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Date Available Online: 15th November 2015

To cite this article: CARDONA LOPEZ, J.A. and HEIKKINEN, M., (2015). Bridging conceptual divides related to sex, gender and sexuality in teacher education. *Education in the North*, **22**(Special Issue), pp. 24-48.

Bridging conceptual divides related to sex, gender and sexuality in teacher education

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(Received March 2015)

Abstract:

A fluid understanding of sex, gender and sexuality contradicts categorical binary thinking. In this article on the implementation of the ethical principles of 'shared moral space' (Nussbaum 2008) and 'deconstructive ethics' (Lenz-Taguchi 2007), we illustrate the realization of these two principles within a framework of gender and sexual diversity on a professional ethics course. Deconstructive ethics is integrated into our course with teacher education students, querying assumptions on sex, gender and sexuality.

Sex, gender and sexuality are explored as part of the course in order to deconstruct gender-stereotyped meaning-making and provide a safe space to learn about LGBTIQQA2S – as we refer to gender and sexual diversity issues in initial teacher education. The fluidity of these categories becomes apparent in cases that break the boundaries of the normative categories, e.g. transgender and intersex children and young people. Therefore, the approach in question is about reconstructing a fluid understanding of sex, gender, and sexuality.

Teacher education students' learning process on the topic is supported by a pedagogical approach that is grounded in critical self-reflection, with theory and practice aiming to produce critical self-empowerment when realizing the various dimensions of the ethical responsibility of the teaching profession.

KEY words: gender, gender-complex pedagogy, ethics, sex, sexuality, teacher education,

The Finnish parliament approved a package of legislation to amend the gender equality and equality laws. The new legislation came into force at the beginning of 2015. In a new Gender Equality Act, prohibition of gender discrimination is expanded to cover discrimination based on gender identity or gender expression. The law imposes a duty on authorities, including educational institutions and employers, to prevent this type of discrimination. The new Act specifies the obligations to promote gender equality, which have been expanded to include compulsory schools. Practically this means that Finnish schools now have to work actively against discrimination and to promote equality. Furthermore, the new legislation challenges Finnish teacher education institutions to reconsider their curricula in order to include knowledge on diversity of sex, gender and sexuality among pupils for their pedagogical praxis.

In this article our aim is to elaborate on teacher education students' conceptualizations of sex, gender and sexuality in the education profession. Our intention is to provide conceptual tools for pedagogical praxis by bridging the conceptual divide that surrounds these students' understanding of gender, sex and sexuality and their identity and expression among children in schools. In the Finnish context research on gender and sexual diversity pedagogy is scarce. Jukka Lehtonen (2003) studied the construction of sexuality and gender in everyday school practices including school subjects and bullying. He analysed the ways in which heteronormativity becomes intertwined in the practices of school culture. According to his study heteronormativity is not challenged in schools, and it can create fears and problems for those individuals who do challenge it. Timothy Bedford's action research study (2009) of the empowerment of teachers and their actions to transform their schools concluded that there were constraints, in particular resistance and barriers were faced including opposition from rectors and colleagues. Legislative support, action on the part of educational authorities, and pre- and in-service teacher training are needed to break down cultural and structural barriers to promoting GLBTQ educational equity. Outi Ylitapio-Mäntylä's (2010) study in an early childhood education context showed that everyday practices of early education teachers are gendered confirming an assumption of heteronormativity. Gendering practices are constructed and reconstructed in many ways in everyday routines and educational activities. In our research project we aim to take the discussion further as legislative support now exists. Our focus in this article is on initial teacher education, teachers' professional ethics and class teachers' pedagogical practice.

