintain respect in their peer groups.

Vavrus (2008) examines elementary and secondary experiences of teacher candidates. Through auto-ethnographic narratives interpreted via categorical analysis, various themes emerged that spoke to sexuality and gender identification. Vavrus indicates:

> All of the teacher candidates wrote about experiencing both subtle and direct expectations to behave according to traditionally prescribed gender roles. Breaking out of those roles risked being ridiculed by peers and labelled deviant, what one heterosexual male described recalling as early as 2nd grade as 'gender anxiety.' (p.386)

Stories recounting experiences like this demonstrate the pressures that exist in school to perform gender acceptably. It is evident these performances begin early.

Thorne (1993) uses the term "gender play" (p.5) to describe the ways that children establish gender binaries and exhibit peer surveillance in maintaining gender roles in elementary school through play, thereby establishing at this level a great deal of the heteronormativity experienced. Thorne writes:

> In preschools and kindergartens, girls more often gravitate to housekeeping corners and doll-play, and boys to the area with large blocks and toy cars and trucks. But note that this sort of commonsense example may well presuppose what it sets out to explain; if girls and boys, starting at relatively young ages, are given different toys and exposed to gender stereotypes, forces have already been set in motion that would result in loosely differentiated interests and perhaps even separate gender subcultures. (p.57)

She later argues, "Same- and mixed-gender groups structure the early forms of active heterosexuality, and they assert an increasingly vocal taboo against other forms of sexuality. By fourth and fifth grades, 'fag' has become a widespread and serious term of insult" (p.154). Her research fully supports "the view that gender is socially constructed" (p.3) and children are "*socialized* into existing gender arrangements" (p.2).

Bailey (1993) explores children's conceptions of gender and how much children understand about what are 'girl things' and 'boy things' from a very early age. Her research involved the use of four children's stories that featured non-normative expressions of gender, followed by conversations with kindergarten and grade one students about their understandings of gender and their feelings about aspects of the stories that pushed gender norms. Data revealed children's distinct play behaviours, social relationships and rules between the two genders, as well as a reliance on visible markers of gender.

Blaise (2009) observed children in a kindergarten class and reports the degree children express sexuality through their interactions with peers. Children re-enact what they have garnered from the media and the adults in their lives, and learn very quickly what performances get awarded with attention and praise. She outlines a scenario in which a six year old girl sung *Genie in a Bottle* by Christina Aguilera, followed by a discussion with the group of five and six year old children about the content of the song. The children suggest that she is singing about wanting a boyfriend, and tell Blaise that to get a boyfriend you have to be pretty, even sexy, and they discuss what pretty looks like (p.454). Blaise draws from this research to suggest

> children are neither ignorant nor naïve about what girls want and what they need in current times. They believe in heterosexual desire, and this is evident through their talk and actions…These understandings restrict possibilities for both girls and boys, and they clearly show how heteronormativity is part of the early childhood classroom. (p.458)

She argues children and teachers actively construct these understandings and that teachers can intervene and challenge certain behaviours and help students think critically.

A study by Renold (2000) investigates how primary school develops gendered and sexualized identities within a context of compulsory heterosexuality; she illustrates how heterosexuality is experienced by primary school children and how this frames the gendered categories of what it is to be a boy or girl. She notes that gender and sexual identities co-exist, as the portrayal of what is deemed acceptable boy or girl behaviour supports a heterosexual framework or "heterosexual matrix", as Butler (1990) calls it. Renold interviewed several students in year six in Britain, and found they had an astute awareness of attractiveness related to the opposite sex, that all gossip was heterosexual in nature, and all children positioned themselves as heterosexual. Students were also able to identify various categories within gender, identifying among the girls, *tarts, girlie girls,* and *tomboys.* Renold concludes her article by noting how, "The pressures of compulsory heterosexuality to conform have particularly damaging consequences for those boys and girls who are positioned as Other to the normalising and regulatory (heterosexual) gendered scripts" (p.324).

Check (2002) describes a first grade boy who was verbally harassed by another boy regarding the use of pink scissors. He uses this story as a metaphor representing "inadequate models for how men must act to be masculine" (p.46). He explains throughout the article how boys in elementary through to high school learn how important performances of masculinity are to their well-being and social value. He makes suggestions for lessons and strategies in the classroom to examine teaching bias, and breaks his discussion into three sections: attitudes and behaviours, use of language,

and evaluating curriculums for bias (p.48). He concluded that teachers cannot ignore misogyny and homophobia in their classrooms.

These studies illustrate the role teachers play in intervening in children's 'gender play', validating non-conformist behaviour, and disrupting binaries and stereotypes that continue to shape school environments well into high school. Heteronormative environments cause many children to feel unable to successfully perform gender in normal and acceptable ways leading to teasing, isolation from peer groups, and often harassment about perceived sexuality. How teachers respond to these issues surrounding gender norms and sexual orientation requires investigation.

Pedagogical Practices and Teacher Beliefs

Cahill and Adams (1997) investigate teachers' attitudes toward gender roles, reporting comments and beliefs from teachers about children's play behaviours, gender presentations, and sexual orientation. It was recommended that future research should focus on teachers' attitudes towards homosexuality and gender roles, and how teachers actually behave and interact with children who engage in "cross-gender" play (p.527). Thorne (1993) notes several ways by which teachers influence mixed gender relationships, such as classroom seating, assigned or unassigned group-work, routines of lining up, lunchroom routines, and playground activity.

Subsequent research has shown that teachers' pedagogies are developed from teachers' attitudes and beliefs (Birden, 2002; Britzman, 2003; Kehily, 2002; Kumashiro, 2002; Meyer, 2009). If teachers do not feel that discussions about gender, masculinities, and sexual orientation need to occur, or vary on opinion as to the level in education at

which these discussions should occur, then teachers may not include this content in their teaching programs.

Meyer (2009) outlines a portion of her research between 2003 and 2008 when she conducted open-ended interviews across Canada and the United States, exploring how secondary teachers perceived and responded to issues of 'gendered harassment'. Her data indicates information about school cultures and the formal and informal influences that impact *how* teachers feel and *what* teachers feel they can do about gendered harassment. Formal aspects included education and training policies, whereas informal factors referred to administrators' style and values, policy implementation, interpersonal relations with colleagues, students, and parents, as well as surrounding community values. Meyer explains how each of these influences often act as barriers to dealing with gendered harassment and how these can have a direct impact on teachers' own attitudes and beliefs. In her discussions with teachers who claimed a desire to diminish "gendered harassment", Meyer reports:

> In spite of this personal commitment, they felt limited in their actions by a perceived lack of support from the administration and/or their colleagues. They also reported feeling isolated in addressing the problem of homophobic name-calling in particular, stating that it was too prevalent an issue in their school for them to tackle alone. The lack of intervention by colleagues and the lack of demonstrated support from the administration resulted in many of these teachers giving up and limiting their interventions to only the most severe offenses. (p.43)

Britzman (2003) echoes how novice teachers' good intentions often quickly change or become supressed because of these informal influences:

> Student teachers do not set out to collude with authoritarian pedagogy. Nor do they desire to suppress their own subjectivity or those of their students. Just the opposite: they usually begin with intentions of enhancing student potential and find this intention thwarted by socially patterned school routines….Institutional constraints become lived practices. (p.236)

In line with this claim, Robinson and Ferfolja (2001) investigate pre-service teachers' attitudes and beliefs about addressing sexual orientation in school and indicate the difficulties many teachers experience that contribute to a feeling of resistance in addressing such issues. They suggest "giving a focus to sexuality and deconstructing and problematizing heterosexuality in the process is often read by some students and colleagues as a means of pushing one's own personal agenda" and some participants expressed a feeling of "vulnerability" in doing so, and held back from addressing these perceived controversial issues (p.131).

Hermann-Wilmarth (2007) writes to "help future teachers become fully inclusive teachers, particularly of early elementary students" (p.347). She is a lesbian parent and shares her concerns regarding her two-year old eventually attending school. She argues that literature is an excellent opportunity to bring conversations about gender and sexual orientation into classrooms, and notes the significance of doing so, not just for "the children living in homes headed by same-gender couples, but also for the students who will be harassed in middle and high school because of their perceived gay or lesbian identities" (p.347). However, in her experiences teaching pre-service educators and listening to their concerns and reservations about facilitating such discussions, she claims, "There is much work to be done" (p.347). She outlines some of the difficulties teachers

encounter when considering the topics of gender and sexual orientation in the classroom such as a lack of resources available in school libraries, a dominance of heterosexism in schools, and how many teachers are passive to changing norms and how some teachers believe elementary students are too innocent and naïve to be discussing sexual and gendered identities. Hermann-Wilmarth concludes her article stressing the role teachers play, especially those teaching teachers, in creating the possibilities for conversations to occur (p.351).

Martino and Cumming-Potvin (2011) conducted a study in Australia that investigates elementary school teachers' pedagogical approaches to addressing same-sex parenting and non-normative sexuality. Their research involved selecting several children's literature books that incorporated gay or lesbian relationships, and asking elementary teachers how they felt about using such materials in their classrooms. Their data indicates that while some teachers were comfortable using some of the books, they preferred the ones that were subtle in their reference to sexual orientation, where it was not as "in your face", as one teacher put it (p.16). Other times, the teachers were not as comfortable using certain texts and raised concerns, such as upsetting conservative parents, questioning the age-appropriateness of the material, and fear of promoting the "gay agenda" (p.486). Martino and Cumming-Potvin suggest there is room for further reflection on "the relationship between teacher beliefs and the pedagogical implications for addressing same-sex parenting within the critical literacy classroom" (p.23).

Blackburn and Buckley (2005) conducted a similar study in the United States to inquire whether high schools were using materials that addressed 'same-sex desire', as they called it, in the English language arts curriculum and, if so, what was being used and

how. The study used a random stratified sampling of 600 public high schools from which the authors received data from 212. Results indicated that only 18 schools "use texts, films, or other materials addressing same-sex desire in their English language arts curriculum" (p.205). Upon further investigation, however, the researchers claim that teachers were "failing their adolescent students" due to the material presenting "limited, and often troubling, views of LGBTQ people" (p.205). Even more discouraging is recognizing that 194 respondents said they do not use materials that even address same-sex desire.

Sieben, Wallowitz, and Gardner (2009) review success stories from teachers who have made conscious efforts to address sexual orientation and gender education at the secondary level. While other accounts of successful pedagogical practices that address sexual orientation and gender can be found, it should also be noted that the majority of these studies focus on secondary classrooms.

Various studies point out the degree to which elementary schools foster gender binaries through play and heteronormative practices (Blaise, 2009; Casper, Cuffaro, Shultz, Silin, & Wickens, 1996; Cahill & Adams, 1997; Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2011; Renold, 2000; Thorne, 1993), yet teaching pedagogies need to be investigated to discover what elementary teachers are doing to challenge the social constructions that restrict the children's identities. Does acknowledging 'internal influences' and 'institutional constraints' justify neglecting sexual orientation and gender identities in the elementary classroom?

Pedagogy does not exist without an agenda, intentional or not. Teachers regularly make choices regarding the materials they use to supplement the material covered in

class. Through privileging middle class, Caucasian, or heterosexual identities and perspectives, others are left out. The OCH (2010) identifies the role that teacher attitudes and beliefs play in presenting classroom material, and includes the following recommendation:

> To increase their comfort level and their skill in teaching health and physical education and to ensure effective delivery of the curriculum, teachers should reflect on their own attitudes, biases, and values with respect to the topics they are teaching, and seek out current resources, mentors, and professional development and training opportunities, as necessary. (p.11)

Updated curriculum documents now call attention to teachers' pedagogical choices and recommend reflection upon what resources are utilized. For example, the OCL (2006) states:

> Students in Ontario come from a wide variety of backgrounds, each with his or her own set of perspectives, strengths, and needs. Instructional strategies and resources that recognize and reflect the diversity in the classroom and that suit individual strengths and needs are therefore critical to student success. (p.5)

Robinson and Ferfolja (2001) conclude, "There is a growing awareness and concern about the social inequalities faced by minority sexualities, especially in regard to violence and youth suicide" and stress the importance of pre-service teachers addressing social justice issues such as homophobia in the classroom (p.132). Birden (2002) describes a teaching pedagogy entitled "teaching with attitude" that suggests teachers reflect upon their own beliefs and practices and how their decisions impact students (pp.60-64). Research needs to examine elementary teachers' pedagogical practices and

whether sexual and gendered identities are included in or excluded from their teaching practices, as well as the reasoning behind these decisions.

Homophobia and Violence

In order to understand the importance of teachers addressing gender expression and sexual orientation in the classroom and disrupting norms and social constructions, reviewing data that reveals gender non-conforming students' experiences with harassment in schools is helpful.

According to EGALE (2011) Canada's Final Report on Homophobia, Biphobia, and Transphobia in Canadian Schools, the following statistics were gathered:

- 68% of trans students, 55% of female sexual minority students, and 42% of male sexual minority students reported being verbally harassed about their perceived gender or sexual orientation.
- 20% of LGBTQ students and almost 10% of non-LGBTQ students reported being physically harassed or assaulted about their perceived sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Almost two thirds (64%) of LGBTQ students and 61% of students with LGBTQ parents reported that they feel unsafe at school.

The study surveyed over 3 700 students from across Canada between December 2007 and June 2009. An open-ended online survey was distributed and advertised to reach students who identified as LGBTQ. The survey consisted of fifty-four questions, mostly multiple choice, regarding demographics, experiences, and institutional responses. Also, a parallel survey was distributed to all students in twenty randomly selected schools, and data was contrasted with the online survey to validate accuracy.

Students who may not be LGBTQ experience harassment and a great deal of bullying; these students are bullied because of a 'perceived' sexual orientation or due to coming from same-sex families. Some teachers fear that addressing gender and sexual orientation at the primary level is too soon or inappropriate; however, acknowledging and accepting diverse families as well as understanding stereotypes surrounding gender are two important aspects that require address in today's schools. Conversations about gender and sexual orientation can be understood by young children without a detailed explanation about these topics. Furthermore, students should not have to wait for a time in school when they can finally feel safe. A great deal of literature reports that students often attempt to make it through elementary and high school, hoping to experience better times ahead. The "It Gets Better" Campaign, initiated by Dan Savage, is a perfect example of this mentality[2].

A study by Erlandson (2004) shares the stories of four lesbian and gay students who graduated from Saskatchewan schools. One girl comments, "My experience at school was a BIG experience of silence….Teasing was always going on, directed toward me all the way up through elementary school and high school because I was different" (p.22). Another student describes feeling relieved in grade 12, "Well, it's going to be over in another year and I won't have to listen to that kind of stuff" (p.23). Participants described feeling isolated, having few friends and no role models. They knew they were different from a young age and reacted with silence to avoid confrontation. Erlandson notes that one student acknowledged wanting to talk about what was happening to him,

[2] The "It Gets Better Project" was initiated in September, 2010 by columnist Dan Savage who created a YouTube video to reach out to LGBT teenage youth being bullied in schools. For more information see Savage (2010).

but "the inherent risks he recognized in doing so resulted in him feeling that silence was his only option" (p.25). Students admitted other feelings as well like, "The whole time, especially grades 7 through 9, I just wanted to run away" (p.29), and, "It affected me academically because I was in a depression" (p.29), and, "I think the biggest problem is that I was depressed and suicidal" (p.29). These stories echo a consistent struggle for help, safety, and understanding, and the 2011 EGALE study reveals the same themes.

Kimmel and Mahler (2003) link some of the experiences of boys, in particular, who experienced bullying regarding non-conforming gender expression to acts of retaliatory violence and aggression. The paper reviews various school shootings across the United States and indicates, "All or most of the shooters had tales of being harassed – specifically, gay-baited – for inadequate gender performance; their tales are the tales of boys who did not measure up to the norms of hegemonic masculinity" (p.1440). The authors note, "Nearly all had stories of being mercilessly and constantly teased, picked on, and threatened. And most strikingly, it was *not* because they were gay…but because they were *different* from the other boys – shy, bookish, honor students, artistic, musical, theatrical, nonathletic, 'geekish', or weird" (p.1445). The importance of addressing gender expression and sexual orientation in schools is overwhelming upon listening to the stories and reports from non-normative youth and understanding the harassment these students experience as well as the violence that often results to non-normative youth and peer bystanders. It is necessary teachers realize the magnitude of this situation.

Chapter Summary

When gender and sexual orientation are not discussed in the classroom, teachers are reinforcing ideas of heteronormativity, and continuing to place gender non-

conforming students at the margins, leaving them feeling oppressed, isolated, and afraid. This chapter has outlined how schools create and reinforce heterosexual environments that result in students' self-regulating gender performances that reflect expectations of normalcy and acceptable masculine and feminine behaviours. Research shows that students understand gender binaries from a young age, and practice and police gender stereotypes through play, gender expression, and discourses of attraction towards the opposite sex. Research indicates the degree to which teachers' attitudes and beliefs impact pedagogical decisions and the difficulties experienced by some teachers, particularly pre-service teachers, in using materials that address sexual orientation and non-normative gender identities..

The last section of this chapter reviews the research that reveals students' experiences with homophobia and harassment, and illuminates the significance of assisting teachers to become comfortable and find ways to overcome barriers to address gender and sexual orientation in the classroom and, thereby, alleviate the suffering of so many struggling youth who exhibit non-normative gender expressions. The violence that occurs on account of perceived sexuality cannot be ignored. My research attempts to lift the silences surrounding teachers' pedagogies and open the possibility of more schools addressing gender and sexual orientation by understanding the experiences of select Ontario teachers regarding attitudes and beliefs about gender and sexual orientation in the curriculum and in the elementary classroom.