Kevin K. Kumashiro's (2009) pedagogical principles are *anti-oppressive pedagogy* and *anti-oppressive teaching*. Kumashiro exemplifies hidden praxis by presenting students in teacher education programmes with two questions, firstly: "*when does gender and sexual orientation come up in schools? That is, when do we see or learn something about gender or sexual orientation?*" and secondly: "*What do we actually do versus what we say that we should do?*" (Kumashiro, 2009 p. 718). Kumashiro's simple questions reveal the asymmetry between praxis and discourse. The first question raises awareness about how pervasive heteronormativity and the silent paradigm are. The second question is about the official curriculum (what we are allowed and encouraged to teach) and the "hidden curriculum", unspoken rules hindering pupils' identity and modelling them; hidden curriculum is what we teach mostly indirectly, unknowingly, and/or unintentionally; where an action belonging to the hidden curriculum "*has more educational significance than formal curriculum*" (Kumashiro, 2009 p. 718) because it is reinforced by recurrent and unchecked praxis which confuses students. Students learn different things when confused; i.e. "*Silence can be intrusive, as when adult silence around antigay name-calling indirectly teaches that such action is accepted in schools*" (Kumashiro, 2009 p.719). Homophobic bullying affects all students and influences the entire school climate (Lehtonen, 2003; Bedford, 2009).

What does it mean to teach 'queerly'? It means to understand curriculum 'as a gender text (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery and Taubman, 1995) and, by being 'queer', educators question normative ideals about genders and sexualities; by doing so they normalize other ways of being (Sedgwick 1991, 2003, 2013) challenging binary logic (Gender Male/female and Us/them). Kumashiro proposes that teaching 'queerly' aims to address our own unchecked assumptions, to be aware that by our actions we can reinforce inclusive practices by not complying with silencing and the invisible practice of oppression, but rather we can create empowering spaces to challenge such behaviours. Kumashiro articulates this point as *it is as what we actually do versus what we say we should do*, addressing this contradiction.

Kumashiro re-evaluates the margins of learning/teaching and identities in the hidden curriculum by challenging bias on sex, gender and sexual diversity, but also by inviting student teachers to "read" statistics and information about homophobia in an anti-oppressive way. This could be done by dismantling "at risk" discourses, and looking at how to foster healthy peer relations. We should check our own assumptions about "others" and "us" - in doing so, we can identify what really makes

this divide. How can we find “a shared moral space” in our aim to understand identity formation? It is necessary to challenge unchecked silence and invisibility. But also it requires the creation of pedagogical tools to do it.

Similarly, Robert Toynton (2007) maintains we need to revisit and revise assumptions on a post-gay culture, to make it more inclusive; within a contemporary post-gay culture we should examine radical and conservative elements that alienate both homosexuals and heterosexuals alike, rather than making the same mistakes of the past, i.e. invisible and silenced identities resulting from non-inclusive learning environments.

With regard to his research in the field of science teaching Toynton emphasises that invisibility reinforces the gay/queer marginalization discourse:

“The cost of non-integration is the continuation of the present situation where students talk of feelings of self-marginalisation, low self-esteem and the burden of the emotional labour required to maintain invisibility, all of which impede their engagement with learning and undermine their confidence in the existence of their learning.” (Toynton, 2007, p.603)

The de-representation of scientists that are gay or queer, within academic research, defies the purpose of inclusive and empowering education, by rendering them silent and invisible within the advocacy discourse. If such a regime continues it rejects the validity of their learning process, and their own identities, making it difficult for them to denounce their marginalisation. Not only is it necessary to “teach teachers to teach queerly”, educational researchers also need to research “queerly”. The scarcity of research results in an inadequate recognition of gender and sexual diversity issues in schools, including issues of human rights and family law (Rayside 2014). In response, effective inclusive pedagogical practices for training teachers are needed, in order to address the needs of lesbian, gay, bi, trans, intersex, queer and questioning (LGBTIQQ) children and young people (Moe, Perera-Diltz, Sepulveda, and Finnerty, 2014). Furthermore we shall include also asexual, allies and two spirited (AA2S), but in aiming for inclusive expression we rather use the umbrella term gender and sexual diversity (e.g. Meyer, 2012, 2010) to cover all these identifications. But also training is needed to increase comfort levels of teachers and educational researchers in addressing sex, gender and sexual diversity in their professional practice (Ninomiya, 2010).

The theoretical background to the study is feminist educational ethics, in particular the two ethical principles of 'shared moral space' (Nussbaum 2008) and 'deconstructive ethics' (Lenz-Taguchi, 2007), which are the "*Ethics of Resistance, Affirmation and Becoming*". Deconstruction is defined "as a process of redoing by undoing, reformulating by unformulating, and retheorizing by untheorizing" (ibid. p.276).

The deconstruction process seeks to re-think the binary theory-practice, overlapping feminist post-structural theory, the theory of *communicative action* (Habermas 1985), and practice of writing "*sous-rature*" - 'under erasure' (Derrida 1976). Derrida's "*Difference*" is a **productive force**, and a '**value equalizer**' (p.284), because treating each reading as equal creates a *space for consensus*, which is an ethical value and preconditions us to create a **shared moral space**. In this new space meaning-making is possible by deconstructing and redefining within a consensus. Consensus requires identifying troubling signs of meaning, acknowledging the **power of affirmation**, and **otherness** (making us aware of the *Other*, as we become ourselves as subjects). In the words of Lenz-Taguchi deconstructive ethics is "to facilitate a process of becoming" (2007, p.288).

These principles are integrated in our education ethics guidelines and in our philosophical gender-complex pedagogy in a course intervention with teacher education students. Our research data is gathered from a pedagogical intervention conducted with first year International Teacher Education students on their "Educational Philosophy and Ethics" course. The initial data comes from student teachers' study journals collected for Jose-Adan's Master's thesis (2011).

We explore fluid understanding on diversity of sex, gender and sexuality – its possibilities and challenges in the context of teacher education. Above all, an approach that includes Gender and Sexual Diversity (GSD) (Bryan, 2012; Meyer 2010) as an umbrella term (for LGBTIQQAAS), more importantly grasps the fluidity in various identities that become apparent in cases that break the boundaries of normative categories. Fluid understanding of diversity of sex, gender and sexuality should be an appropriate approach for teacher education for many reasons e.g. resulting in possibilities or outcomes such as desegregation of strict gender segregation that is still so prevalent in education. We used sexual and gender diversity during the intervention phase but currently frame it as a *gender-complex pedagogy* (Rands, 2009, 2013), including the various aspects of sex, gender, and

sexuality and diversity as well as fluidity between the categories or *gender-responsible pedagogy* according to theoretical formulations constructed in our research group led by Vappu Sunnari.

Becoming a reflective professional in considering fluidity in sex, gender and sexuality

The study journals provide accounts of the student teachers' processes of becoming reflective professionals in considering sex, gender, sexual diversity and violence. The analysis focuses on students' ethical reflections regarding sex, gender, sexuality and diversity. The following five quotations exemplify students' reflections when sex, gender and sexual diversity comes to be "*seen*", "*voiced*" and discussed in classroom activities with peers or at home. We identify that some students experience challenges when considering fluidity of sex, gender and sexuality as a topic in elementary education, others question its value, meanwhile others reflect on how to teach in new ways that bridge knowledge gaps and identity divisions. Each quotation is accompanied by a pedagogical analysis, identifying behavioural and conceptual shifts as students learn to see the development of pupils as a continuum that includes gender identity, gender expression, and development of sexuality.

***"Why can't we live in a rich and colourful diversity of sexuality"* (Student)**

Student teachers' reflect on '*mainstream*' assumptions about normative sexuality (Heteronormativity). "Heteronormativity relies on forms with boxes, it disallows the natural variations in *biological sex*, *gender identity*, *gender expression*, and *sexual orientation* that exist in the human species" (Bryan, 2012 p.39). Reflections present bias labels as '*deviant*', '*hidden*', '*mainstream*', and '*subcultures*' as responses to fluidity of sex, gender and sexuality, corresponding to heteronormative beliefs such as gender bipolarity, monopolies of masculinity and femininity, and heterosexual peering as rules. Moreover, reflections about gender variant, transgender and intersex individuals generate questions about how gender and sexual diversity are silenced in educational institutions and society.

Breaking the silence takes place at a personal level, by fostering a "*comfort zone*" (Cosier, 2009; Ninomiya, 2010) about a subject seen as "*taboo*", placing sexuality within the private sphere, limiting childhood to a pre-sexual stage; not perceiving the teacher's role to inform or educate pupils about gender and sexual development in

elementary school, and, crucially, struggling with the idea of pupils with gender diverse identities. Through a reflecting process the student teachers disrupt taken-for-granted concepts, becoming aware of inequalities faced by individuals who are perceived as *gender variant* (Cosier, 2009 p.286) and *sexually diverse* pupils. This reflection requires systematic deconstruction of assumed beliefs of childhood as an asexual stage in life and reconstruction in terms of understanding sexual development across the life span - but also it requires a process of open inquiry into gender and sexuality as a multi-perspective subject. Gender and sexuality development are essential parts of children's lives.