Chapter Three - Methodology and Data Analysis

This chapter explains how I approached my research, and collected and analysed data. Taking a social constructionist approach using understandings developed out of queer theory, I have conducted qualitative research that combines participant observation and in-depth interviews. The OCL (2006) and OCH (2010) documents serve as a point of triangulation with this data. Reviewing my research questions, I seek to understand:

1. To what extent do teachers address sexual orientation and gender identities in their classrooms to reflect the modern health and language curricula?
2. What are the influences affecting whether and how teachers include or exclude material addressing sexual orientation and gender identities in pedagogical practices?

As the preceding literature review details, understanding these questions is neither a linear nor systematic process, but requires awareness of many parts of the story that contribute to a holistic understanding of teachers' pedagogies. Teachers' classroom practices are not determined by the curriculum alone; teachers' attitudes and beliefs play a pivotal role in determining what resources are selected to enhance classroom instruction. Furthermore, teachers are affected by the parents and community surrounding the school, its administration, and larger school board policies and beliefs.

Queer theory offers a lens to view the interactions among these factors and how social structures and discourse affect teachers and students. As a social institution, the school plays a large role in reinforcing norms, binaries, and dominant identity categories. Teachers are implicated within these social practices; queer theory provides ways to

challenge ‘knowledge’ and enhance critical literacy programs through broadening our understandings of identities.

Due to the many factors that contribute to such a broad understanding, I cannot expect to comprehend any particular part of a teacher’s experience in a clear or quantitative way; instead, I aim to develop meaningful interpretations that are evident among complex qualitative data. Drawing from queer theory, this chapter explains how I gathered and analysed my data to gain rich insights regarding several teachers’ beliefs and pedagogical decisions. Last, I review some of the limitations of this research, given the sensitivity of the topic and the challenges posed to the research.

Methodology

I situate myself as a social constructionist and would like to take a moment to clarify my position. First, I will take this opportunity to distinguish between social constructionists and deconstructionists - as queer theorists are sometimes identified. While I view my role as a researcher to blur the lines of gender and identify how fixed categories of gender oppress individuals and create unnecessary harassment on the playground where children struggle to fit into socially prescribed categories, my role as a social constructionist is to look at the underlying structures that create these problems and how language creates identity categories. Queer theory provides a lens through which to investigate binary categories (e.g., boy and girl, heterosexual and homosexual) that create hierarchical structures. In order to deconstruct, we must understand the social constructs we are disrupting. Recognizing how social categories are culturally and historically situated enables individuals to disrupt the repetition of the norms and performances that contribute to these social constructions.

Secondly, it should be noted that social constructivism and social constructionism are often interchangeable terms. Gergen (1985) points out how social constructivism is also used in reference to a Piagetian theory, as well as a form of perceptual theory, and a 20th century art movement. The use of *constructionism* is an attempt to avoid these confusions (p.266). Furthermore, Patton (2002) uses the work of Crotty (1998) to distinguish these two terms because he uses *constructivism* to focus on the "meaning-making activity of the individual mind" and "the unique experiences of each of us", whereas *constructionism* focuses on "the collective [and transmission] of meaning" and "the hold our culture has on us", shaping the way we see things (p.58). Despite the use of the term *constructivism* in the table found in Denzin and Lincoln's (2011) *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research,* which outlines paradigms and perspectives for research, I have chosen to refer to my approach as social constructionism. While each student takes part in 'meaning-making' at the individual level, this is not separate from the influence of the collective meaning that is produced by the school through curriculum, teachers, and peer interactions. In other words, subjective experiences are constructed through the everyday lived experiences in the school environment itself.

According to Burr (1995), social constructionism can be described in the following ways:

> [It] insists that we take a critical stance towards our taken-for-granted ways of understanding the world (including ourselves). It invites us to be critical of the idea that our observations of the world unproblematically yield its nature to us, to challenge the view that conventional knowledge is based upon objective, unbiased observation of the world….Social constructionism cautions us to be ever

> suspicious of our assumptions about how the world appears to be. This means that the categories with which we as human beings apprehend the world do not necessarily refer to real divisions. (p.3)

Burr identifies that this paradigm views knowledge as constructed between people in our daily interactions and dialogue which are culturally and historically relative. She notes, "The particular forms of knowledge that abound in any culture are therefore artefacts of it" (p.4). With this in mind, it becomes clear how curriculum documents are artefacts of our social world, and what is considered knowledge, or valued as such, is indicative of the social priorities at the time.

For social constructionism, "Knowledge is not something people possess somewhere in their heads, but rather, something people do together" (Gergen, 1985, p.270). Similarly, Denzin and Lincoln (2011) note that knowledge is constructed through lived experiences and interactions; therefore, in conducting research, in-depth understandings of individuals' experiences are an important aspect of understanding how they construct knowledge. In combining observations that "yield detailed, thick description" with open-ended interviews "that capture direct quotations about people's personal perspectives and experiences" (Patton, 2002, p.40), my research provides rich understandings of the participants' individual realities. Interviews with teachers enabled me to understand teachers' experiences with curriculum and pedagogy and how they negotiate curriculum changes and the classroom. Observations completed the picture as I saw the language instruction itself and how teachers presented curriculum. These opportunities had a specific focus on seeking critical literacy practices as an occasion for

diverse discussions that could include gender and sexual orientation, either currently, or in the future.

Interviews were semi-structured following the use of an interview guide (Patton, 2002, pp. 343-345). Rather than ask specific questions, interview 'topics' were organized according to the type of information acquired: background, values, opinions, experience/behaviour, and feelings (e.g., sample questions included: 'How do you *feel* about curriculum documents now including references to sexual orientation and gender identities?' and 'What has been your *experience* with new curriculum documents that now include references to sexual orientation and gender identities?'). Questions like these were included within a variety of topics to create a consistent flow to each interview and allow an element of comparability among participants; however, using a question guide also provided room for conversations to occur that may not have been anticipated. As Patton (2002) indicates in his discussion about unstructured interviews, "Sensitizing concepts and the overall purpose of the inquiry inform the interviewing. But within that overall guiding purpose, the interviewer is free to go where the data and respondents lead" (p.343). By combining an interview guide with opportunities for open conversation, I was able to invite teachers to share their experiences openly, thoroughly and provide detail to their stories to enhance the richness of the data gathered.

The initial interview served as an opportunity to gain background information and attitudes and opinions regarding teaching and critical literacy (e.g., sample prompts included: 'What is critical literacy?', 'What is the intention of a critical literacy program?', and 'What do you view your role to be as an educator?'). The first interview also acted as an icebreaker; this allowed me to get to know the participant, engage him or

her in thinking about the upcoming topics of conversation, and become comfortable with one another before the observation and second interview. Building rapport in this way encouraged participants to share experiences more intimately.

At the end of the first interview, participants were provided a curricular unit (see Appendix D) I designed that supported the updated OCL (2006) and OCH (2010) and addressed sexual orientation and gender. The unit consists of many prompts for classroom discussions, as well as a small sample of literature that reflects content inclusive of sexual orientation or non-traditional gender identities. Teachers were asked to browse the material after my departure, and at the second interview, they were asked how they felt about using any of the provided material in their critical literacy programs.

The second interview fostered deeper discussions surrounding new curriculum and teachers' experiences addressing sexual orientation and gender in the classroom; it also elicited their beliefs and attitudes about when it is appropriate to discuss this content, and their reasoning behind their pedagogical choices. Some questions arose from field notes during observation research, in the form of a conversational interview (Patton, 2002, p.342). Interviewing each teacher twice also allowed previous responses to be revisited and expanded.

Each interview was less than 30 minutes in length, and was conducted in a place of the respondent's choosing to minimize potential discomfort and facilitate open discussion. Every participant chose to interview at their school. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed, so that blocks of text and possible vignettes could be utilized in the presentation of data. This allowed the maintenance of as much context as possible when sharing the experiences of participants. Participants were also given the opportunity

to review transcripts and make any adjustments necessary to increase the accuracy of their shared experiences. No participant, though, chose to make any alterations.

During my observations, I sat at the back of the classroom as a spectator or onlooker. I observed five classroom environments during language instruction for one week in each classroom. I listened for vocabulary and discussions that I felt indicated aspects of critical literacy implementation. During this time, I was a "solo field-worker" completely in control of the inquiry, determining what I was looking for and taking notes accordingly without any participant contribution (Patton, 2002, p.269). I offered participants some information about my observation by indicating I was observing the language lesson to learn more about their literacy program and their rapport with students. I also informed them I was not necessarily looking for particular content regarding sexual orientation or gender. In this explanation of my intentions, I was "selectively disclosing" (Patton, 2002, p.277) aspects of my inquiry, but did not provide specific details about my observation of critical literacy practices.

Field notes enabled additional reflexivity with data, as well as a way of understanding how teachers understood critical literacy in the classroom. I transcribed the audio recordings to experience another opportunity to "get immersed in the data" (Patton, 2002, p.441). Patton indicates that field notes contain "the observer's own feelings, reactions to the experience, and reflections about the personal meaning and significance of what has been observed" (p.303); furthermore, field notes include "insights, interpretations, beginning analyses, and working hypotheses about what is happening in the setting and what it means" (p.304). I do not approach this study without bias and opinions, but rather am very aware of my positionality and how this impacts my

view and interpretation of data. Patton (2002) argues, "A human being is the instrument of qualitative methods. A real, live person makes observations, takes field notes, asks interview questions, and interprets responses. Self-awareness, then, can be an asset in both fieldwork and analysis" (p.64).

Participant Recruitment and Data Collection

Teachers were informally recruited through a variety of methods. I contacted principals within the Gray Ridge District School Board[3] and distributed an email with my study information that could be forwarded to teachers. I followed up by visiting various schools and providing the information for my study in person. Snowball sampling also occurred as teachers who may have known someone who was interested in the study were able to pass along my information to others.

Participants were selected for the study purposefully, aiming for specific insight regarding my research questions (Patton, 2002, p.40). I was seeking four elementary teachers from within the Board to represent different perspectives in approaching queer issues. Two teachers were to have addressed sexual orientation and gender identities in the classroom in some capacity. The other two teachers were not to have addressed these topics. This purposive sample enabled me to listen to experiences from participants who incorporated this content into their classroom, why they felt it was important, and how they were implementing it. Further, I was able to listen to participants who did not address this content and come to understand some of the factors that influenced teachers' pedagogy and attitudes. As Petrovic and Rosiek (2007) argue, for researchers aiming to

[3] To protect the privacy of those involved in the study, the names of the school board, schools, and participants are pseudonyms.

understand teacher knowledge regarding sexual and gender identity this conversation "must involve teachers who already see heteronormativity as a problem and teachers yet to be 'queered'" (p.211). They justify that the former group may discuss some of the obstacles encountered in attempting to address sexual orientation and gender, while the latter group may identify how teachers display "heteronormative subjectivities" (p.212).

The Participants

While I intended to interview only four teachers from a region in Southwestern Ontario, I selected five teachers. The fifth teacher offered an interesting angle to the research as she is a seasoned teacher with many years of experience in the classroom and currently teaches English language learners. Also, she was part of the team of teachers who created a resource recently released through Gray Ridge which dealt specifically with addressing sexual orientation and gender in the elementary classroom. Her obvious interest in the material made her an "information-rich case" (Patton, 2002, p.230) as she was able to discuss opportunities for and experience with addressing queer identities as an exemplar for other teachers struggling to do so. Patton suggests that through these cases "one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry, thus the term *purposeful* sampling. Studying information-rich cases yields insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations" (p.230).

The other four teachers represented a range of teaching experience, as each perspective – addressing queer identities or not – also had the combined perspectives of one novice teacher still grappling with the many aspects of teaching, and one mid-career teacher. All teachers still had room for growth and development in their professional

careers. Due to this saturation of information gathered from two interviews as well as classroom observation, the sample size was sufficient to extract rich data.

Table 1 summarizes the participants' respective sex, age, teaching experience, and self-identified ethnicity. The YES or NO at the top refers to their answer as to whether they addressed sexual orientation or gender in the classroom. The asterisk identifies the fifth participant who was added to the study. Names that appear are pseudonyms – some chosen by the participants themselves – as are school names and the name of the school board.

Table 1

Summary of Participants

	NO Sheri JK – SK	NO Lucan Grade 6	YES Zara Grade 6	YES Sabrina Grade 6	YES Anne* ESL
Sex	F	M	F	F	F
Age	48	34	41	36	52
Experience	22	8	17	6	30
Ethnicity	Caucasian; English background	Caucasian	Caucasian; Asian background	Caucasian; English background	Caucasian; Mennonite

Each participant identified as Caucasian. Interviewing participants of diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds would have provided different perspectives. This would be interesting to investigate in future studies, however, given that I am interested in individual experiences and that empirical information is not extracted from this study, ethnicity is simply one aspect of the individual stories and experiences shared.

Sheri is a kindergarten teacher who is not currently addressing sexual orientation or gender in the classroom. She was very familiar with the curriculum and quite interested in addressing these topics in the future within a discourse of family structures.

She was happy about the resources entering the library that incorporated queer identities, and felt resources could go even further to provide teachers with ways to integrate the literature into her classroom, such as prompts for discussion or related activities. She was extremely connected to her community at Rosewood school where many parents worked middle to upper class jobs. She indicated, "These parents are at the university, they're in the hospitals, they are lawyers…some are running their own businesses." As a result, she noted that they have great expectations, and she stressed that upon addressing gender and sexual orientation in the classroom, she would need to ensure parents were kept informed and happy. She also described the population as a 'WASP population' and felt this may be a reason to add more diversity into the curriculum specifically, as students do not get exposed to as much diversity as those in some other schools.

Lucan and Zara both worked at Willow Heights, a school attended by children of middle class backgrounds. Both also taught grade six classrooms, although their teaching philosophies differed greatly. Lucan, a male teacher relatively early in his career, was not addressing gender and sexual orientation in his classroom. Throughout the study he continued to argue for its omission from primary grades in particular, and to express caution about addressing it at the junior level. His concerns for pleasing parents and cultures, as well as fears of pushing an agenda as a young, male teacher, kept him from feeling that addressing queer identities was necessary. He had fantastic rapport with his students and parents, as shown during my time observing his classes. His sense of humour and ability to relate to the children enabled him to have great conversations with the students. Had his concerns for addressing queer identities not been so overwhelming,

it was clear that the classroom dynamic would have been a safe space for these conversations to occur.

Zara, in contrast, was a seasoned teacher who had also spent several years as a literacy coach. Her opinion about addressing sexual orientation and gender in the classroom is you "have to be respectful and you have to realize what's out there. You can't be living in a little bubble." As a result, her pedagogy was centered in questions and class discussions where she incorporated diverse literature and activities whenever possible. During my observation of her classroom, the class was reading a story called *The Breadwinner* that was set in Afghanistan. She also told me about a school in Abu Dhabi where her class exchanged emails with the students there. Zara discussed moments when she incorporated literature that dealt with queer identities, but also mentioned the resistance she faced from students in her class with a religious background that did not agree with queer lifestyles. Despite her indication that she addressed queer identities, she did not proactively seek opportunities to do so, but felt justified to respond to a situation if it arose.

Sabrina and Anne, similarly, also worked at a school together. Maple Park was a school that educated students of upper class families in a newer area of the city. Both teachers felt they addressed sexual orientation in the classroom. Ironically, it was Anne, who was a part of a team that designed a resource to help teachers incorporate queer literature into the classroom, who expressed more reservation about doing so. Anne's experience teaching had exposed her to parents who raised significant concern about such topics being addressed. Being an English second language teacher, she was particularly aware of the cultural diversity in the school, and was careful about how she introduced

conversations of gender, although she still made efforts to do so. She indicated that sexual orientation was not something she would talk about blatantly, however, and suggested this was a topic that you had to be quite sensitive about to avoid hurting your reputation in the community through upsetting parents.

Sabrina, in contrast, openly and freely talked about both gender and sexual orientation in her grade six class. During my observation in her class, she had just read *10, 000 Dresses*, a book about a boy who feels he is a girl and who enjoys wearing dresses. Sabrina's class had participated in several conversations about what this boy was experiencing and how he must have felt. Sabrina indicated that, to her surprise, her class handled the topic maturely and showed interest and understanding. She was excited about the inclusion of such books in the library and indicated if parents had any issue with the content, she would be happy to speak with them. Sabrina was very passionate about recognizing diversity, and acknowledged that the school population was quite diverse and she loved that.

In all data collection, I abided by the ethical review requirements of both Western University and Gray Ridge District School Board. A letter of information was sent to all participants and consent was gathered before interviews and observations were conducted (See Appendices A and B). Participants were made aware that participation was voluntary and if they did so, it would have no effect on their employment. They were informed that they were welcome to withdraw from the study at any time, although none did so.

Data Analysis

I have analysed the data conscience of my position as a social constructionist informed by queer theoretical underpinnings. Gergen (1985) suggests that the success of constructionist accounts depend on the following:

> the analyst's capacity to invite, compel, stimulate, or delight the audience, and not on criteria of veracity. Required, then, are alternative criteria for evaluating knowledge claims – criteria that might reasonably take into account existing needs for systems of intelligibility, limitations inherent in existing constructions, along with a range of political, moral, aesthetic, and practical considerations.(p.272)

In analysing the data, I have selected themes that I feel demonstrate currency and prominence and illustrate the overall purpose of the thesis itself. Data that gathers participants' experiences inevitably requires interpretation from the researcher. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), social constructionism shapes the researcher as a "passionate participant" (p.101) as the researcher is the facilitator in reconstructing the voices of participants. While my voice is infused throughout the many voices of the participants, my informed position as a former grade five and six teacher, as well as my role as researcher contribute to the interpretation of data. As a researcher, I was immersed in the data throughout the process via interviews, observations, field notes, and transcription to enhance the degree I was able to interpret participants' responses. Through constant reflexivity via field notes and self-analysis, I provide a balance between researcher and participant. I share experiences in large blocks of text to uphold the voice and perspective of each participant (Patton, 2002, p.41; p.64; 503). Patton notes, "Thick description sets up and makes possible interpretation" (p.503).

In reviewing data, I colour coded each new theme or idea presented by the participant, and kept an ongoing log of ideas mentioned. Then, I cross referenced each transcript and collection of ideas to make note of recurring and dominant concepts. The data was organized into appropriate headings that corresponded with some of the themes presented in Chapter Two that emerged from the literature review - heteronormativity, curriculum, and pedagogy - as well as additional headings that grouped ideas which frequently emerged in the data: diversity, leadership, and age appropriateness.

In recognizing the degree of interpretation that occurs in this process of analysis and understanding, I am aware of my role in the research. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2000) note, "Highly reflexive researchers will be acutely aware of the ways in which their selectivity, perception, background and inductive processes and paradigms shape the research" (p.141). I began my thesis by situating my perspective on these issues, and continue to raise awareness of the fact that I am implicated in the data and how researchers are "inescapably part of the social world they are researching" (Cohen et al., 2000, p.141). My experience as a classroom teacher, my direct engagement with participants for two interviews, transcription, observations, and field notes, as well as my academic voice enable me to develop "personal insights" to contribute meaningfully to the data, which are "an important part of the inquiry" (Patton, 2002, p.40). Social constructionism is an appropriate paradigm to ground this research as it recognizes how "knowledge is sustained by social processes" (Burr, 1995, p.3).

Limitations of the Research

Purposeful sampling was important as random selection may have obtained teachers who were reserved and apprehensive to share what they are *not* including in their

pedagogy and classroom discussions. Instead, I was able to interview teachers who self-identified prior to interviews and were aware of my interest in all perspectives, as indicated by the study information sheet.

Secondly, purposeful sampling might have added another interesting component to the study if I had chosen to include more ethnic or cultural diversity to provide a broader understanding of how gender and sexual orientation in elementary school is experienced. Recognizing that this issue is complex, this study aims to gather in-depth understandings of a few individuals' experiences, and does not make claims to generalize the information gathered. Therefore, the small sample size of Caucasian individuals does not affect the validity of the data gathered, as these experiences are simply how these particular participants experienced the phenomenon in question.

Similarly, it should be noted that all participants were female except one, Lucan, and of the participants he was the only one who identified as uncomfortable addressing gender and sexual orientation in the future. It would be interesting to conduct further studies with more male participants to investigate a correlation between gender and comfort addressing these topics at the elementary level. This small sample size is unable to provide any insight on this finding.

The degree to which teachers expressed concern for appeasing parents was likely heightened by the amount of parental participation and involvement in the schools. Teachers who experience lower levels of parental participation may not have expressed concerns as strongly as the participants in this study.

Another consideration is that teachers may have felt inclined to create lessons that were more inclusive of sexual diversity and gender during my observation stage;

however, if this occurred, it provides meaningful data demonstrating opportunities to address these topics in the classroom.

Lastly, while some teachers may have felt they had to indicate they liked the provided curricular unit (i.e., because I had designed it), I asked teachers if they would use the books and prompts provided, which led the discussion back to their comfort level in the classroom with these topics and their attitudes and beliefs surrounding these discussions at the elementary level.

Chapter Summary

This study seeks to understand teachers' experiences with curriculum addressing sexual orientation and gender. Through explaining qualitative research methods for data collection, this chapter shows how I obtain rich understandings from participants via interviews and observations, as well as acknowledges my role as researcher in the collection and analysis of data. Triangulation of data is achieved by combining qualitative methods with information in Ontario curriculum. My purposeful sampling of participants and curriculum documents enabled me to select "information-rich cases" (Patton, 2002, p.40). The use of an interview guide provided flexibility of dialogue throughout the interview process to enable thick description. I analyse data through social constructionist methods that acknowledge the social complexities that contribute to teachers' experiences with sexual orientation and gender. The interpretive nature of this study recognizes my self-reflexivity as well as my professional and academic position, situated amongst the data as I present the experiences of the participants in meaningful ways.

Chapter Four - The Complexity of Addressing Gender and Sexual Orientation in the Elementary Classroom

This chapter provides an analysis of the participants' experiences infused with my interpretation of what the data mean for contributing to the larger understanding of addressing sexual orientation and gender in the elementary classroom and negotiating this material with curriculum, pedagogy, external factors, and student needs. I have organized data according to categories apparent in the teachers' responses and that contribute to the overall discussion this thesis offers. I begin this chapter with sections on heteronormativity, critical literacy, and factors affecting pedagogy. This leads into a discussion about understandings of diversity and how educators can teach for social justice and equity in education. The majority of participants felt gender and sexual orientation should be discussed at the primary level, and expressed the importance of administration, school boards, and the Ministry of Education supporting teachers and informing parents of coverage of these topics in schools.

Recognizing Heteronormativity

It can be quite difficult to discern the problems in a school surrounding heteronormativity because, as heteronormativity suggests, heterosexuality is the norm. When boys and girls perform within 'expected gender roles' there does not appear to be any visible problems; yet when a boy or a girl expresses gender outside of those expected roles that difference becomes apparent. As mentioned previously in this thesis, I have chosen to focus on the effects heteronormativity can have on boys in particular, despite recognition that girls are also affected.

Atkinson and DePalma (2009) write about the active learning process in which students take part, for example, boys "*learning* to *do* straight by doing particular things with [their] hands and legs, and consciously not doing other things" (p.19). Meyer (2007) argues, "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" (p.19) and that "children learn very early in their lives about what cues represent boys and girls in our culture" (p.18). Bailey (1993) points out young children's reliance on visible characteristics in order to differentiate gender, which then impact how children play together. Butler's (1990) framework of the 'heterosexual matrix' identifies how the social categories of gender are constantly at work to 'perform' identity within these codes and upholds hegemonic structures of heterosexuality.

Because these performances seem so 'natural' or normalised, teachers may not even recognize issues in their school or classroom where children are struggling to perform acceptable gender expression in peer groups to avoid harassment. For example, two participants from the same school had the following responses regarding their perception of gender issues:

> Lucan: at this school…if the boys have participated in dance, or like, the boys are in choir, for example, or the girls want to do floor hockey, none of the kids have a problem with it…There's never been an issue about bullying or exclusion or stuff like that because it's, it's the kind of classroom and, and culture here that there's a lot of inclusion.

Zara initially indicated similar sentiments, “I don’t see a lot of issues with, um, students who are not showing masculine tendencies…” But then qualified this statement:

> I will say that there is a student at this school who was bullied a lot last year um, who is an incredible actor and dancer…um, ballet type dancing, and he was bullied very greatly. Um, and yet he was like one of the stars of our show this year because he’s incredible. And he’s, he’s one of my friend’s sons so I knew a little bit about the bullying.

This last sentence indicates that her knowledge about the bullying was in part due to her friend telling her about it outside of the school environment. This suggests that it is possible had her friend not alerted her to the boy’s situation, Zara may not have been aware of what was going on. Lucan’s response indicates an ignorance of any problems regarding gender stereotypes and bullying.

When these same participants were asked to provide an opinion of what is meant by ‘gendered identities’, their responses did in fact indicate an awareness of the stereotypes that exist surrounding gender.

> Lucan: I think of maybe stereotypes in one way, because you think about looking one way for men, looking one way for females … the visuals that people have in mind of what a respectable male or female might, might look like, or maybe what an unrespectable male or female might look like. I guess that’s in the eye of the beholder right?... It’s like you’re making inferences just on what somebody wears to create a stereotype right? We, and we do it, because, unfortunately, that’s how a lot of people have been raised, or how the media portrays things.

> Zara: I think it's relating to one gender or another. Um, unfortunately, I think that genders come with a lot of stereotypes and beliefs, and so if you relate to a male identity that might mean that you have male, stereotypically male traits, um and likes, and beliefs.

Lucan refers to "making inferences" based on appearance thereby drawing on social constructions and understandings of gender in determining what a "respectable male" or "unrespectable male" looks like. In this way, he is referring to the hegemonic codes of masculinity that are in place in society, and the degree to which individuals police the performance of these codes by casting judgement on those who may not look the way "people have in mind".

Butler's (1990) notion of gender as performance illustrates the narrow gender categories in society and how individuals work to uphold these structures to avoid being an "unrespectable male or female" as Lucan identifies. Zara indicates remorse in how gender operates in such restrictive terms when she uses the qualifier "unfortunately" to describe the stereotypes that coincide with gender. Another participant, Anne, echoes the limiting, stereotypical ways of expressing gender in her description of gendered identities:

> Putting, I call them, those stereotypes, those assumptions, those myths …that all women are tender and soft spoken and caring, and all men are you know, strong, and heroes and conquerors, and all of those things.

When students are faced with navigating gender stereotypes and "assumptions" about how they *should* be, they are often unable to portray their true identity due to the

fear of ostracism from their peers. For boys in particular, failure to portray acceptable 'boy' characteristics can have undesirable social consequences. Meyer (2007) argues:

> The most effective challenge to any boy's masculinity it to call him 'gay', 'homo' or 'queer'….What is being challenged is his masculinity – his gender code – but is being done by accusing him of being gay, which is equated with being 'feminine'. (p.23)

Similarly, Thorne (1993) suggests:

> Kids use the term and its loose array of synonyms ('girl', 'fag', 'faggot', 'wimp', and sometimes 'nerd') to label boys who seem effeminate in dress and mannerisms, who avoid or perform poorly at sports, and/or who frequently play with girls. (p.116)

For some boys, these effeminate mannerisms are difficult, if not impossible to hide, as an audible voice inflection, or visible body or physical ability in sport activities are all 'on display' to peers for meaning to be 'inferred' regarding one's masculinity and whether it is 'deserving of respect'. In contrast, boys who have the privilege of expressing gender acceptably amongst peers have the opportunity to cross gender lines more easily as they have already 'proven' their 'boy-ness'. Thorne (1993) describes a situation she observed: "Because of his extensive social resources, John could occasionally cross into girls' activities without being stigmatized. His unquestioned masculinity as one of the best athletes and most popular boys in the school was like money in the bank; he could take the risk of spending, because there was plenty where it came from" (p.123). Not all boys, however, are this fortunate, and as Zara describes, crossing gender binaries means bullying and harassment.

Whether teachers think they witness gender stereotyping or harassment on account of one's gender expression, deconstructing gender binaries and gender codes can only serve to open up the possibilities for expressing gender and lift surveillance conducted by the self and the peer group. Britzman (1995) explains that queer theory "offers methods of critique to mark the repetitions of normalcy" and "insists on posing the production of normalization as a problem of culture and of thought" (p.154).

Sabrina, a teacher who had spent two years teaching in Costa Rica prior to teaching in Ontario, loves to salsa dance. She described, "when we did our dance unit…I taught them how to do Salsa and Merengue, and the boys at first were like, I'm not dancing, and I'm like, why not?...In Costa Rica, it's amazing – it's so cool if boys can dance." She continued explaining that in Costa Rica, "it's more accepted for men to be, you know, hugging and kissing and showing affection to one another than it is here in Canada." These differences in culturally acceptable gender norms indicate the influence social understandings and stereotypes can have on gender expression and what activities a boy feels he can participate. Meyer (2007) writes, "Heterosexism and its more overt partner, homophobia, are very clearly linked to cultural gender boundaries" (p.23). Thorne (1993) argues, "Understanding that gender relations are not fixed and invariant but vary by context can help teachers and aides reflect on their practices and extend those that seem to promote equitable interactions" (p.160).

An ideal setting to dialogue about different understandings of gender across culture is through critical literacy programs which promote cultural understandings and multiple perspectives. Atkinson and DePalma (2009) discuss how texts can be used strategically to challenge hegemonic practices and provide alternative paradigms for

viewing and understanding gender and heteronormativity. For example, they describe a teacher who uses *The Paper Bag Princess* to illustrate how the princess "reverses standard fairy tale roles by rescuing the prince from a dragon, and then flies in the face of heteronormative convention by refusing to marry him" (p.23). Similarly, books like *The Sissy Duckling* or *Oliver Button is a Sissy* challenge understandings of masculinity and provide opportunities to discuss gender stereotypes and the possibilities for what a boy may do or become. Atkinson and DePalma (2009) suggest, "in order to break old chains, new chains of invocation must be forged. In order to deconstruct 'gay' as an insult, it must be allowed to acquire new, positive and intelligible meanings and associations" (p.25).

Critical Literacy and Social Constructions of Gender

The definition of critical literacy in the OCL (2006), as previously cited, is as follows:

> the capacity for a particular type of critical thinking that involves looking beyond the literal meaning of texts to observe what is present and what is missing, in order to analyse and evaluate the text's complete meaning and the author's intent. Critical literacy goes beyond conventional critical thinking in focusing on issues related to fairness, equity, and social justice. Critically literate students adopt a critical stance, asking what view of the world the text advances and whether they find this view acceptable. (p.152)

My interviews began by exploring teachers' overall understandings and opinions about critical literacy. In doing so, I hoped to work up to dialogue about the OCH (2010) and OCL (2006) and their updated vocabulary surrounding social justice, specifically sexual

and gendered identities, and teachers' experiences with this material. This lay the foundation for thinking about ways teachers can challenge social constructions of gender in their classrooms, discuss stereotypes and connections to sexual orientation, and express their opinions about engaging in these conversations while outlining factors that influence pedagogical decisions.

With critical literacy as my focus, I asked teachers in the first interview both what they felt critical literacy was and how they taught for critical literacy. Responses reflected the definition in the OCL (2006), indicating the importance of developing the ability to identify multiple perspectives, evaluate text, and form opinions. The idea that children might become blind to the world around them seemed of concern to several participants, as their responses indicated teaching a sense of recognition – whether it was bias, stereotypes, or the basis of our opinions. Participants said that if students take information as presented to them, they are not a critical thinker. Similarly, Kumashiro (2002), expresses, "Students can learn that the desire for final knowledge is itself problematic. Learning is about disruption and opening up to further learning, not closure and satisfaction" (p.43).

Zara articulated the difficulty that can sometimes arise from reconciling difference and our potentially contrasting opinions, but announced her belief that it is important to realize the context of our opinions. She told me:

> I think [critical literacy is] allowing your students to understand that there's differences in the world, and that we, we can have opinions about it, but we, maybe….It's sometimes hard because there are judgements, and I think we have

> to have judgements at some point, um, but we have to also realize maybe, at some point, where those ideas came from and why they haven't changed.

Zara's slow and reflective response indicated that judgement can be problematic when it is not understood in terms of "where those ideas came from". In appreciating difference and understanding our judgement, Zara argues learning to form opinions is an important skill. In helping students to "realize" the roots of our opinions and how they differ from others, Zara attempts to accommodate multiple world views – a key component of a critical literacy program. Social constructionism becomes useful in identifying how knowledge about gender and sexuality are socially constructed via cultural influences as each culture's perspective supports different opinions. When students are given tools to identify the beliefs of various cultural groups, they are better able to situate their beliefs and opinions about how and why judgement occurs. Recalling Sabrina's example of teaching her students salsa, she indicated to the students how Costa Rican culture and citizens viewed men and dance compared with a Canadian understanding. While some students held the opinion that boys do not dance, she was able to contrast this with a different world view and encourage them to think critically about the social and cultural roots of their opinions.

As a way to help students obtain these tools and skills for social analysis of opinions and understandings, Zara indicated the importance of text. When I asked her *how* she taught for critical literacy, she replied:

> I think I bring it into whatever I'm doing, based on the texts I choose, based on the ideas of the kids, um, based on media literacy, um, so, I think a lot of it, for me, has to do with the read alouds that I choose. Um, I often choose things that

> have some controversy to them, or maybe not controversy, have a shock value a little bit to the kids here…So we learn a lot about each other, and that literacy, critical literacy, comes in through understanding and realizing that there are differences, and then I am very straightforward about offering opinions of my own, but calling them opinions, and making them realize that other people might have other opinions.

When Zara claims she selects texts that "have a shock value," she expresses her attempt to expose students to perspectives that are quite different from their own. In this way she is supporting Kumashiro's (2002) request for learning to be uncomfortable. He notes that children might enter a "pedagogy of crisis" (p.53) or a "paradoxical condition of learning and unlearning" (p.63) where students may be required to "disrupt our commonsense view of the world" (p.63). He argues education is not learning what we already know and staying comfortable, but rather education is learning to challenge our ideas and build on existing knowledge. Working through this 'crisis' students may come to understand the social nature of knowledge as opposed to a fixed understanding.

Furthermore, Zara's response also highlights the teacher's role in determining what texts to bring into the classroom. Zara describes the negotiation that takes place between choosing texts that reflect "the ideas of the kids" and choosing texts that serve the teacher's priorities such as texts that "have a shock value". In striking a balance between literature that students can relate to and literature that might present foreign ideas, she attempts to implement a critical literacy program where "we learn a lot about each other". In her classroom, students are encouraged to offer opinions and Zara presents her

opinions on topics, allowing the creation of a program where students learn what opinions are and "realize that other people might have other opinions".