One student identifies silence as (individual) response and a defence mechanism toward individuals holding conservative religious beliefs regarding sexuality. When, through lack of awareness and avoidance, student teachers do not challenge notions based on multiple discrimination (Crenshaw, 1995,1991; Combahee River Collective, 1974), the act of remaining silent reinforces heterosexism (individually) and heteronormativity (structurally), implying that ideas like homosexuality, transsexuality or intersexuality are not areas for academic inquiry. Another perceives it as a meditative silence, examining socio-cultural and biological evidence about gender and sexual diversity. However, silences due to issues pertaining to sexual diversity represent a knowledge gap in research-informed teaching practices and a challenge to address the "whole" development of children.

When faced with gender variant individuals, the students negotiate their roles as future teachers, i.e. one student is certain to "*have never before heard*" of the term *intersex* until the beginning of the course, recalling data about intersexuality as a *shocking* truth, but relating the concept to the biology class about chromosomal determinants of sex in the foetus. However the student is able to question the silence about intersexuality in the school texts, suggesting how imagination then responds to bewildering facts. There is a gap in scholarship. Addressing human gender and sexual development should be included in the curriculum, and teachers need to increase their ability to teach in new and interesting ways; promoting mutual understanding, respect and acceptance of all diversities among pupils, recognizing the fluidity of sex, gender and sexuality not as independent categories but as continuous and overlapping and at the same time distinctly unique in each of us. Martha Nussbaum (1998), in *Cultivating Humanity*, addresses the recognition of such sexual diversity as both an academic and political endeavour, a responsibility

towards our fellow citizens to be valued and recognized in their unique ways of being.

We ask how can we address fluidity between categories. Categories are partial, delimiting identities into neat and simplified spaces of representation. Sexual nomenclatures and classifications of gender and sexual diversity perpetuate marginalization of sexual “subcultures”. Subcultures which are located opposite heterosexual assumptions and heteronormativity; but also, identities within the subcultures, like transgender and intersex identities, transgress homonormativity (Duggan, 2003). Homonormativity assumes a cultural belief that there are right ways to be gay or lesbian.

Patrick Keilty’s (2012) studies on sexual nomenclature and subcultures help us to understand that power is pervasive through from individuals to institutions and to society.

“[T]he mechanisms of power around classifications of gender and sexuality are not always top-down or bottom-up. Instead, the weight of social discipline among members of sexual subcultures themselves helps these classifications, often reflecting the nomenclature of subjects and desires within sexual subcultures in a complex relationship to a dominant culture” (Keilty, 2012 p.417).

These categories deny self-definition of an individual’s unique identity. By creating a dialogue which intersects issues and understandings of sex, gender and sexual diversity we address a descriptive safe space for self-definition. However, only some of our participants question structural power and their own participation in reproducing sexual nomenclature, thereby perpetuating the marginalization of others and themselves within normative regimes. Keilty (2012 p.428) insists on research that examines *“the relationship between power, authority, and identity. It will also enable us to develop concepts in relation to existing theories, rather than merely ‘applying’ or adapting concepts from other disciplines.”*

Relations between *power, authority* and *identity* are represented in a society that controls itself, by means of surveillance, and compartmentalization of individual identities (Foucault 1995). Similarly, gender identities and their expression are controlled and monitored by culture and society. Furthermore, Women and Gender Studies researchers (Haveman and Beresford, 2012; Hanson and Pratt, 1991;

Charles, 2003; Watts, 2005) examine how authority and power segregate identities. Could we undo strict gender segregation in educational systems? Gender segregation refers to the gendered division of schools, into boys' schools and girls' schools, and/or groups, these segregations could be seen as a first step to *occupational segregation*, as a continuum of stereotypical ideals of male and female identities into gender dominated work forces.