Britzman (1995) argues for studying reading practices and sees how text selection often reinforces heterosexuality as the norm, unless teachers disrupt the discourse via queer pedagogy. Teachers must prioritize texts that challenge gender roles and heterosexuality to present students with ideas that disrupt normalizing practices, such as performing and policing gender identities.

As a self-identified lesbian, Anne indicated a clear agenda in her description of a critical literacy program:

> It's understanding how you connect to it, it's analyzing it – finding the biases in it; it's finding the stereotypes, the myths, um, all of the isms…put all of those isms in there: sexism, classism, racism – all the phobias…and look for all of those things that, that bump up against your comfort levels, or that, um, push your comfort levels, you know?

In her reference to finding the "isms", she is also referring to analyzing texts. In her selection of texts, she ensures that students are participating in a process of deconstruction by looking at texts in critical ways. In "finding the stereotypes", we gather that a prior discussion is necessary about what stereotypes are and how they are formed. Furthermore like Zara, Anne prioritizes texts that "push your comfort levels". These will not be texts selected by students, but rather by teachers who are attempting to expose children to new ways of thinking about the world.

In probing Anne further in the interview, I asked, "What in your opinion is the purpose of asking questions such as 'whose voice is missing?'"–a prompt taken directly from the OCL (2006) document, from grades four through six. She responded:

> To stretch the boundaries that kids intrinsically have around their norms – that a Mom and a Dad and two kids is the norm for family. Um, you know, whose voice is missing? The child with a disability, the, ah, grand… - the elderly voice, the whatev – it's just, you know, so whatever their norms have been…um, put in all the gender identity, put in all the hetero/homosexual issues, put in the social justice issues – all the classisms. So, beginning to address those.

Her answer clearly illustrates her priorities to disrupt and 'queer' common-sense notions when teaching critical literacy. In helping students identify difference, she attempts to expand their "boundaries" and "norms" in a way that teaches inclusivity and serves "social justice issues". Anne feels that these boundaries and norms can be so entrenched in that she refers to them as "intrinsic", implying these understandings exist naturally. Certainly, when children are raised with the social construction of "a Mom and a Dad" as the norm of the family unit, and are never taught to challenge this idea, it can seem as though this construction is inherent. In serving social justice, she suggests the need for exposure and expansion of normative values. By learning to understand powerful binaries like heterosexual/homosexual that situate heterosexuality as dominant and normal, and challenging this notion through queer pedagogy, students work towards social justice by unsettling the social hierarchy between these categories.

Social constructionism states knowledge is developed through social interaction. If a child was exposed to a different understanding, such as being raised by a single

parent, or a same-sex couple, his or her idea of family would be different. Anne's use of words like 'stretching boundaries' as opposed to taking down boundaries suggests that for her, despite these different ways of being raised, inherent understandings exist for children that may not change. These ideas need to be added to so that they include more diverse understandings of the structure of a family or possibilities outside heterosexuality. From either perspective, children require exposure to a variety of perspectives; Anne is aware of the "hetero/homosexual issues" and norms surrounding "gender identity". As such, her teaching pedagogy reflects her desires to address them.

I also asked participants about their opinion of the *intention* of a critical literacy program. Lucan suggested, "To create awareness, I would say is the most part. Um, also telling kids that they shouldn't be afraid to ask questions." Anne similarly says, "It's to create an analyst. It's to be able to analyze, to understand, to deconstruct, to reconstruct, um, to modify, all of those things – a piece of literacy. So, you can find its meaning, you can find its value." Additionally, Zara notes that critical literacy is also intended to do the following:

> realize that we can't look at what we see and think that that's all there is….I think that, that your brain has to be working all the time when you see a picture, when you read a book, when you do whatever, because if it's not, you're going to become sheep.

In each case, the focus is on the analysis of information given and on not accepting information as a singular transaction but as a potential discussion. Also, each participant alludes to discovering meaning, thereby suggesting that meaning is embedded and needs to be extracted and interpreted. Lucan says critical literacy intends to "create awareness"

of this meaning. Similarly, Anne identifies a list of skills that serve to "find meaning" in a piece of literature. Furthermore, Zara suggests that when you don't look for meaning, you risk seeing things at face value and thinking "that's all there is" and becoming "sheep" who follow the flock without protest. Zara later shared, "I really believe that the job of teaching is not necessarily to instil knowledge, it's to instil understanding of the world." Like Lucan and Anne, Zara sees the importance of providing children with the skills to ask questions about and analyze their world, rather than merely learning information complacently.

Freire (1970) argues that teaching is a political act that involves dialogue, humility, and transformation. The experiences and attitudes shared by Anne and Zara in particular are clear examples of this political process. Their beliefs about instruction and their priorities about what children should gain are evident in their responses and strongly shape their program and text selections. They are open to discussing various opinions and teaching children to understand "bias", "stereotypes" and "difference". In response to my query that began this thesis, there is certainly no neutral stance in teaching; instead, there are purposeful text selections and decisions made regularly that reflect teacher's attitudes and beliefs. This illustrates the importance of investigating teachers' pedagogies and beliefs about gender and sexual orientation as teachers are the catalysts for introducing children to ideas that disrupt heteronormativity and gender binaries.

Anne indicates:

> Children don't understand there are norms beyond their own family unless you have exposed them to lots of those. And my prime way of doing that is story

> telling – let the children tell their own stories, um, and then introducing them to as many characters and possibilities as I can through books.

Anne argues for expanding what children identify as the norm, and suggests a way to do this through text and classroom dialogue. She places the onus on the teacher to "let children tell stories" and to introduce them to diverse literature, suggesting that "unless you have exposed them" children will not "understand there are norms beyond their own family."

The OCL (2006) *Antidiscrimination Education in the Language Program* states, "Learning resources that reflect the broad range of students' interests, backgrounds, cultures, and experiences are an important aspect of an inclusive language program" (p.28). While using a diverse selection of literature in the classroom helps expand children's social understandings, Kumashiro (2000) argues that in education about the other, using diverse literature without further discussion can be problematic as it does not give us truths about particular groups, but rather a partial perspective based on stereotypes and myths (p.32). He also points out the challenge in ensuring teachers do not position the 'Other' as expert (p.33), as there is no verification of knowledge. Educators can use literature to discuss stereotypes, missing voices while not singling out students. Anne makes note of the difficulty in being the student who attempts to point out his or her own 'missing voice' from classroom discussion or text selection: "That's a very difficult thing…saying 'I don't hear my voice; I'm the only black child in this classroom – where's the black voice?'"

Anti-oppressive education is careful to recognize privileging and othering across multiple intersections of oppression so that no child feels 'othered' or 'oppressed'. When

students are able to identify the various ways people are privileged and 'othered', they are better able to situate themselves amongst their peers, relate to the classroom discourse, and challenge 'normative' thinking.

In teaching students the social constructions of knowledge and queering their understandings of gender and sexual orientation in particular, educators provide a context for how gender stereotypes operate and how gender binaries create narrow ways of 'doing boy' or 'doing girl' in our Ontario schools. As Atkinson and DePalma (2009) suggest, children learn to disrupt norms and create "the possibility of a different paradigm, where 'gay' has ceased to be associated with weak, pathetic, laughable or embarrassing" (p.26). Loosening the grip that social constructions have on our identities requires recognition of the hegemonic discourses and codes that frame stereotypes. In exposing children to a literature that represents a broad spectrum of identities, and teaching children to analyze texts and seek meaning, we can begin the process of altering performance and enable students to carve out unique identities safely and with a voice.

The Politics Behind Pedagogy: The Influential Factors that Surround the Classroom

The importance of familiarity with the surrounding community was a salient theme throughout the data. Participants indicated that what they did in the classroom had direct ties to the home. The schools in which my participants taught were in neighbourhoods that had significant parental involvement. The relationship between home and school was an extremely important factor that influenced what was taught in the classroom. As Anne commented regarding addressing sexual orientation and gender in the classroom, "You have to know your community, you have to be respected, you have to be trusted within your community. Um, because this is…this will bring up a fear

and a reaction in some parents that you couldn't imagine could happen." According to Anne, it was important to establish a relationship with the community first by building "respect" and "trust" before raising a topic that will "bring up fear". She felt that fear might be less likely if she had respect and trust established. In short, rather than respect teachers for addressing these issues, parents might respond with apprehension. According to Anne, there is more priority given to pleasing the community than addressing sexual orientation and gender in the classroom – a topic that causes a "reaction in some parents" that teachers must be ready to deal with. This raises concerns for teachers who are not as seasoned as Anne, such as Lucan. Interestingly, as a teacher, I also felt this power differential and apprehension. Lucan, a male teacher with eight years' experience, identified as not addressing gender and sexual orientation in the class. He noted, "[The students] communicate to the parents, and the next thing you'll be in…you know."

What do teachers who are attempting to establish rapport in the school and community do when these issues arise? Do teachers need to wait for a time when they feel respected and trusted in their community before serving the needs of sexual and gender minority youth? Does anti-discrimination education and teaching for social justice become silenced by fear? And one might ask, fear of what? How powerful is the community?

Anne expressed concern regarding being recognized for her sexual orientation before being recognized for many other aspects of her character. She explains:

> I want to be seen as a wonderful person, as a person who loves the children, as a person who is a great teacher, as a person who is an integral part of the staff, I

> want to be seen as all of those, because my orientation is just this tiny part of who I am, right? So in this community, in this setting, I want to be seen as 'the norm' before I'm not the norm.

She stresses the importance of establishing a solid rapport with the community. She wants to be "seen as 'the norm'" before disrupting this reputation and being proclaimed "not the norm" or "abnormal," which she fears would signify less social acceptance. The desire to prove she is "a person who is a great teacher" before revealing her sexuality suggests that once someone learns she is "not the norm" she may be discounted as a "great teacher". Anne expresses concerns regarding what can result when discussing issues of sexuality among the community, and has developed strategies for building a "respected" identity before encroaching on these topics.

Lucan expressed the same concern regarding parents, but did not have the same action plan in place; rather, he chose to avoid these topics all together. He commented:

> I gotta watch out for myself, because it just takes one false allegation of anything, or me saying anything about something with sexuality, that can throw me through the ringer, and I don't need to touch that.

Similarly, he noted earlier in the interview, "I wouldn't touch it because being…a young male….I don't need that fire."

Lucan, "a young male" elementary teacher and Anne, a lesbian, both expressed concerns in protecting their minority identities within the teaching environment from the discontent of parents. Lucan suggests it could "throw [him] through the ringer", and Anne recognizes she could be labeled "not the norm" which may override her visibility as a "wonderful person". In ensuring their reputation and character are upheld, these

teachers developed strategies for addressing gender and sexual orientation. In Lucan's case, he chose avoidance, whereas Anne attempted to establish "respect" and "trust" based on her character before entering discussions of gender and sexuality.

Sheri indicated that while she currently does not address sexual orientation in her kindergarten classroom, she intends to do so in the future given the books that have just been released into elementary libraries in Gray Ridge District School Board featuring same-sex couples in families or characters challenging gender norms. She, however, proceeded to explain the plan of action to ensure parents were aware and comfortable in a community where parents were involved in the curriculum and classroom:

> because [parents] are well educated, I think that when I would be introducing what you would maybe be considering controversial types of books, again, I would not just wing it on them, I would definitely let them know in the unit what I was going to be working on. I would invite them to come in and chat with me, or I would leave the materials out for them to have a look at. Um, in my calendar, I would always make sure I gave them a heads up….You could do a quick survey at the beginning of the year – are you interested in these topics? Have – are you familiar with these books? Would you be interested in your child being introduced to the concepts of alternative family structures, for instance? Um, discussing um, emotions in boys and girls…and you might even put a few sample questions?

When I asked her how she would respond if parents indicated they were not comfortable with the content, she said:

> I mean my curriculum is my curriculum, so I still have to cover certain things, but maybe what I would do is massage it a little bit and perhaps if they had an issue with it….I could find another book that kind of expressed the same ideas but maybe not in quite a blatant type of title…maybe just work it in a little bit softer….So I wouldn't necessarily let [parents] scare me off, but if there was a clear, clear indication…or maybe it was just one or two people I could just say, 'okay, well on the day that we're doing that particular book, I could provide an alternative ah, activity for your child to do…and I mean you do that all the time with Jehovah's Witnesses, for instance, who don't celebrate birthdays or seasonal things, and I have to alter my program.

Sheri indicates many different strategies for accommodating parents who may disapprove of discussions surrounding gender or sexual orientation in the classroom. Her acknowledgement of the material as "controversial" reflects the same concerns as Anne and Lucan about parents' potential reactions. Sheri reveals great detail in her plan for communication with parents in attempts to minimize these reactions. She plans to proactively survey the climate of the community to determine issues beforehand, as opposed to dealing with reaction-based situations. She provides ways to prompt parents' thinking with "sample questions" of what she might cover in class. Sheri also has many steps to take upon complaints. She can "another book that expressed the same ideas but maybe not in quite a blatant type of title" or providing alternative activities on the day(s) the book(s) were being read. In all of her solutions, it is obvious that her aim is appeasing parents and being as sensitive and approachable as possible.

Even though Anne did identify as addressing gender and sexual orientation once "respect" and "trust" were established among the community, she still demonstrated the delicate ways she would integrate these topics and stated she would not have outright lessons on the topics. She said, "I would not specifically teach those things, because that's when you get the parents biting you, and that's not what I want, because as soon as the parents bite you, it shuts the whole thing down, right?"

The participants' language reveals how the teachers perceive parents. Lucan did not want to be 'thrown into the ringer' or have to 'deal with fire'. Sheri said she might 'massage' the material a little bit, in a way that indicates being delicate and sensitive. She also noted she wouldn't let the parents "scare [her] off". Anne indicated that she wanted to avoid parents "biting you". Anne admitted:

> I have seen three actually…of our fathers physically threaten um, teachers, classroom teachers, because their children were taking things home from the library, like *Mum and Mum are Getting Married*, for example…the fact that the material is even available in the library is threatening.

These references to parental behaviour indicate the power and influence that parents can have over teachers' pedagogy; for teachers to become more confident and exude more authority over their curricular choices, they must overcome this discourse of power.

This kind of "reaction in some parents", as Anne pointed out, can be quite intimidating for teachers and make them feel they have to be very sensitive to avoid this kind of "threatening" behaviour. Sheri also suggested, "Sometimes it's just about the words. Sometimes if you're not careful with your word choice - it's how you present something." The way that Sheri drops off the end of the sentence of what happens if

you're not careful, points toward the meaning of Anne's direct example about fathers threatening teachers: there are consequences for teachers who are not careful.

Zara also echoed efforts to be 'sensitive' around topics of sexual orientation and gender:

> I think you definitely have to be sensitive though, especially to those kids that have specific religious backgrounds. Um, and make sure to use words like this is my opinion, this is reality, this is what's happening out in the world…but some of the kids are going to say, 'no, it's not okay to be gay'.

In this answer, Zara makes a connection between the sensitivity and religion, indicating teachers need to be aware of religious diversity in their classrooms and be "sensitive". Similarly, Lucan had expressed:

> If I sat there and talked about, you know, masculinity, or…sexual orientation…that's stuff that's been instilled in those kids, um, especially, I think, even with, with the religious ones who, when, when they deem that inappropriate or just wrong in the eyes of God or the bible or whatnot, based on whatever religion they are, whatever we discuss isn't going to change it…and if anything, you'll offend.

Lucan suggests that challenging beliefs that have "been instilled" might cause him to "offend." This is another reason Lucan chooses not to address sexual orientation or gender. Recognizing religious diversity in his class, Lucan's method of being sensitive was to not disrupt religious foundations that had been established at home. Further, he believed discussions at school weren't "going to change it." Similarly, when Sheri raised

the example of accommodating students who are Jehovah's Witness, she said, "I have to alter my program."

While Lucan had decided not to discuss these topics at all, Sheri and Zara suggest it is about *how* you talk about it. As Sheri notes, you have to be "careful with your word choice". In addressing gender and sexual orientation, she suggests selecting texts that "expressed the same ideas, but maybe not in quite a blatant type of title." Zara indicated establishing a sense of clarity by using words like "this is my opinion" or "this is reality". In this way, she connects back to the aims of critical literacy in determining various opinions or perspectives in the world. Prior to the study, Zara identified as a teacher who does address gender and sexual orientation in the classroom. She shared a story that indicated her struggle in learning to negotiate being "sensitive" with the idea that "this is reality" coupled with her resolution about how to ease this tension in the future. She described a time when she was introducing her class to the new library books that addressed gender and sexual orientation. She told how a student approached her after the lesson and said, "Are we going to be doing any more of that because I'm a Mormon and I don't believe in that?" Zara responded, "I don't think so," but continued by saying the following:

> I know now what I should have said, and I wish I had said, to the effect of, you know, it's not about belief, it's about the fact that it's there. You don't have to go and read about it and search about it, but you have to be respectful because that is life.

Zara admitted that several students in her class are "very religious", yet argued:

> I think that we have to be real. I think that…you can have your opinions, but you still have to be respectful and you have to realize what's out there. You can't be living in a little bubble…we want to understand that, again, different cultures have different beliefs in gender, whether right or wrong we have to understand them….I think we have to respect them, we don't have to agree with them.

Zara indicates her initial reaction was silenced by agreeing she would not cover these topics again. On further reflection, she shares her current stance that "you can have your opinions, but you still have to be respectful and you have to realize what's out there." She differentiates between opinions and respect. For Zara, respect means acknowledging "different cultures have different beliefs" and talking about the various beliefs, and recognizing that you "don't have to agree with them."

This notion of respect is central, but in a diverse society, what do ideas of 'respect' and 'sensitivity' look like? Like Zara, do we talk about all identities and ways of life and understand that we may not all agree? Or, like Lucan, do we all agree *not* to talk about the different ways of life that exist and remain silent so as not to 'offend'? The latter solution can seem easier when parents put up strong resistance. At the same time, critical literacy, as described in the OCL (2006), suggests that, "Critically literate students adopt a critical stance, asking what view of the world the text advances and whether they find this view acceptable" (p.152). If students do *not* find the view that is presented to them acceptable, it is expected that students have the skills to understand that others might, and this is part of living in a diverse society. Also in the OCL (2006), the *Antidiscrimination Education in the Language Program* states:

> Critical thinking skills include the ability to identify perspectives, values, and issues…asking questions and challenging the status quo, and leads students to look at issues of power and justice in society. The language program empowers students by enabling them to express themselves and to speak out about issues that strongly affect them…they also learn to use inclusive and non-discriminatory language in both oral and written work. (p.29)

Non-discriminatory language is defined in the OCL (2006) as "Language that conveys respect for all people and avoids stereotyping based on gender, race, religion, culture, social class, sexual orientation, ability, or age" (p.156). This indicates a focus on both understanding and challenging stereotypes. In order for students to take part in this process and lead them to investigate social justice issues, students must be afforded opportunities to dialogue about difference. Through dialogue, students can develop the ability to share their perspectives with their peers.

Similarly, students will likely share their perspectives with their families and in some cases this may cause conflict. Anne shared her experience with non-conforming students who come from homes where non-normative gender and sexuality is unacceptable:

> Ah, it's awful; it's hell for those kids – absolute hell for those kids. They are bullied physically, they are bullied, obviously, emotionally and verbally, um, often by their own families. It's really awful. Also, ah, finding….I had a female student, grade 8 girl, who stereotypically would be labelled butch – was not conforming to the standards of her family. She was the athlete, she was aggressive, she wanted to play with the boys all the time, she did not want to dress

> like the typical girl - had to dress according to their culture. And just trying to find ways to affirm that for now, she might have to fight those battles, but just to honour who she is, and to affirm – find ways to affirm who she is, and let her be who she is at school.

Anne felt school needs to offer an alternative perspective from this student's home life or cultural views so that the girl could "affirm" and "honour" her identity. Anne recognized that many kids are "bullied…often by their own families" and felt school should be a safe place to "let her be who she is". In this way, Anne is providing this student the tools to negotiate family, culture, self, and school. She feels that by grade eight, she is capable and can "fight those battles."

In encouraging students to dialogue in school about different worldviews or perspectives, however, the goal is not to create conflict or 'battles' at home. Students need to learn how to negotiate various worldviews and appreciate their cultural and historical roots. When students develop skills to identify knowledge about gender as socially constructed, they may come to appreciate the opinions of their family within the context of culture or religion. Freire (1970) argues:

> It is not our role to speak to the people about our own view of the world, not to attempt to impose that view on them, but rather to dialogue with the people about their view and ours. We must realize that their view of the world, manifested variously in their action, reflects their *situation* in the world. (p.129)

The beliefs of parents "reflect their *situation* in the world", and through critical literacy, students learn to differentiate between the beliefs presented to them at home, and the diverse beliefs that exist in the world. Kumashiro (2002) notes:

> 'School's supposed to help you become a person, not just echo what your parents want us to teach.' And you know, that's what I always say to my students: You're going to be exposed to all this stuff and a lot of it is going to be scary because it's going to be different than what you hear at home at the dinner table. Then you've got to take it on, and decide what you want to keep and what you want to throw away. (p.75)

Students will come to see that gender constructions and sexuality are very different across cultures and religious communities. A family is raised under certain beliefs and perspectives, while school is a place where children from diverse families interact. Home beliefs and cultural upbringing offer a certain perspective to students, it cannot be the only perspective allowed. What is discussed at home should not silence the different viewpoints a student may encounter at school. Social justice in education calls on students and teachers to dialogue about difference and refrain from judgment of what is right or wrong, but rather understand the context for beliefs and opinions and act equitably and respectfully.

Social Justice in Education

Through recognizing diversity, we teach aspects of social justice and acknowledge each identity and worldview without oppression or privilege. The OCL (2006) states in its *Introduction*:

> Language is a fundamental element of identity and culture. As students read and reflect on a rich variety of literary, informational, and media texts, they develop a deeper understanding of themselves and others and of the world around them. If they see themselves and others in the texts they read and the oral and media works

> they engage in, they are able to feel that the works are genuinely for and about them and they come to appreciate the nature and value of a diverse, multicultural society. (p.4)

Students who exhibit non-normative expressions of gender, may question their sexuality, or come from families with same-sex parents, need to see themselves reflected in the literature and classroom discussions to achieve social justice. How educators perceive diversity is important as it impacts pedagogy and begins the framework of inclusive education that is anti-discriminatory. Participants described diversity in the following ways:

> Zara: Diversity is…differences that I hope are celebrated, but maybe not always. Differences based on race, background, religion. It's different ideas, and, it's, it hopefully allows for different ideas to come forward in a classroom, so that we understand better instead of assuming things, I think.

> Sheri: I guess diversity for me would be acknowledging different cultural backgrounds, um, different foods, different things that we like to do…in my class, sexual orientation or gender, under diversity, has never really arisen, but it's certainly in types of different forms of family structure; it could be seen as part of that.

> Anne: Diversity is diversity. It's all the differences…it's all the wonderful components…I like to think of it as the cogs on the wheel – you know, you never know which one starts it and you never know which one ends it, but there's all the

cogs on the wheel that have to connect with all the other cogs on the wheel…sometimes they are jagged, and sometimes they are sharp, but they all need to learn how to work together. So it's ah, it's all the components, it's all the pieces.

Sabrina: Oh diversity…that can go from skin colour, to language, to beliefs, to values, to…to everything. It's just, um, to family structure…it could be, you know, career, um…Diversity comes in every walk of life. I mean it's…every question that you ask can be a diverse answer, you know, what do you want to be when you grow up? There's lots of diversity in here as to, you know, what kinds of things they want to do with their lives. Um, you know, what do you believe in? Again, a very diverse answer. So diversity is, is everything I think.

Lucan: I've seen religious diversity in the classroom and cultural diversity…to even really get into sexual diversity? I haven't really talked about it.

Interestingly, Zara, Anne and Sabrina didn't include gender or sexual orientation in their definitions, despite the focus of the interview on these topics. Lucan and Sheri reflected on sexual orientation and gender in the context of diversity, but in a way that gave it attention given the interview focus, as each admitted to it not arising in discussions of diversity in their classrooms thus far. The omission of gender and sexual orientation from descriptions of diversity could be an oversight on the part of the participants; however, it may speak to the social construction of diversity in school institutions currently. Data shared in the previous section seems to indicate that sexual or

gendered identity was often silenced due to cultural and religious diversity. If teachers do not represent gender and sexual orientation in their classroom, then students will remain unexposed to these issues. Yet Zara claims,

> We're a large school! We have lots of families here probably that are, um, two mothers or two fathers, or have a sibling that has either come out, or hasn't come out, but still is, um, struggling with that. So…I think we need to allow them to see themselves in those books.

Sexual and gendered identities need to be included in discourses of diversity. Diversity according to the OCL (2006) is defined as follows:

> In reference to a society, the variety of groups of people who share a range of commonly recognized physical, cultural, or social characteristics. Categories of groups may be based on various factors or characteristics, such as gender, race, culture, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability/ disability, age, religion, and socio-economic level. (p.153)

Representation of sexual orientation and gender in the classroom, however, is the first step required to achieve the aims of anti-oppressive education and social justice. Britzman (1995) argues pedagogies "require something larger than simply an acknowledgement of gay and lesbian subjects in educational students. At the very least, what is required is an ethical project that begins to engage difference as the grounds of politicality and community" (p.152) and continues by suggesting, "More is required than simply a plea to add marginalized voices to an already overpopulated site" (p.158). Similarly, Kumashiro (2000) writes, "Learning and hearing about the Other should be done not to fill a gap in knowledge…but to disrupt the knowledge that is already there;

changing oppression requires disruptive knowledge, not simply more knowledge" (p.34). We cannot include literature reflecting non-normative gender identities or sexual orientation without a discussion about the stereotypes and binaries that frame individuals in oppressive structures such as hegemonic masculinity or homosexuality.

Britzman (1995) writes:

> the view…that one should attempt to recover authentic images of gays and lesbians and introduce them into the curriculum with the hope that representations – in the form of tidy role models – can serve as a double remedy: on the one hand for hostility toward social difference for those who cannot imagine difference, and, on the other, for the lack of self-esteem in those who are imagined as having no self. But this formula cannot address the very problems – 'the unstable differential relations' and the different forms of ignorance – that are unleashed when students and teachers are confronted with gay and lesbian representations. (p.158-159)

In other words, merely including gender and sexual identities in the classroom does not address the hierarchies of identities that exist in performances of masculinity and femininity, or the treatment of heterosexuality as the norm. Furthermore, representation of various identities does not address the tensions among cultural and religious groups who disagree with homosexuality. Inclusion teaches tolerance, but fails to acknowledge the systemic issues of oppression, privilege, and power among various groups and identities. Britzman argues, "Pedagogies of inclusion, then, do not facilitate the proliferation of identifications necessary to rethinking and refashioning identity as more

than a limit of attitude" (p.160). She suggests the problem "becomes one of working out ethical relations and not asserting identity hierarchies" (p.164).

Gergen (1985) states, "The process of understanding is not automatically driven by the forces of nature, but is the result of an active, cooperative enterprise of persons in relationship" (p.267). Recognizing this dynamic of social interaction and construction enables a culturally and historically-situated dialogue about identities. In this way, we can appreciate the interaction among aspects of diversity as opposed to silencing or tolerating differences. Anti-oppressive education calls on educators to talk about processes of inclusion and exclusion that create hierarchies of identity that reinforce dominant identities as normative and marginalize and oppress others. Educators often find it difficult to initiate these conversations, however, and many question how early to begin these conversations in children's lives.

When and How to Talk

During classroom observation, I witnessed a discussion in Zara's classroom that developed from a novel the students were reading together entitled "The Bread Winner". The book is about a little Afghan girl who, upon the Taliban taking her father away, was forced to take care of her mother and sisters by cutting her hair and dressing like a boy to work in the market and support her family. The content of the book led to many interesting discussions, many of which illustrated critical literacy skills.

One discussion that arose concerned blackened windows and their purpose in Afghanistan, that is, to enable women who wear hijabs and burkas to take them off in privacy from men. This led to a discussion about gender, religious traditions, and, eventually, marriage traditions where women were covered during religious ceremonies

until being unveiled to their husbands. In discussing various cultural traditions and marriage ceremonies, it was noted that cultural understandings support opinions about the way things should be. My 'researcher ears' were very aware of the opportunity to point out that Canada offers opportunities for marriage many countries do not, including civil services, or for men to marry men and women to marry women. Further, the opportunity existed to point out that while not all cultures agree with these practices, they represent an aspect of human diversity.

As I sat quietly observing, I recorded this occasion in my field notes and inquired about the situation in the second interview. I had wondered if the reason Zara did not pursue conversation about sexual orientation and gender concerned sensitivity around the cultural diversity she had made reference to in her first interview. Also, in her classroom, there was a student from Sudan, whom she frequently included in the discussion to add her experiences. I wondered if perhaps the inclusion of homosexual marriage in this discussion was not worth the possible consequences it may have resulted in had students discussed it at home with their parents.

In the second interview, I asked, "In the class discussion about marriage, cultural traditions and our various opinions based on the countries we come from, did you think of the opportunity to address legalized homosexual marriage in Canada?" She replied "No." Before I elaborate on this, I wish to point out another similar situation in her class.

In another observation block, the conversation went from courting rituals among men and women in different cultures to a discussion of mating rituals among animals. This discussion centred on how male animals often need to be attractive to the female so that she will choose him for mating. I felt this was another moment where discussions

surrounding gender and normativity could have been challenged in raising homosexual relationships among humans. I asked her in the second interview, "In the discussion about mating rituals did you think of the opportunity to address homosexual relationships?" Again, she replied, "No." This time she expanded by saying, "I didn't think of that" and added, "I think it has to be more blatant for me to think of it." Zara was a teacher who had admitted to having addressed sexual orientation and gender in the classroom before, and felt it was important to insert conversations in the classroom that discussed these topics, yet admitted to not thinking of these scenarios as opportunities to do so. My interpretation is that she was not carefully listening for opportunities or proactively seeking opportunities to address gender and sexual orientation, but rather discussed these topics when they became an obvious topic or issue.

Kumashiro (2000) notes that anti-oppressive education that *changes students and society* can be difficult as unlearning one's worldview can be upsetting (p.44). Teachers are unlikely to challenge common-sense understandings in discussions such as those outlined above, unless they are proactively seeking opportunities to unsettle children's perceptions of social knowledge. Had Zara begun discussing homosexual marriage with her class, this may have led to an uncomfortable conversation where students' understandings may have been disrupted. Without mentioning this lifestyle to children, however, educators reinforce heteronormativity. Kumashiro notes, "Oppression originates in discourse, and, in particular, in the citing of particular discourses, which frame how people think, feel, act, and interact" (p.40). He states, "By teaching students that the very ways in which we think and do things can be oppressive, teachers should

expect their students to get upset", but this does not justify avoiding what he calls "disruptive knowledge" (p.44).

How old should children be to begin these conversations? Interestingly, among participants' concerns regarding the community, parents, and cultural or religious backgrounds - all factors which seemed to limit or silence addressing sexual orientation and gender - four out of five of my participants felt that these topics were appropriate for the primary level. Many indicated that the earlier these topics were introduced, the better.

When I asked Sheri if she felt it was appropriate to discuss sexual orientation at the primary level, she responded:

> If you don't start now, then this just gets worse as children get older and, and into high school, and then you get homophobia, you get violence, you get extreme bullying…and I'm sure it starts long before that, but I think if the school can start to introduce these things for kids to even just think about or to be more comfortable with then maybe that will translate as they get older to a more, um, level of tolerance for different lifestyles and choices.

Sheri expresses her awareness for the harassment that occurs for many students, especially "as children get older", as well as the severity in high school with "violence" and "extreme bullying." She points out that even if the school can "introduce these things for children to even just think about" then this may lead to more tolerance for "different lifestyles". In the same way, critical literacy attempts to teach children how to live in a world with multiple perspectives in hope that they learn to separate their opinion from others', but also learn to listen to others and respect that difference.

This notion that ideas about how the world is become more solidified with age is evident in a story she later told me concerning a conversation she has with a former student teacher:

> I was saying I really don't approach gender in here very much, and she was repeating a conversation to me that, um, she had heard one of my kids saying. One of my little girls in the morning class said, um, did you hear what Katy Perry did? And Bailey goes, "no, what?" And she said, "well, she kissed a girl and she liked it." And then Bailey started to laugh, and then this little girl went on to say girls can marry girls, boys can marry boys, and there was another little boy sitting around and he looked at her and said, "well, is it okay if I still marry Kiera?" *laughs* So he wasn't sure as a boy if that would be alright for him to, to marry a girl.

This scenario demonstrates the awareness children have from an early age of sexuality and gender. The little girl seems to present information in a different way than the heteronormative world she has been exposed to. In sharing this story, she is seeking reactions that will inform her social constructions of what is 'normal' and 'acceptable'. When the little boy asks if it's "still okay if I marry Kiera" it is evident that he is also still developing his social norms as he is quick to doubt his own heterosexual understanding. Educators play a significant role in assisting children to develop these understandings and construct their social realities.

Debra Chasnoff wrote and co-directed with Helen Cohen a documentary entitled, *It's Elementary: Talking About Gay Issues in School* (1996) that demonstrated the success of addressing sexual orientation in the elementary classroom. Teachers who agreed to

participate in a unit discussing same-sex relationships and reading children's literature to open up these opportunities found that children had many questions and were receptive to the conversations that occurred. Many stereotypes were discussed and those who were uninformed became educated. In regards to the harassment that children experience based on gender expression or assumed sexual orientation, one individual in the video states, "if the educational system does not deal with those issues early on, there's bashing of gays on the streets". The film also indicated that most who are charged with gay murders are teenagers. This demonstrates that students' homophobic attitudes and beliefs need to be challenged from an early age.

The documentary indicated adults often have the greatest difficulty with challenging social norms as they are so entrenched in every-day thinking; however, children are learning and constructing social norms through play and interaction regularly. The children in the participating classrooms were unperturbed by the material on sexual orientation. Casper, Cuffaro, Schultz, Silin & Wickens (1996) expressed, "As adults we forget that what represents change to us does not necessarily represent change for the children. Many children have never known a world without lesbian and gay families" (p.291).

Thorne (1993) notes, "As children get older, they tend to separate more and more by gender, with the amount of gender separation peaking in early adolescence" due to heterosexual pressures increasing with development (p.52). This separation demonstrates the degree to which socially established norms shapes children as they grow within certain constructs and expectations. If adults do not intervene with different possible

ways of thinking and constructing identities, children will continue to reinforce the dominant structures that are already in place.

Zara described a conversation she had with her young son while watching the TV show *Smash* when her son inquired, "Why are those two men kissing?" She replied calmly, "Because they love each other" and her son walked away satisfied. When adults help identify many points of view in the world for children, children can make decisions as they develop knowledge and understand its cultural and social location. In developing skills for determining different perspectives and identities, students can engage in critical literacy.