Gender-complex pedagogy (Rands 2009) bridges the knowledge gaps between theories/practices in multiple educational scenarios, such as supporting transgender young people through mathematics and science (Rands 2013), by addressing how identity and its expression are normalized. For example, Riitta Korkeakivi (2014) informs us about *prinsessapoika* (the *princess boy*) and how simply dressing up as a princess, being a "boy", initiates a shared space for gender identity exploration, inside and outside school, with the support and understanding of parents, and teachers. This story is not an isolated case, it echoes the children's book by Cheryl Kilodavis (2010) "My princess boy". The tale is about Kilodavis' son, her struggles to understand him, and the outcome when based on unconditional love. It is a tale of acceptance, empowerment, it is intended to end the judgment of others that may result in marginalization.

Outi Ylitapio-Mäntylä (2009), in her research titled: "*Shared stories of early education teachers: Gender and Power in Everyday Practices*" reminds us that best practices are developed from deep, honest and caring relationships between practitioners, teachers, and children, where knowledge creation and the understanding of one another, within empowering teaching practices in everyday situations, increase awareness about power relations. By questioning and bringing factual learning into classroom activities pupils inquire about relationships, families, dressing-up, and all different ways of being, based on what they know about their own life, and they present evidence that "boys" and "girls" perform equally well in sports, home economics, or being caring, etc. By sharing a space for new meaning-making, and knowledge production, children become active learning agents and producers of their own narratives.

However, discourses of young people at "*risk*" and the "*marginalization*" of gender variant and sexually diverse pupils create a tense atmosphere. Gender variant and sexually diverse pupils are marginalized within school environments (Sears and Williams, 1997) when gender expression threatens normativity or normalcy, resulting in violence, instances of sexual abuse and post-traumatic stress disorder (Hébert,

Lavoie and Blais, 2014), homophobia and internalized homophobia (Blais; Gervais and Hébert, 2014), bi-phobia, and trans-phobia, bullying, and/or shame (Taylor, Peter with McMinn, Elliot, Beldom, Ferry, Gross Paquin and Schachter, 2011).

Jennifer Bryan (2012 p.179) proposes to take these instances as “*the teachable moment*”, that is, when a teacher taps right into the situation, in this case, the discomfort caused by the child’s dressing-up. Teachers should be prepared to address the children’s (and their own) *emotional literacy* regarding the fluidity of gender, sex and sexuality, even if the subject is not brought up in class. By using inclusive and anti-oppressive practices teachers could question how the marginalization of *gender variant* children affects us all. Teachers’ reflections should address the emotional consequences of untapped (hetero/homo) normativity. It requires active preparation from teachers; such learning can surface only if teachers are aware of their continuous effects on people’s lives. The school staff and the teachers can address gender stereotyping and open space for dialogue only if they are prepared to question their own bias, assumptions and transform them into new anti-oppressive paradigms.

Bryan (2012 p.188) questions us about:

“*What we have neglected in the core skills of [Early Childhood and Elementary Education] ECEE?*”

“*[W]hile they [children] are learning about family and self and gender and stereotypes, students are **observing, comparing, recording listening, predicting, researching, problem solving, quantifying, and more.** Teachers identify “lack of time” and “no room in the curriculum” as the two biggest obstacles to addressing GSD, yet the themes and skills of ECEE are in, many ways a perfect match for this area of learning.*”

Children’s skills for understanding the reality of our world are unlimited, and we as teachers are able to incrementally address issues of GSD into the curriculum, providing skills, materials and support to children as in any other field of study.

The issue here is three-fold; first, we need inclusive, non-judgmental and gender complexity training for teachers; second, informed practice-research is needed to create a continuum of learning/teaching; third, inclusion of research (for teachers) and inclusive GSD representational material (for schools) is needed to support children when they are looking for factual information on what they see in their lives.