Interacting with children in this way requires that educators be ready to intervene and challenge social discourse. For example, Sheri says, "You never know with children this age, what they're going to come up with. So you have to kind of be ready to address, um, perceptions of what they have and I, I usually just kind of go with the conversation." One example she raised dealt with when a boy in her kindergarten class exclaimed, "My Dad says boys don't cry." When a child is seeking to understand social expectations is extremely important to address, as children are building the norms of society and learning quickly what are acceptable ways of performing gender. This teacher told me that at the time they were sitting in a group, so she threw the question out to the class and asked, 'Do boys cry?' She explained:

> It's usually the other children that fill in, 'yes, yes, of course they do!' and we talk about when would boys cry, why would boys cry, how would that be different than girls?...it's kind of like school rules / home rules – some things are for home and they're okay…but when you come to school you have to be aware that there

> are different rules….It's okay if you cry, and I do acknowledge that Mom and Dad have said that and I said I understand and that's probably a home rule or a home expectation, but just like we have different rules for outside and inside, when you're here in the class, boys can cry.

The quick response that Sheri gave indicates her ability to challenge social norms and help students think about multiple perspectives. Boys who cry do not meet the gender codes of acceptable masculinity, yet Sheri makes it "okay" by separating the social knowledge this boy had gained from his home versus the social knowledge constructed at school. She creates a dialogue with the students by enabling them to contribute their current understandings and grapple with confusion. She provides an analogy to which the students relate by referring to "rules for outside and inside" and comparing that to "home rules and school rules". She not only has expanded the possibilities of gender expression for the boy, but provided an opportunity for her class to rethink knowledge construction regarding boys and what boys do.

Another scenario shared by Zara demonstrates the same kind of quick questioning that she has determined as appropriate responses to students' actions. When I asked her about whether masculinities should be discussed in the classroom, she replied:

> I think that sometimes that's taught for you, unfortunately… I think it's good to question the students' understanding of masculinities at an early age…maybe it's just in passing, like somebody says, you know, are you going to go play with the boy toys in - when they're in kindergarten, and you say, well, what are boy toys? You know? So, I think it's more those questions and questioning them to understand that those thoughts might not be realities.

Zara is prepared to act even before a child says something that reaffirms social norms, because she is reflective of her role as an educator when intervening in relation to comments and the impact she can have in disrupting or queering students' understandings that limit possibilities. Both Zara and Sheri seemed to have no qualms about challenging students' thought in this way. Interestingly, Sheri had identified herself as not addressing gender and sexual orientation in her classroom yet this scenario indicates that she does.

Four of five participants suggested it would be beneficial to teach children about gender and sexual orientation. When asked whether it was appropriate to discuss gender and sexual orientation at the primary level, the participants responded:

> Zara: I think that we have to teach at a younger and younger age…because…they are the realities of their lives; they're the realities of the world.
>
> Sabrina: Absolutely, because I think it just makes it more a part of our daily discussion.
>
> Anne: …if we just set out those norms – you are who you are, and if that's how you're comfortable, then that's okay. I think the earlier we start, the better off.
>
> Sheri: I think if the school can start to introduce these things for kids to even just think about or to be more comfortable with then maybe that will translate as they get older to a more, um, level of tolerance for different lifestyles and choices.

Lucan, however, truly felt that discussions like these were unnecessary for the classroom, and were unwelcome. He argued, "I think we're robbing kids of just being

kids, and having like innocence and stuff like that…way too early." The risk in "letting kids be kids," however, is that children are not neutral beings. They pick up opinions around them and, like a sponge, are saturated with information. The notion of sexual innocence has been challenged by many researchers. Renold (2000) argues, "A major contradiction in official and unofficial discourses surrounding the production of 'girls' in the primary school is the ambivalent attitude towards sexual knowledge and practice, and notions of an 'innocent' and 'protected' childhood" (p.312). Similarly, Blaise (2009) discusses her findings from a kindergarten classroom, where a conversation occurs about Christina Aguilera and her singing about wanting a boyfriend when a student indicates you "get boyfriends by being sexy" (p.454). Blaise concludes that, "It is clear that young children know a lot about femininity, masculinity, and heterosexuality" (p.455). She notes that views that see children as innocent or asexual, "are all based on the idea that sexuality happens later…at a time distant from the early years" and "they fail to notice the delight and pleasure the children are experiencing while actively drawing upon gender and sexuality discourses" (p.451).

The problem with the notion of sexual innocence is it assumes the conversations that need to be had are sexual in nature. Yet, as we have seen from the examples above, conversations with children about gender and gender roles do not have to explicitly address sexual education, instead, they allow children to understand gender stereotypes. When students begin to tease and bully to compete for acceptance, A boy who does not conform to gender roles becomes an easy target, as his apparent difference attracts harassment from peers. This is especially so if teachers have not taught students that it is "okay" to be different and that these behaviours are in fact acceptable.

If teachers intervene in educating children about the social constructions of gender in early years' education, in grades three or four students can begin to understand the link that society makes from a sissy to a homosexual. In deconstructing these stereotypes early, we can alleviate a great deal of bullying and self-hate as children negotiate identities.

As participants identified, however, these conversations are not welcomed by all religions and cultural backgrounds, and teachers end up having to take a 'risk' in having these conversations in class. Some participants recommended that to assist with this step, more responsibility needs to be taken by those in leadership positions to inform parents of true diversity and the content that will be included in classrooms.

Who is Responsible?: Administration, Board, and Ministry Levels

As one teacher indicated, if and when she were to start teaching gender and sexual orientation in the classroom, "I'd have to look at the expectations, and be able to articulate to parents where this fits in and why I'm doing it." Does this responsibility lie with teachers, or as Lucan argued, is it the job of the Ministry? "This is something where I think the Ministry has to get out there and say this is what we've developed, and this is why, and let parents know." Furthermore, the school board itself was also mentioned as responsible for demonstrating support to parents. Lucan continued,

> Well, Gray Ridge better have something out next year saying, 'hey, this is what our initiative is…' if not, you know, teachers, I find, are going to have, you know, their wall up, because they don't want to deal with something like that, right? They have enough to deal with.

Recognizing that Gray Ridge distributed children's literature featuring non-normative gender expressions or same-sex relationships to all the elementary libraries, and that Administration echo similar support for this inclusion seemed very comforting to participants. Having knowledge about what supports teacher pedagogy and planning can have large impacts on what a teacher decides to cover in the classroom. For example, Sheri, who did not identify as addressing gender and sexual orientation in her classroom, indicated that she would include these books in her unit on families. She suggested that the books incorporating same-sex relationships "would certainly work in with our family unit, diversity, different kinds of families, and talking about families. And I haven't done that in the past but then these books have just come in." Sabrina seemed prepared to speak to parents now, "if parents have any concerns or complaints, of course I'm open to

that – open to discussion – however, it's a part of our library at school." Since the school and the school board have both supported this material, Sabrina felt confident to speak to parental concerns.

Anne spoke of the importance of administration and board levels indicating support:

> I think the more of us that are on staff, the more of us that are out, the more of us that are in leadership positions, you know, we have two, um, male – I was going to say coordinators, but one's actually a vice principal right now, the other's just been promoted to vice principal – who are married, partners. Um, you know, ah, the more we have those role models out there that clearly the board is putting a rubber stamp on saying this is fine, this is acceptable, this is welcome, and there's no backlash about it. Like, the more that that stuff becomes the norm, then I think we can start doing PD.

She notes that the board "is putting a rubber stamp on saying this is fine, this is acceptable, this is welcome" and that queer staff should recognize this and take on leadership roles, so they become more visible as a group. In Anne's perspective, once queer individuals are viewed as part of the norm, others will be more apt to learn about queer issues and, as she suggests, "We can start doing PD." This implies that until this is the case, straight teachers may remain uninterested and continue to view gay and lesbian couples as "abnormal".

The idea of professional development in the area of addressing gender and sexual orientation in the elementary classroom was an interesting topic among participants.

Sabrina was adamant the need for professional development when asked if she felt teachers would benefit from this training:

> 100%. Absolutely, without a doubt, because some people just don't know where to start. And maybe don't know what's appropriate to talk about or…what would be crossing the line for our board, you know? [It] seems to be a bit of a conservative culture, so I, I certainly wouldn't want to cross any lines with my professional career, um, but at the same time, I also kind of want to push those boundaries a little bit too, right? Because I feel like we are a little too conservative with, with what we can discuss in class and, and so, this might really help.

Sabrina's opinion that "some people just don't know where to start" and her concern regarding not wanting to "cross any lines with her professional career" suggests there is a line which teachers fear may go too far. Yet the majority of participants felt that gender and sexual orientation should be addressed at the primary level. Sabrina indicates that she would like to "push those boundaries." It is interesting to wonder to what boundaries she is referring? Does this refer to the parental boundaries or cultural boundaries mentioned earlier? Or perhaps, despite teachers knowing they can discuss these topics, they wonder how deeply to engage the conversation. Is it acceptable to talk about these topics in any capacity the teacher sees fit? Future research need to investigate what could be covered within each grade, similarly to how curriculum documents are constructed for other subjects. These guidelines could help teachers to understand the degree to which students are cognitively and emotionally capable of having these conversations. This could be useful in potential professional development.

In regards to professional development, both Zara and Anne were not sure what was best. Zara replied:

> Um, yes and no. I think those that are comfortable with it are going to do it anyway. I think those that are uncomfortable with it are going to stay uncomfortable with it. Um, unless they start talking…so in that case maybe…it might not be necessarily handing them a unit and saying go and do this…it would be more allowing the discussion within a group so that they can feel that they are comfortable to go back to their classroom and talk about things…maybe, also, maybe it's knowledge – maybe they need more knowledge to feel comfortable too.

Zara's response indicates her struggle as she discusses both perspectives: that teachers who are "uncomfortable with it are going to stay uncomfortable with it" but perhaps these teachers "need more knowledge to feel comfortable too". In recognizing both positions, Zara implies that both are acceptable and she is unsure what to do. For Zara, teachers who are uncomfortable with addressing sexual orientation and gender should not be forced to do so. She felt professional development might be useful for "allowing the discussion within a group" so that teachers may increase their comfort among others, but they should not be handed a unit to go and implement. Similarly, while the OCL (2006) and OCH (2010) include references to sexual orientation and gender, it is not mandatory that teachers cover these topics. Given the importance stressed in the documents about social justice, however, engaging these topics are necessary.. Following this logic, teachers *should* take professional development surrounding how to implement

conversations about gender and sexual orientation in the classroom, *especially* if they are uncomfortable.

Anne, one of the designers of the resource kit that accompanied all of the children's literature books that were distributed to schools across Gray Ridge, indicated the benefits of professional development as:

> You know, that's a tough one, …because I've been begging for it for four years. I have been asking, begging, literally, we have written proposals, we have gone to exec. council, we've done lots of things for four years, begging for this, and we continually get shot down. And it's not so much the teachers' professional development that's at issue, it's the parental reaction to what happens in the classroom. When the kid goes home and says, 'oh, we read about a boy who likes to dress in pink and he has a magic wand and everybody got a tiara as the gift at his birthday party' then the parents get their backs up and so, we as an education system, that's always our first – keep Mom and Dad happy, right? Keep grandparents happy, keep tax payers happy – that's our first thing.

This response brings us back to the primary concern expressed by participants: pleasing the parents and not upsetting religious or cultural beliefs. Anne's uncertainty about professional development is not about whether it should be offered, as she has "been begging for it for four years", but that it serves teachers appropriately. Her concerns are less about what teachers learn about gender and sexual orientation, and more about how teachers will deal with parents when they begin to have these conversations or read children's literature with non-normative expressions of gender. In order for teachers to respond to parents appropriately, they need to be informed about diversity, social justice,

and the Ontario Ministry of Education's stance on these issues. When parental concerns speak louder than teachers' advocacy, many students suffer silently without access to the support systems until much later in their educational career. .

Disrupting Knowledge and Developing New Understandings

Recalling Freire (1970) and Kumashiro (2002), learning requires being open to ongoing dialogue where information is not static, but understood from a variety of perspectives and shared with humility. When knowledge is understood as a transformation (Freire, 1970), one can be expected to consistently have to let go of previous ideas, and accept new ones. For Kumashiro (2002), this can often result in personal crisis as it can be difficult to unlearn views that one may consider common-sense. Changing oppression requires what he calls "disruptive knowledge"(p.42), and notes, "Learning is about disruption and opening up to further learning, not closure and satisfaction" (p.43). In order to open up to dialogue and disruption, one needs to be exposed to new ways of thinking and understanding.

Throughout the interviews, participants who identified as not addressing sexual orientation or gender in the classroom were thinking about these issues for the first time, and that these conversations were still quite fresh. They continually repeated comments such as "I've never thought about this before" or "I don't know". For example, I asked Lucan, 'What is gender?' He replied, "Gender? I'm just going to say male and female? I don't know. I don't look at, at anything more maybe deeper than that – maybe I should, but I, I don't." In response to the same question, Sheri began thinking in the moment:

> Well I guess male – female and I guess gray areas of gender where you're not…hmm…Um, I haven't really thought about that either. Male – female and I

> guess what you associate with being a boy or being a girl. How…how you're, um, taught based on gender I guess, as well. Um, it's all that, you know, boys don't wear pink – all those kinds of things that come up. Girls do this, boys don't do that. Quite often I'll hear boys say in here, well, boys don't cry. I mean those kinds of gender issues. I guess that's what it would mean for me. Male – female, and how you are raised to fit into those roles, I guess.

This response indicates that upon taking the time to think about it, Sheri is able to articulate gendered identities through her understanding of stereotypes such as "boys don't wear pink" or "boys don't cry" and "how you are raised to fit into those roles". Social constructionism views these 'rules' of *do*s and *don't*s as socialized knowledge that shapes how children will interact and behave. Reflecting on this further would enable Sheri, and others with similar understandings, to apply this awareness to knowledge about gender play and expression and connections to heteronormativity and gender binaries.

On finishing the last interview with participants, I asked each teacher if he or she had anything else to add. Two teachers proceeded to thank me for the opportunity to think about and reflect on these issues. Lucan, the teacher who had identified as not addressing gender or sexual orientation, expressed opinions about childhood innocence, and shared his fears about parents' reactions or the perception of a personal agenda as a young, male teacher addressing homophobia. He told me,

> I've never really thought about it as in depth as, as you putting it out there. And it really, when I was reading things, or even the beginning discussion questions, it

> was almost like a see-saw – like, 'Well, I don't see why not' and then it going, 'Well, I can see this happening'.

His response suggests the opportunity to think about these issues further would be beneficial as his "see-saw" thoughts are unresolved. Also, given that he admits he had not thought about issues of gender and sexual orientation "as in depth" prior to my interview with him, points out the need to ensure that teachers are provided opportunities to grapple with and understand the issues facing today's youth.

Sabrina, who did identify as addressing gender and sexual orientation in the classroom, seemed as if she was actually addressing it for the first time this year. As a relatively new teacher, with six years of experience, she was excited about the opportunity to work these conversations into the classroom. Her final words were:

> Thank you for, like giving this opportunity to the school and to us, because it's something that is really…it's such an important issue to me. Like it's just…and again, like I said, it shouldn't even be an issue in the first place, but it's so important to, to really think about it. And it forced me to really implement um, this, this kind of, you know, topic and discussion into the classroom and I'm so pleased with it. I'm certainly never going back and I want to do more.

Sabrina's thanking me and indicating my interviews "forced" her to implement these topics, as well as admitting that "it's such an important issue" reveals she needed to feel it was "okay" to have these conversations in her classroom. With the right support, such as the children's literature that arrived in her library, and my entering her classroom also with an interest in these issues, Sabrina finally felt she was "given the opportunity" to address gender and sexual orientation.

Sheri reflected on her teaching practices and shared:

> At our schools, we're a…WASP population. We have a few ELL children in our school, not many. And I would have maybe out of 37 children, I would have maybe 4, um that would be from a different culture, speaking a different language at home. So I'm just wondering at this point whether I have used that as a bit of an excuse to not address issues that I could be addressing because I tend to think that we all come from the same background and I think that this has just made me more aware that there are spots in the curriculum where I could add this into my lesson plans and it doesn't necessarily have to be prompted by a student. So sometimes I think I've maybe just kind of used that as an excuse to…I think, "oh, we don't have those kinds of issues here at Rosewood" and I'm sure that there are families that do, and some of them are maybe very quiet about it….So, I would like to try that next year when I do some of these units over again, to work these things in.

In taking the time to step outside her practice, Sheri was able to identify areas where she could be more inclusive in using literature that reflected greater diversity. Sheri reflects on the fact that her school population is a "WASP population" and perhaps she has used this "as a bit of an excuse" not to address issues of gender or sexual orientation. Realizing this, she plans to incorporate this content into her units in the future.

Birden (2002) notes, "One curricular area that needs to be problematized is the natural and obvious tendency to address sexual diversity in the same manner that we address multiculturalism" (p.62). Similarly to Sheri, Birden wonders whether teachers

who do not address sexual diversity in their classrooms are partaking in a "moral holiday" (p.64). She stresses that, "by ignoring sexual diversity a curriculum is perpetuated that presumes all youth to be heterosexual until proven otherwise, presenting a formidable barrier to the psychosocial development of LGBTQ youth" (p.56). Furthermore, she expresses concern regarding those children that are raised by same-sex parents and reiterates how the classroom pedagogy needs to address diverse families. (p.62) We live in a time and society where we must recognize diversity in all its forms and lift the silences surrounding pedagogy so we can begin to alleviate gender-based bullying in schools.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented an analysis of the data, and extracted patterns across the participants' experiences that share meaningful insight regarding their attitudes and beliefs surrounding critical literacy and addressing gender and sexual orientation in the elementary classroom. In recognizing how difficult it can be to identify heteronormativity when it is the dominant discourse of school institutions, Lucan and Zara identify how gender issues among youth can sometimes seem non-existent. However, Zara then shared a story about a boy at her school who was bullied for challenging the norms surrounding masculinity when he decided to be a part of a school play with a lead dancing role in ballet.