Education has a political and social purpose, to bring social cohesion and advance social justice. By studying Dewey's (1916) *Democracy and education*, Harbour and Ebie (2011) are committed to the eradication of student marginalization in Higher Education based on identity; however, they are aware that:

"Deweyan democratic learning communities do not provide us with the instructional tools needed to construct new teaching strategies, learning assessments, or curricula capable of disassembling student marginalization." (Harbour and Ebie, 2011, p.5)

Institutional marginalization needs to be addressed by teaching strategies as well as curricula capable of disassembling the processes that intend to divide us. Harbor and Ebie (2011) remind us:

"[H]ow student marginalization might be embedded in a variety of individual behaviours, institutional policies, and social or cultural practices that attack students on a very personal level. Often, student marginalization occurs at times when / where and places students are most vulnerable, that is, when they are seeking help and guidance from others." (Harbour and Ebie, 2011, p.8)

Thus it is an ethical question to provide guidance on such critical vulnerable moments. Our approach on sex, gender, sexuality and diversity becomes a representational space within pedagogical practices that seeks to inform initial teacher education students about gender complexity practices, to comprehend diversity, and to allow children to formulate their own descriptions of the world. This requires a safe shared moral space, a new language, a new meaning making and a new way to look at relationships that reflect today's family compositions (e.g. rainbow families, same-sex marriage, single parenting). This approach requires creating a "new narrative [that] could explain how the marginalization of students not only oppresses them and undermines their success but poses a great impediment to the development of democracy." (Harbor and Ebie, 2011, p.13)

"I just somehow freeze and stand here with confusion and my lack of awareness" (Student)

Exercising imagination could be understood as the action that allows teacher students to assess their own beliefs in order to actualize meaning-makings and re-

define *frames of reference* (Mezirow, 2003). Frames of reference and habits of mind are learnt during a lifetime and reinforced by society and culture, resulting in what seems to be a 'personal' point of view. Student teachers consciously write about their *frames of reference*, where *habits of mind* are negotiated and re-framed, resulting in "confusion" and recognition of "lack of awareness". Other responses to a re-orientation process are *denial* and disbelief in relation to diversity in daily life, placing intersexes and transgendered individuals as outsiders. Meanwhile, participating in a 'queer school culture' is perceived as *difficult* due to *unexamined heteronormative assumptions* (Bedford 2009) and *heterosexual matrix* (Butler, 1999). One student teacher considers sex, gender and sexual diversity as matters unsuitable for discussion with children in elementary school, based on their own *assumptions* that information about intersex and transgender identities "would only cause confusion" to pupils; despite being presented with different approaches to gender complex pedagogy, it seems difficult for this student teacher to comprehend instruction about sexual development as an ethical issue in education.

Pupils are able to see the realities of the world in their own families and families they know. It is surely be just a step forward to ask them to describe what makes *their* family? For example, teachers could watch films and documentaries, discuss them among school staff, such as: "*What makes a family?*" (Greenwald, 2001), "*it is elementary*" (Chasnoff and Cohen, 1996) and "*It's Still elementary*" (Chasnoff and Symons, 2007) among others. Inclusive pedagogical practices for trainee teachers can be implemented, in order to address the needs of LGBTIQQA2S children and young people (Moe, Perera-Diltz, Sepulveda, and Finnerty, 2014) and the inclusion of children's parents that could be transparents, and/or same-sex parents.

For instance, in the work of Sam Killermann (2013) "The social justice advocate's handbook, a guide to gender" Killermann presents a "genderbread person" (a gender neutral version of the fairy tale 'the gingerbread man') which incorporates essential characteristics in a person's identity, described in continuous terms rather than in rigid dichotomies; its importance lies in giving a person the right of self-definition, rather than imposing an identity chosen by others. Killermann's Genderbread person dials into self-defined identities.

The dials are as follows: Gender Identity's degrees go from the levels of non-gendered, woman-ness and man-ness including a two-spirited person (First Nation American gendered identity). Gender Expression embodies performativity of gender from A-gender, to diverse levels of feminine and masculine performativity. Biological Sex, including A-sex, intersex, male, female and male, female as self-identified. Finally, attracted to: from nobody (asexual) to women/females/femininity; and/or Men/males/masculinity. By using the five dials, we allow constructing and understanding the complexity of gender, attraction, and identity to address and examine unchecked normative assumptions, but most important is how these assumptions are not merely reflected on, but are acted upon to produce a behavioural shift.

“It is relevant to think about this subject [of gender, sex and sexual diversity] in becoming a future teacher” (Student)

Student teachers reflect in terms of teachers' ethical responsibility and pupils' well-being within educational environments, being *aware* of the effects that heteronormativity has on a person's life, and considering *multilayered* identities, categories and stereotypes, concluding that “*we should be tolerant toward each other*”, emphasizing ethical issues. Although tolerance is seen as relevant, the aim is to increase knowledge and acceptance of diverse genders and sexualities. The reflection is backed up by research on “*attitudinal change of teacher's students toward LGBTIQ[AA2S] persons.*” (Engberg, Hurtado and Smith, 2007, p.72).

One student teacher explains that silence protects a person's identity, even though a person consciously knows that the act of remaining silent does not protect against discrimination and retribution due to sex, gender, and factual or perceived sexual orientation. For example, within the environment of the heteronormative school, gender and sexual diversity are taboo topics, students learn about the heterosexual ‘*mainstream*’. Such a school is labelled within the *silent paradigm* (Kumashiro 2002), where a gender variant pupil will be at peril due to gender identity and its expression. Thus school staff may not only fail to protect a gender variant pupil, but also may legitimize abusive behaviour. Physical, emotional, and psychological health are integral parts of safety. It requires attention and coordinated efforts from staff, teachers, counsellors, head teachers, and priests/ministers in religious affiliated schools to ensure safe and non-violent environments (Kirkley and Getz, 2007) to foster students' process of becoming.

“All children should gain a deeper understanding of themselves and others who coexist with them in their schools.” (Student)

Student teachers reflect upon *inclusion, diversity, open-mindedness* and *respect* to address the needs of all pupils, and base their reflections on ethical and personal values, guiding their learning on tolerance, and cherishing the diversity of all people. They also reflect on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948), and the needs of all individuals for freedom from discrimination based on sex, gender, sexual orientation and ethnic background. They see teachers' roles as advocates, facilitators and allies with their pupils.

In addition, student teachers reflect on the challenges, and how to overcome obstacles such as silent misunderstandings and religious misconceptions. Others see inequality as a gendered issue; one student examines the issue of hatred institutionally supported by faith and by political discourses, interpreting people's silence as supporting inequality. Student teachers advocate for equality and diversity engendered by discussion. They consider heteronormativity and gendered restrictions as an issue that affects most pupils regardless of their gendered and sexual identity, but retain the hope that shared understanding can be enhanced and faith in their own potential as agents of social transformation.

Ideas of identity disclosure are treated with care; in emphasizing the significance of personal history student teachers become aware of the limitations of the teacher's role, and the need to consolidate practices, conciliate religious, professional and ethical beliefs. There is a need for multidisciplinary approaches (teacher, parents, counsellor, social workers, etc.) and guidelines to manage conflict in classrooms. Two student teachers consider the relevance of GSD inclusion in the educational philosophy and ethics course because the topic increases their awareness around teachers' ethical responsibilities.

“... of The World's Multiracial, Multicultural, and Multisexual Composition”

“What we have to understand is that children are living in societies that are increasingly acknowledging the realities of the world's multiracial, multicultural, and multisexual composition.” (Student)

This is a quote from one student teacher's journal emphasizing the need for teachers to interpret the children's lives within the actual world. During the course students start *de*-constructing and *re*-constructing critically their own experiences in order to

improve their learning opportunities, as well as considering the integration of such learning into their professional lives.

Student teachers see theory and praxis in a holistic way, where educators use critical thinking in order to bridge the meaning between educational ethos and advocacy, increasing understandings of peer-to-peer dynamics, and facilitating teacher-to-teacher and teacher-to-pupil interaction.

Discussion on Pedagogy within Teacher Education

The disrupting techniques used by deconstructive ethics encourage reflections on counter heteronormativity praxis and the need to foster pupils' resilience. Student teachers relate the intervention content to the educational ethos; formulating counter-heteronormative responses to public discourses of [in]-visibility and [non]-audibility of gender and sexual diversity, being able to openly discuss and articulate their views with family, friends and peers over the media and social portrayal of GSD, the safe-space within their immediate social circle enabling them to correlate and assume an advocate role, acknowledging and accepting multiple identity compositions, extending shared moral space into their reflections and possibly into their future teaching practices.