In viewing critical literacy as an opportunity to develop conversations that challenge students' views of the world and deconstruct stereotypes and personal opinions, I reviewed data that indicated teachers' opinions about critical literacy, how they taught for it, and the intention of critical literacy. Participants acknowledged that critical

literacy was about encouraging children to think, ask questions and seek meaning. Some also expressed the importance of a diverse selection of literature that exposes students to new ideas.

When asked about the inclusion of literature regarding non-normative gender and sexual orientation for a critical literacy program, participants shared concerns for keeping parents happy and not upsetting the community. Teachers identified the need to keep the respect of the community and to accommodate and please parents, especially parents from cultural or religious backgrounds that might disagree with discussions in the classroom surrounding gender and sexual orientation. Ultimately, participants felt that discussing gender and sexual orientation with children from a young age, was important and necessary. Struggles remain between integrating this material and dealing with parents' resistance.

In order to better handle these conversations, many participants expressed the need for more support from those in leadership positions, such as administration adopting new library books, the Board developing new school resources, or the Ministry supporting new curriculum expectations. Many had articulated action plans to accommodate parents, whether it was through letters home which insert the content in more subtle ways, or justifying its inclusion based on library resources. Opinions about professional development varied, yet many participants appreciated the opportunity during the interview process to think about these issues and reflect on their teaching practices and pedagogy.

Chapter Five - Discussion: Impacts on Teachers, Students and Administration

This thesis examined the degree to which some teachers address gender identities and sexual orientation in the elementary classroom in light of recent changes in the Ontario elementary curriculum – specifically the *Ontario Curriculum: Grades 1 - 8, Language, Revised* (2006) and the *Ontario Curriculum: Grades 1 – 8, Health and Physical Education, Revised Interim Edition* (2010). Within a discourse of social justice and equity in education, these revised documents were purposely selected to inform my study as they share a significant focus on antidiscrimination education, inclusive education, and critical literacy. I interviewed and observed five elementary teachers with varying levels of teaching experience who self-identified as either currently addressing or not addressing issues of gender and sexuality in the elementary classroom. I also aimed to gather insight about the influences that affect teachers' pedagogical decisions surrounding the inclusion of material addressing sexual orientation and gender identities.

The prime factor found to influence teachers' ability or inability to address gender and sexual identities is the power that parents have over teachers' pedagogical decisions. Parents who do not feel that these discussions are appropriate for school and the elementary level in particular, have power and authority that resulted in teachers being cautious when thinking about addressing gender or sexual orientation. Lucan felt that beliefs at home are strong and that instruction at school would not alter students' opinions. In attempting to respect his students' families, he elected not to address gender or sexual orientation in the elementary classroom.

Sheri admitted that her school population was not a diverse population, but rather described it as a WASP population. Furthermore, she acknowledged that the school had

a tremendous amount of parental involvement, and her students' parents were very aware of curriculum and her program. As a result, she knew families well. She reflected on whether she used these factors as reasons not to address issues of gender or sexual orientation. She assumed most families were 'traditional'. She decided that in future units on family, it would be useful to expose children to diverse family structures, whether her school population represented this or not, as it would help students from a young age to appreciate a different lifestyles and worldviews. She had many steps in place to implement these conversations in her class and maintain congeniality with parents.

Zara identified as someone who addresses gender and sexual orientation in her classroom, but realized during the interviews that she did not always seek out proactive opportunities to have conversations surrounding gendered and sexual identities. Furthermore, she shared how many individuals in her classroom were quite religious and how this can create a sense of tension in attempting to respect all students and backgrounds when various opinions about sexual orientation are represented. She argued, however, that despite negotiating difference, it was an essential part of a critical literacy program that students learn to understand the context of their opinions within cultural beliefs and perspectives. Further, they need to see that each student and family comes from a different background with varying worldviews. In fostering a dialogue about difference, she attempts to teach students how to embrace identities and choices without casting judgement.

Anne relayed the power that parents can have over teachers in sharing the reactions she has experienced from parents upset about the inclusion of library books in

elementary schools that feature characters portraying non-normative gender and homosexuality. The aggression she witnessed has resulted in Anne ensuring she creates a strong sense of trust and respect within her community before she discusses non-normative gender in her classroom. She admitted not teaching lessons specifically on sexual orientation for the same reason. While Anne was a participant who identified as addressing gender and sexual orientation in her classroom, it was evident that parents silenced a great deal of the conversations she wanted to have. She struggles to reach students who exhibit non-normative gender identities, without upsetting parents or cultural groups who view gender in different ways than she does. This was evident in her example of the girl in grade eight whose family did not support her desires to be aggressive and athletic or befriend boys. Anne attempted to make school a safe place for students to be who they are and learn to negotiate their opinions amongst those of their families.

Sabrina demonstrated excitement in addressing gender and sexual orientation in her classroom and felt she had received the support necessary to do so. All participants expressed the importance of having administration, school board, and the Ministry of Education support of teaching pedagogies surrounding gender and sexual orientation in the elementary classroom. Also, all participants except Lucan felt that discussions about gender and sexual orientation should occur at the primary age. The younger children were in these conversations, the better.

My analysis of the data acknowledges my role as a researcher and the degree to which my theoretical framework shapes the interpretation of data. Queer theory advocates the deconstruction of heteronormative structures that oppress persons who are

not heterosexual, and challenges binary categories such as 'boy' and 'girl' that uphold hegemonic ideals of masculinity and femininity. I have made sense of the participants' experiences through social constructionism and indicate how teachers' practices and choices impact the social knowledge that students acquire about gender and sexuality. While my academic voice is threaded throughout, in-depth interviews, observations, field notes, and interview transcription have provided me with a rich understanding of the data. In presenting data in large blocks of text, I have attempted to maintain authentic and accurate experiences shared by participants that express the complexity of the issues.

Significance and Implications

Despite parents who wish to silence discussions surrounding gender and sexual identities, educators must recognize the increasingly diverse families in Ontario today. Achieving social justice in education requires addressing this diversity through a representation of varied identities as well as challenging identity hierarchies that treat one way of being as better than another. Anti-oppressive education encourages educators to dialogue about issues of power, oppression, and privilege. It also aims to help students develop an awareness of structures in society that impact the inclusion or exclusion of identities. Kumashiro (2000) argues that students need to learn "they (often unknowingly) are complicit with and even contribute to these forms of oppression when they participate in the privileging of certain identities" (p.37).

While there are various opinions about gender and sexual orientation across cultures and religious backgrounds, a socially just education does not silence discussion of difference. Instead, critical literacy programs support social justice by teaching students to differentiate various opinions and beliefs among peers and families, free from

judgement, privilege or oppression. With an understanding of social constructionism, students learn to recognize how culture and history shape our social understandings of gender to create multiple worldviews.

Heteronormative environments limit possibilities for children's interests and activities. In a study by Vavrus (2008) that studied teacher candidates' experiences in school, a heterosexual male participant said, "The threat of being labelled gay affected my interests and talents," and this individual eventually left his participation in music and theatre in favour of athletics (p.387). Meyer (2007) notes how gender codes and

> 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. (p.19)

Hegemonic masculinity maintains a certain way of being a boy, so that any boy who expresses traits or interests outside of socially established norms is oppressed and treated as other than a 'real man'. Labels such as 'girly' and 'sissy' are used to police such behaviour and equated with homosexuality, which is also treated as outside the realm of hegemonic masculinity. Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2003) explain, "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). When 'sissy' boys are then called 'fags', Kimmel and Mahler (2003) note the violence that can occur when boys are 'gay-baited' and retaliate with acts of aggression such as the many high school shootings across the United States. Ferfolja and Robinson (2004) report on

findings from research conducted in Australia regarding anti-homophobia education in teacher education. They argue:

> The importance and relevance of dealing with anti-homophobia education with pre-service early childhood educators and with young children cannot be stressed enough, when one considers the frequency of youth suicide and suicide ideation among gays and lesbians, and the extensive violence and harassment perpetrated against those who identify as, or are perceived to be, gay or lesbian. (p.19-20)

Wyss (2009) shares stories from participants getting "shoved, pushed, smacked, punched, and/or kicked by others in school" because, as one participant suggests, "I was different" (p.716). She reports participants' feelings of fear, violation, public ridicule, constant anxiety, and intellectual abuse due to non-normative gender identities. Recalling statistics from EGALE (2011) Canada's Final Report on Homophobia, Biphobia, and Transphobia in Canadian Schools, it is evident these feelings are echoed in Canada:

- 68% of trans students, 55% of female sexual minority students, and 42% of male sexual minority students reported being verbally harassed about their perceived gender or sexual orientation.
- 20% of LGBTQ students and almost 10% of non-LGBTQ students reported being physically harassed or assaulted about their perceived sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Almost two thirds (64%) of LGBTQ students and 61% of students with LGBTQ parents reported that they feel unsafe at school.

When teachers address gender and sexual orientation with young children, children learn to accept multiple ways of 'doing boy' or 'doing girl' and are more likely to pursue their individual interests and identities, without facing fear and oppression. In anti-oppressive education, students learn to embrace difference and engage in a dialogue with peers that cause them to be critically aware of their opinions and perspectives, so as not to marginalize any particular way of thinking or being.

Teachers are pivotal in providing students opportunities to deconstruct discourses of normalcy and identify binaries and stereotypes that narrow constructions of identity. Disrupting heteronormativity in schools requires utilizing queer pedagogy that separates the homosexual/heterosexual binary from the hierarchical structure that situates heterosexuality as the norm. Moreover, it provides a method to critique the social categories of male and female and create opportunities to understand these constructions differently.

Freire (1970) notes that critical thinking is "thinking which perceives reality as process, as transformation, rather than as a static entity – thinking which does not separate itself from action, but constantly emerges itself in temporality without fear of the risks involved" (pp. 127-8). Critical thinking is a process where ideas are challenged, evaluated, and assessed in an ongoing fashion, so that no piece of information is taken at face value. Critical literacy provides students with opportunities to enter dialogue with peers and teachers about difference, challenge their thinking in new ways, and potentially disrupt the way they socially construct gender identities and sexuality. While this may be unsettling, it is through what Kumashiro (2002)calls "disruptive learning" that we truly learn (p.42). Kumashiro (2000) notes:

> We are not trying to move to a better place; rather, we are just trying to move. The aspects of oppression that we need to work against is the repetition of sameness, the ongoing citation of the same harmful histories that have traditionally been cited. Although we do not want to be (the same), we also do not want to be better (since any utopian vision would simply be a different and foretold way to be, and thus, a different way to be stuck in a reified sameness); rather, we want to constantly become, we want difference, change, newness. (p.46)

Glazier (2007) outlines the "difficulties surrounding the use of critical literacy in today's culture of accountability and, particularly, for today's new teachers" (p.376). She notes how intimidating it can be to enter the teaching profession and challenge ideas of normalcy to support social justice education. She argues that new teachers "are reluctant to introduce a new curriculum into the classroom, let alone new pedagogy" (p.376). She reviews a case study of a young female teacher and her struggles to implement critical literacy practices. Glazier writes about how the participant successfully challenged stereotypes and oppression by exploring sexual orientation and homophobia in her classroom. Glazier seeks to identify ways educators can embrace teaching in socially just ways despite uneasy feelings.

A number of studies stress the importance of educating teacher candidates for social justice education and diversity, specifically issues of gender identities and sexual orientation in the classroom (Kumashiro, 2004; Vavrus, 2008; Glazier, 2007; Robinson & Ferfolja, 2008, 2010;Whitlock, 2010; Ferfolja & Robinson, 2007). As a teacher educator, Kumashiro (2004) argues, "We need to prepare teachers to be a lot less certain about

what and how they are teaching, and to view this uncertainty as a useful element of teaching and learning" (p.113). When knowledge is treated as an exchange and an ongoing dialogue, we are less likely to get stuck in 'common-sense' views that oppress individuals and contribute to issues of bullying and harassment over difference.

Robinson and Ferfolja (2001) write about common unsettled attitudes and beliefs among pre-service teachers when they are introduced to queer issues in schools. They argue in response to these struggles,

> We are not arguing that all teachers need to teach sexuality as such, but rather need to have the knowledge and skills to redress the homophobic attitudes, harassment and violence that occur in schools daily. Teachers must address all student needs through the provision of an inclusive curriculum and through the development of positive and equitable teaching practices and policies. (p.127)

Recommendations

I argue that while pre-service teachers are an ideal target group to ensure new teachers are entering the profession with the knowledge and skills necessary, professional development is needed for teachers already in the system. These teachers are encountering new curriculum and changes in society that reflect priorities to teach in socially just ways. As an experienced teacher, I am aware that professional development is often offered as a choice where teachers are able to select personal areas for improvement. While I think this can be beneficial at times, the topic of addressing sexual orientation and gender identities in the elementary classroom needs to be offered to *all* teachers, regardless of its perceived need. As data indicates, teachers may not even

recognize the bullying and harassment that occurs in their schools, or the self-surveillance that students experience to fit norms of masculinity, femininity, or heterosexuality.

Teachers indicated that the intention of a critical literacy program is to expose children to multiple perspectives and develop the skills to identify point of view and articulate personal opinions. This thesis suggests the ways queer pedagogy and anti-oppressive education can be woven into critical literacy practices to challenge hierarchies of identity that create oppression and privilege. Professional development could assist teachers in enhancing their critical literacy program.

Last, while it is useful to provide teachers with knowledge about non-normative gender identities, sexual orientation, heteronormativity, hegemonic masculinity and femininity, and ways of deconstructing socially established norms and stereotypes, a great deal of professional development needs to address the tensions teachers experience between addressing these topics and negotiating the powerful influences of parents on their pedagogical decisions. Data indicates that the greatest struggle for teachers is appeasing parents in relation to classroom content. Socially just education requires educators to teach for all identities and disrupt hierarchies of identity that privilege heterosexuality over homosexuality, or dominant ideals of masculinity over other ways of being a boy. In working towards social justice by challenging common-sense views of gender and sexuality, and reaching students who may be harassed on account of their sexuality or "perceived" sexuality, it is also inevitable that unsettling worldviews can mean unsettling family beliefs rooted in culture and religion. Rather than silence conversations that challenge the status quo and offer alternative opinions about identity,

educators need the skills to handle this "disruptive knowledge" among students and parents.

Moreover, along with professional development for teachers, responsibility for addressing gender and sexual orientation does not reside with teachers alone. Administration needs to be supportive of teachers using literature that incorporates queer identities, and school boards need to be strong in their stance that this is something teachers need to discuss in their classrooms. Finally, the Ministry of Education needs to be vocal about the changes that have been made to curriculum, so all teachers are attuned to the complexity of achieving social justice and equity in education. When teachers are confident they can facilitate a dialogue regarding gender identities and sexual orientation, we can begin to help the students who suffer from gender-based bullying.

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Appendix A

Letter of Information

Addressing Gender and Sexual Orientation in the Elementary Health Education and English Classroom: A Focus on Teachers' Pedagogical Practices

Introduction

My name is ***Pam Malins*** and I am a Masters student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Western Ontario. I am currently conducting research regarding teachers' experiences with updated elementary Health and Language curriculum documents and their references to sexual orientation and gender, and would like to ***invite you to participate in this study.***

Purpose of the Study

The aim of this study is to develop a rich understanding of several elementary teachers' experiences in working with updated curriculum that includes sexual orientation and gender and exploring to what extent this content is included or not included in classroom pedagogies. I hope to understand these experiences from a variety of perspectives, ***uncovering some of the reasons why some teachers do, while other teachers do not, address sexual orientation and gender identities in the classroom.***

If You Agree to Participate

If you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to take part in two interviews, occurring at a place of your convenience and comfort, as well as allowing me to observe your Language block for one week. Each interview will be approximately 60 minutes in length. I will investigate your reasoning behind the inclusion or exclusion of curriculum surrounding gender and sexual orientation. You will be given a unit on masculinities and asked to provide feedback on its potential use in the classroom. Either position is welcome as I wish to hear from both perspectives. You will be given the opportunity to review your interview transcripts and make any necessary changes to ensure accuracy of the information. This would take approximately 15 minutes. In appreciation for your assistance with the study ***you will be given a $25 gift card to Chapters***.

Confidentiality

The information collected will be used for research purposes only, and neither your name nor information which could identify you will be used in any publication or presentation of the study results. All information collected for the study will be kept confidential. Information will be secured on my personal laptop computer which is password protected, and on my own personal audio recording device which will be kept in a locked

cabinet. Data will be destroyed through file deletion and smashing and disposal of audio material, after 5 years (or sooner at your request by contacting the researcher). The only people accessing this information will be myself and my 2 supervisors, for the purpose of assistance with analysis.

Risks and Benefits
There are no known risks to participating in this study.

Voluntary Participation
Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time, with no effect on your employment status.

Questions
If you have any questions about the conduct of this study or your right as a research participant you may contact the Office of Research Ethics at The University of Western Ontario at xxx-xxx-xxxx or xxxxxxxxxxx. If you have any questions about this study, please contact:

Pam Malins
Masters student in Education
University of Western Ontario
xxxxxxxxxxxx

Dr. Michael Kehler
Faculty Advisor in Education
University of Western Ontario
xxxxxxxxxxxxx

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.
Sincerely,

Pam Malins

Appendix B

Letter of Consent

Addressing Gender and Sexual Orientation in the Elementary Health Education and English Classroom: A Focus on Teachers' Pedagogical Practices

Pam Malins, Masters Student
University of Western Ontario

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Name of Participant (please print): _____

Signature of Participant: _____

Date: _____

Name of Person Obtaining
Informed Consent (please print): _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C

Interview Guide

Addressing Gender and Sexual Orientation in the Elementary Health Education and English Classroom: A Focus on Teachers' Pedagogical Practices

A. Interview Guide (Patton, 2002)

Interview One:
Background
*age
*ethnicity/race
*teaching experience

Values
*What drew you to teaching?
*What do you view your role to be as an educator?
*What is your teaching philosophy?
*How important are the curriculum documents to your practice?

Experience/Behaviour
*How frequently do you reference the curriculum documents?
(Prompt: scale of 1 to 10 – 10 being most often)
*How do you use the curriculum documents?
*How do you teach for critical literacy?

Opinion
*What is critical literacy?
*What is the intention of a critical literacy program?
*What is the purpose of asking questions such as "whose voice is missing?"
*What is diversity?
*What is gender?
*What is 'gendered identities'?
*What is sexual orientation?

Interview Two:
Experience/Behavior
*What has been your experience with new curriculum documents that now include references to sexual orientation and gender identities?
*What has been your experience with _____in your classroom?
a) sexual orientation
b) masculinities
c) gender

*Do you incorporate any content in your classroom regarding _____? Explain.
a) sexual orientation
b) masculinities
c) gender

Opinion
*What are your thoughts on the curricular unit provided?
*Would you use any of the books provided in the unit in your literacy program? Why or why not?
*Do you think it is appropriate to discuss _____ at the primary level? Explain.
a) sexual orientation
b) masculinities
c) gender
*Does teaching about _____ have an age requirement?
a) sexual orientation
b) masculinities
c) gender
*Do you think that you would benefit from professional development that addressed incorporating sexual orientation and gender identities in the classroom?

Knowledge
*Are you aware that there are references to sexual orientation and gender in the updated Language (2006) and Health (2010) documents? (Prompt: view documents if necessary)

Feeling
*How do you feel about addressing _____ in the elementary classroom?
a) sexual orientation
b) masculinities
c) gender
*How do you feel about curriculum documents now including references to sexual orientation and gender identities?

Appendix D

Excerpt from Curricular Unit

Unit Objectives – As Taken from the Elementary Curriculum

Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1-8: Health and Physical Education, Revised Interim Edition (2010)
Equity and Inclusive Education in Health and Physical Education
"In an environment based on the principles of inclusive education, all students, parents, and other members of the school community – regardless of ancestry, culture, ethnicity, sex, physical or intellectual ability, race, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, or other similar factors – are welcomed, included, treated fairly, and respected. Diversity is valued, and all members of the school community feel safe, comfortable, and accepted. Every student is supported and inspired to succeed in a culture of high expectations for learning. In an inclusive education system, all students see themselves reflected in the curriculum, their physical surroundings, and the broader environment, so that they can feel engaged in and empowered by their learning experiences." (p.57)

Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1-8: Language, Revised (2006)
Introduction – Principles Underlying the Language Curriculum
"Acknowledgement of diversity: The language curriculum is also based on the understanding that students learn best when they can identify themselves and their own experience in the material they read and study at school. Students in Ontario come from a wide variety of backgrounds, each with his or her own set of perspectives, strengths, and needs. Instructional strategies and resources that recognize and reflect the diversity in the classroom and that suit individual strengths and needs are therefore critical to student success." (p.5)
Some Considerations for Program Planning: Antidiscrimination in the Language Program
"The implementation of antidiscrimination principles in education influences all aspects of school life. It promotes a school climate that encourages all students to work to high standards, affirms the worth of all students, and helps students strengthen their sense of identity and develop a positive self-image. It encourages staff and students alike to value and show respect for diversity in the school and the wider society. It requires schools to adopt measures to provide a safe environment for learning, free from harassment, violence, and expressions of hate. Antidiscrimination education encourages students to think critically about themselves and others in the world around them in order to promote fairness, healthy relationships, and active, responsible citizenship." (p.28)

Curricular Unit Goal – A Note from the Author (Pam Malins, 2011)
That students gain an understanding of masculinities (plural). There are many ways of expressing 'boy' and this unit attempts to uncover the stereotypes and social constructions of what it means to be a boy, and encourage students to critically analyse 'what is a boy?' for themselves. In a framework of acceptance of difference and working towards inclusivity, it is my hope that students will begin to pave the way to embracing all forms of masculinities, so that children may feel free to discover who they are and what they like, without the stigmas and stereotypes attached to their actions and passions. Deconstructing social binaries of boy versus girl, and discussing bullying and harassment in its many forms, we move towards letting children be who they are without categories, fears, or judgements.

Potential Language Expectations to be Covered

Oral Communication – Point of View – 1.8

Grade 4: Identify the point of view presented in oral texts and ask questions about possible bias. *(e.g., identify the use of words and/or phrases that signal generalizations or stereotypes about gender, culture, ability, or age)*

Grade 5: Identify the point of view presented in oral texts and ask questions to identify missing or possible alternative points of view.

Grade 6: Identify the point of view presented in oral texts, determine whether they agree with the point of view, and suggest other possible perspectives.

Reading – Point of View – 1.9

Grade 4: Identify the point of view presented in a text, citing supporting evidence from the text, and suggest some possible alternative perspectives.

Grade 5: Identify the point of view presented in texts, ask questions to identify missing or possible alternative points of view, and suggest some possible alternative perspectives.

Grade 6: Identify the point of view presented in texts; determine whether they can agree with the view, in whole or in part; and suggest some other possible perspectives. *Teacher prompt:* "Who would be most likely to share this point of view? Who would not?" "Why do you think stereotypes are used in certain texts?"

Writing – Grade 6

1.2 – Developing Ideas: generate ideas about a potential topic and identify those most appropriate for the purpose

1.5 – Organizing Ideas: identify and order main ideas and supporting details and group them into units that could be used to develop a structured, multi-paragraph piece of writing, using a variety of strategies

2.2 – Voice: establish a distinctive voice in their writing appropriate to the subject and audience

2.3 – Word Choice: use some vivid and/or figurative language and innovative expressions to enhance interest

2.4 – Sentence Fluency: create complex sentences by combining phrases, clauses, and/or simple sentences

3.6 – Proofreading: proofread and correct their writing using guidelines developed with peers and the teacher (*e.g. an editing checklist)*

Forms of Writing Included

Autobiography, Poetry, Journaling, Letter Writing, Opinion Piece, Quick Writes

Possible Extensions in the Health Curriculum:

Grade 4 Healthy Living – Personal Safety and Injury Prevention - C1.3	Grade 5 Healthy Living – Personal Safety and Injury Prevention - C2.2	Grade 5 Healthy Living - Personal Safety and Injury Prevention – C3.2
Describe various types of bullying and abuse, including bullying using technology, and identify appropriate ways of responding ***Teacher Prompt:*** "Do girls and boys bully in different ways? Is one type of bullying any more or less hurtful than another?" (ex. Physical versus emotional)	Demonstrate the ability to deal with threatening situations by applying appropriate living skills ***Teacher Prompt:*** "As a bystander, what could you do to help if a friend tells you about a situations where he or she is feeling bullied or unsafe?"	Explain how a person's actions can affect the feelings, self-concept, emotional well-being, and reputation of themselves and others ***Teacher Prompt:*** "Negative actions that hurt the feelings of others can also result in stigma. When someone appears to be different from us…we may view him or her in a stereotyped manner and make assumptions. Stereotypes can have a strong, negative impact on someone's self-concept and well being."

Weekly Format and Accommodations

Weekly Format

*Each week provides a 5 day lesson plan with 'before', 'during', and 'after' activities.

*Each week accommodates for modelled, shared, guided, and independent reading and writing.
-See 6 week plan for general overview

*Each week has a teaching focus, a specific mentor text, as well as a writing trait focus as follows:

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
Teaching Focus	Difference	What is a boy?	Oppression – how does it feel?	What is a sissy?	Who makes the rules?	Inclusivity
Mentor Text	It's Okay to be Different	My Princess Boy	The Ugly Duckling	The Sissy Duckling	Oliver Button is a Sissy	Lesbians and Gays and Sports
Writing Trait	Ideas	Organization	Word Choice	Voice	Sentence Fluency	Conventions

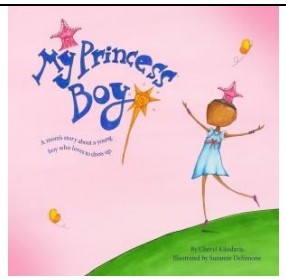
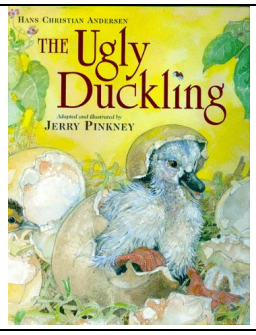
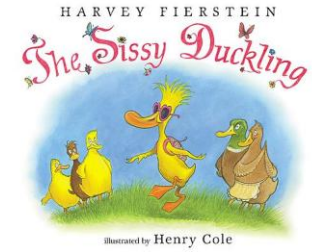
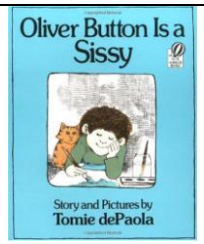
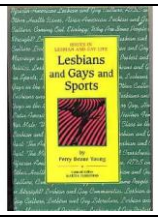
Suggestions for Accommodations

*There is a significant amount of writing opportunities in this unit; ideas for accommodations if necessary may include:
-the use of a computer
-a scribe
-permission for less volume of writing
-a recording device to record thoughts and reflections

*Those with writing difficulties may enjoy
-larger graphic organizers photocopied on 11 x 17
-working in colours

*Those with reading difficulties may appreciate
-shortened passages for guided reading activities
-reading material matched to individual abilities

Literature List

Parr, Todd. (2001). *It's Okay to be Different.* Boston: Little, Brown.	Summary: It's okay to be a different color. It's okay to dance by yourself. It's okay to wear glasses. It's okay to have wheels (be in a wheelchair). It's okay to have a pet worm.... It's okay to be different! Great book to teach about diversity.	
Kilodavis, Cheryl. (2009). *My Princess Boy*. New York: Aladdin.	Summary: a nonfiction picture book about acceptance. It tells the tale of a 4-year-old boy who happily expresses his authentic self by enjoying "traditional girl" things like jewellery, sparkles or anything pink. It is designed to start and continue a dialogue about unconditional friendship and teaches children -- and adults -- how to accept and support children for who they are and how they wish to look.	
Anderson, H. C. (1999). *The Ugly Duckling.* Harpercollins Publishers.	Summary: A mother duck hatches her eggs and, while most of her ducklings are normal, one is grey, too large, and too clumsy to fit in among the others. Though she tries to accept him, the entire barnyard realizes that he simply does not belong and after a period of harassment he leaves to fend for himself. After a rough winter, the spring brings him to a group of swans, where he soon learns to appreciate who he is.	
Fierstein, Harvey. (2002). *The Sissy Duckling*. New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers.	Summary: Elmer likes to clean, do crafts and bake, but he is not accepted by his peers or his own father. Learn how Elmer helps others learn about acceptance and difference.	
De Paola, Tomie. (1979). *Oliver Button is a Sissy.* New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.	Summary: A little boy must come to terms with being teased and ostracized because he'd rather read books, paint pictures, and tap-dance than participate in sports.	
Young, P. & Duberman, M. (1995). *Lesbians, Gays and Sports*	Summary: In addition to a look at the closeted world of professional football and the macho mystique, the author dedicates a chapter each to baseball, tennis, and the Olympics.	

Discussion Prompts Found in Lessons

Week 1:	Week 2:	Week 3:
-What does it mean to be different? -How does difference make you feel? -How do you treat someone who is different from you? -If we're all unique why does difference matter? Yes or No Value Lines… -It is okay to laugh at someone if that person is laughing too. -It is okay to point out someone's difference. -It's okay to be different. -It's okay to tease if others are already teasing. -What kinds of things can I like about a person?	-What is a boy? -How would our ice breaker activity be different if I said 'find someone who likes to wear dresses?" -Do you think boys feel comfortable to admit to liking things that are expected to be 'girl' things? -Who decides what's for girls and what's for boys? -How do writing organizers help us? -What would be my next steps in writing after using an organizer? -Whose voice do we not hear in the text? Is this fair? -Who would be most likely to share this point of view? Who would not? -Do you agree with the point of view presented? Why or why not? -why might kids tease a princess boy? -how would it feel to be a princess boy? -would you tease a princess boy? -can boys like girl things? Why or why not? -Where do you develop your opinions about boys and girls? -Are boys more restricted than girls about what they can or can not do? Why? -Who can make it okay for boys to be who they want to be?	-why do people oppress others? -what can you do if you feel oppressed? -What makes a word powerful? -When someone says, that's gay, how is that powerful? -When someone says, 'be a man', how is that powerful?
Week 4:	Week 5:	Week 6:
-Why was Elmer considered a sissy? -Is sissy a good word? -Why is there a word like sissy? -Who decides someone is a sissy? -What is a stereotype? -What kinds of characteristics are stereotyped? -How can stereotypes hurt? -How does oppression make someone feel? -How can we help people not feel oppressed? -How can we help boys not feel oppressed?	-How does this text remind you of the other texts we've read so far? -What are some of the stereotypes that exist for boys? -How does Oliver feel when he sees the wall writing has been changed? -How can small efforts make a big difference? -who decides that ballet is not for boys? -why do you think people care what interests people have? -why are boys so hard on other boys? -why can girls do 'boys' things but boys can't do 'girls' things? -why are there social rules? -are social rules different in different places and spaces? -who decided what a boy is and what a boy likes?	-what does it mean to be gay or lesbian? -what are some stereotypes we know about gay men? Do you think they are true? -do you think boys' interests are related to their sexuality? -why do people care about boys who don't like sports? -Can men play football? -Can women play football? -Can gay men play football? -Are there gay professional athletes? -What would it be like to be told you can't be who you are? -What would it be like if you weren't allowed to like something you really liked? -What would it be like if you had to keep part of your identity a secret?

Appendix E

THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
FACULTY OF EDUCATION

USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS - ETHICS APPROVAL NOTICE

Review Number:	1109-2
Principal Investigator:	Michael Kehler
Student Name:	Pam Malins
Title:	*Addressing gender and sexual orientation in the elementary health education and English Classroom: A focus on teachers' pedagogical practices.*
Expiry Date:	July 31, 2012
Type:	M. Ed. IPP
Ethics Approval Date:	October 27, 2011
Revision #:	
Documents Reviewed & Approved:	UWO Protocol, Letter of Information & Consent, Advertisement

This is to notify you that the Faculty of Education Sub-Research Ethics Board (REB), which operates under the authority of The University of Western Ontario Research Ethics Board for Non-Medical Research Involving Human Subjects, according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has granted approval to the above named research study on the date noted above. The approval shall remain valid until the expiry date noted above assuming timely and acceptable responses to the REB's periodic requests for surveillance and monitoring information.

During the course of the research, no deviations from, or changes to, the study or information/consent documents may be initiated without prior written approval from the REB, except for minor administrative aspects. Participants must receive a copy of the signed information/consent documentation. Investigators must promptly report to the Chair of the Faculty Sub-REB any adverse or unexpected experiences or events that are both serious and unexpected, and any new information which may adversely affect the safety of the subjects or the conduct of the study. In the event that any changes require a change in the information/consent documentation and/or recruitment advertisement, newly revised documents must be submitted to the Sub-REB for approval.

Dr. Alan Edmunds (Chair)

2011-2012 Faculty of Education Sub-Research Ethics Board

Dr. Alan Edmunds	**Faculty of Education (Chair)**
Dr. John Barnett	**Faculty of Education**
Dr. Farahnaz Faez	**Faculty of Education**
Dr. Wayne Martino	**Faculty of Education**
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Dr. Elizabeth Nowicki	**Faculty of Education**
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Dr. Kari Veblen	**Faculty of Music**
Dr. Ruth Wright	**Faculty of Music**
Dr. Kevin Watson	**Faculty of Music**
Dr. Jason Brown	**Faculty of Education, Associate Dean, Research** ***(ex officio)***
Dr. Goli Rezai-Rashti	**Faculty of Education, Associate Dean, Graduate Programs** ***(ex officio)***
Dr. Susan Rodger	**Faculty of Education, UWO Non-Medical Research Ethics Board** ***(ex officio)***

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Curriculum Vitae

Name:	Pamela Malins
Post-secondary Education and Degrees	Laurier University Brantford, Ontario 2001 – 2005 B. A Nipissing University North Bay, Ontario 2005 – 2006 B. Ed. Western University London, Ontario 2010 – 2012 M. Ed.
Honours and Awards	Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) 2011 – 2012 Ontario Graduate Scholarship (OGS) 2010 – 2011; 2011 – 2012 Western Graduate Research Scholarship (WGRS) 2010 – 2011; 2011 – 2012
Related Work Experience	Grade 5/6 Long Term Occasional Thames Valley District School Board 2008 – 2009; 2009 – 2010