This approach presents some shortcomings, we do not only map the landscape on gender and sexual diversity and its fluidity, but also give our students space to learn best practices informed by research on gender complex pedagogies, inclusive and anti-oppressive practices.

Some surveys map the inequalities in schools based on gender identity and its expression, starting by identifying the climate of homophobia and transphobia mainly at the level of secondary education (Taylor, et al., 2011; Fournier, 2007), and the challenges it brings to new generations of teachers (Bernier, 2011); research in the field of sexuality and health education addresses the issues of sexual diversity in high school by teaching healthy sexuality as safe sex practices by gender segregated groups (Ontario School Curriculum, 2008). This practice does not challenge marginalization of students belonging to sexual minorities, neither does it offer the opportunity to address their possible inquiries about same-sex relations; young people (14-21 years old) that are identified as a sexual minority may be

excluded from access to health and other services (Dumas, Chamberland and Bastien, 2011; Blais, Gervais, Boucher, Hébert and Lavoie, 2013).

Inquiries into sexual minorities, gender and sexual diversity have come from various researchers in education (Meiners and Quinn, 2012; Meyer, 2007, Kumashiro, 2009; Bedford, 2009), climate surveys on schools (Taylor, et al., 2011; Hunt and Jensen 2007), Higher Education initiatives that have established interdisciplinary research projects (Sexualités et Genres: Vulnérabilité, Résilience, Université du Québec à Montréal) and centres on gender and sexual diversity studies, such as Mark S. Bonham Centre for Sexual Diversity Studies at the University of Toronto, others following the line of Women and Gender Studies like the Simone de Beauvoir Institute, and the Mel Hoppenheim School of Cinema with its Interdisciplinary Studies in Sexuality both at Concordia University in Montreal. Others are centres which hold online resources for sexual minorities (in Quebec POLY-OUT ; L'Alternative; Le GRIS-Montréal; Gai écoute: Jeunesse Lambda; Projet 10; AlterHéros and AGIR)

The most interesting landscape of ideas unfortunately remains silenced in this intervention, the intersection of sexual diversity, gender sexual development in childhood and religious beliefs/ views. This specific intersection presents challenges, silences, and assumptions. In this field, the work of Yvette Taylor and Ria Snowdon (2014) could offer us a theoretical lens and methodological approach to discover salient social divisions and identities by 'queering' religion, but our brief intervention lacked the time and tools needed for further exploration of the intersection of religious beliefs with gender and sexual diversity studies in education.

Conclusion

In conclusion we can summarize the three structural dimensions that are interlinked to each other: firstly the legislation defining educational institutions, secondly teacher education training providing appropriate knowledge and tools for teachers to act in ethically responsible ways in school practice, and school climate that will be improved by the gender and sexual diversity aware practices. Thirdly, the development of gender aware legislation, the Gender Equality Act, and protection from discrimination based on gender identity and gender expression.

We highlight future implications for this topic, firstly how it is needed to enhance teacher training practices. From day-care to elementary education teachers should nourish learning about self and others, building relationships, understanding feelings and belongings. From Middle to Higher Education comprehensive sexual diversity education should focus on safety and wellbeing of students, health issues, gender and sexual diversity literacy (Bryan, 2012, 2010; Richard, 2012). It is also important to address teachers' own identity development and to strengthen their personal and professional integrity when identifying, addressing and integrating gender and sexual diversity. We suggest that cornerstones in creating a safe GSD responsible learning environment are de-constructive ethics and dialogue as a pedagogical approach to re-constructing a shared moral space, thereby increasing their capacity to bring knowledge, visibility and dialogue.

Finally, we consider it is necessary to develop legislation that addresses a gender complex pedagogy, following international declarations (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, United Nations, 1948; Eliminating Discrimination against Children and Parents based on Sexual Orientation and/or Gender Identity, UNICEF, 2014). The Yogyakarta Principles (O'Flaherty and Fisher 2008) and the development of policies that regulate practice inform not only teachers but also school administrators and parents about multiple discrimination based on sex, gender and sexuality, and how to address it in everyday life.

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