This article endeavors to pull together various theoretical approaches to curricular reform using the queer student body and queer theory as its starting point. The authors outline the implications of naming, and the possibilities and polemics of citizenship. Offering the intersections of queer theory and critical race theory as a model of intervention, they outline an alternative to universalist discourses of difference and assimilation. In doing so, they hope to develop a better understanding of who queer students are, and an understanding of how they are harmfully positioned as Other within the various discourses of citizenship, curriculum, and educational research.

Within education departments at the university level, at meetings of policy makers, and in classrooms, concerns about how to best address issues of difference in schools are being raised. We hear about the resistance regarding the inclusion of Gay Straight Alliances at the middle and high school level; the banning of books containing gay, lesbian, or bisexual issues in Canadian and U.S. schools; and students successfully suing school districts for harassment that has gone unchecked. At the same time, it seems as if gay and lesbian issues (but not necessarily queer, bi- or transgendered) are appearing everywhere: same-sex marriage has begun the long road toward legal acceptance, and prime-time television seems populated with gay (albeit desexualized and almost acceptable) representations, such as Queer Eye for the Straight Guy. Yet, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and queer (LGBTQ) youth are often constructed as an Other, or as a problem that needs to be “dealt with,” or minimally included by dropping issues into single-day classroom lessons.

One aim of this article is to explore the intersections and disjunctures among recent constructions surrounding sexual minority youth, curricular and pedagogical theories, and citizenships. We argue and will demonstrate the potential for these complex and messy theories to disrupt conventional and static frameworks in classrooms. We focus on the exemplar of LGBTQ youth and bodies in schools, and ways that schools and citizenship can be read with and through theories that question rigid identity constructions of varying types. This article addresses how working through these lenses offers teachers, administrators, and students different and complex tools for teaching and learning with and about sexual minority students.
Introducing \textit{Queer}

The term \textit{queer} is generally understood as distinct and separate from labels such as \textit{gay}, \textit{lesbian}, and GLBT. Each categorization has historical and current usages with implications that are far too complicated to render in a short article. \textit{Queer}, and its attendant meanings, can cause discomfort because its use is fluid and partial. This fluidity works to disrupt and alter understandings of who named sexual minorities are, how they see themselves, and how they are seen in classrooms. In the use of \textit{queer}, there is a push to complicate the binary of gay and straight, a re-figuring of identities containing unstable, and always multiple and partial positions (Butler, 1993). The use of \textit{queer} as opposed to \textit{gay}, \textit{lesbian}, or \textit{bisexual}, purposefully disrupts the notion that identity is fixed or immutable. It includes a move to highlight the existence of and interrupt silent assumptions about heterosexuality as normal and homosexuality as Other. The assumption of heterosexuality as normal, is a \textit{normative} practice. Normative is that through which standards and norms assumed to be morally superior are created and kept in place.

Heteronormativity is ubiquitous within most structures and institutions, including schools. It maintains the power of heterosexuality as dominant and privileged within the classroom or school, and within more general notions of who might be termed a full citizen. We are committed to explaining and using terms such as \textit{normative} because they explicitly articulate how standard understandings and constructions leave the status quo of teaching and learning in place. Simultaneously, an invitation is extended to entertain how theories that are messy, seemingly abstract, and complicated can offer openings to deconstruct how heteronormativity serves to exclude, erase, or silence queer students, their citizenship, or right to political citizenship within educational institutions.

\textbf{How Queer Bodies Get Read in Public/School Settings}

In assigning certain cultural, aesthetic, and social meanings, the queer body is labeled and made visible in very specific ways. Its Otherness is a \textit{normalizing} mechanism; it is an attempt to control and assimilate, while simultaneously reifying the heterosexual body without ever having to question its heteronormative stability. In the classroom, an ostensibly public space, queer bodies often occupy a double bind. There is resistance to infusing curriculum with gay and lesbian content. Yet, the same queer bodies can, and often are, subjected to the trauma and violence of publicly sanctioned pejoratives and are negatively marked within school spaces. What is invisible and markedly absent from curriculums is often rendered visible and saturated with meaning outside the classroom, as queer bodies are named in high school hallways and cafeterias, or erased in popular epigrams such as, “Oh, that’s so gay.” Once named, the individual is socially and politically marginalized.

The reality of the queer body, the acknowledged presence of the gay or lesbian student, is not what is at stake in curricular reform, for gay and lesbian students \textit{are}. Rather, it is the violence enacted on and through the body’s public surface that is at issue in the debates surrounding reform. In the classroom, this violence is often enacted through silencing. This is not to say that all forms of silence in the classroom necessarily equate to trauma or lack of agency. However, it does mean that in order for lesbian, queer, trans, or other sexual minority students to feel safe in their hallways, classrooms, and playgrounds, or for these students to choose to speak openly and publicly and feel secure doing so, a space must exist for them. What does this space look like and how can educators facilitate and maintain such a space? We can begin by acknowledging the curricular silences and pedagogical ellipses, which may be addressed by readings of classrooms and curricula through queered lenses. Accordingly, the challenge for queer youth is that of navigating ones’ subjectivity within the boundaries of culturally normalizing stereotypes. The challenge for educators becomes how to teach and write curricula, employ theory, or perform pedagogies in ways that do not simply reify and renormalize heteronormative, publicly mediated prescriptive identities.

\textbf{Naming versus self-identifying}

Depending on the circumstances, to be called “queer,” “faggot,” or “lesbian” may be understood as an affirmation of self or, as is often the case in
schoolyards and hallways, an insult hurled in an attempt to politically immobilize the queer body and render it visible as Other. To the 12-year-old standing at his locker, hearing shouts or whispers of “faggot” from his heterosexual peers is not affirming or enabling. When heard from another queer youth, the same term could serve as a form of acknowledgment, acknowledging one’s identity in a community. In short, naming can either be enabling or paralyzing. The same can be said of curriculum. As noted previously, the mere inclusion of an uncomplicated or uncontextualized curricula denoting gay and lesbian visibility can mean that instead of bringing about a powerful acknowledgment of the queer body, the Othering is furthered and given special authority by its inclusion in official and hidden curriculums. Just as heterosexuality is a given in the classroom, so too are the binary categorizations of sex/gender and numerous other boundaried and dichotomized assumptions, the most pronounced of which is public/private. Education, Giroux (2003) tells us, is a democratic public sphere. That is, children enter into the classroom as public citizens; their private lives seemingly inconsequential to their participation, unless they fail to fit neatly within dominant identity frameworks. Similar to other public spaces, the classroom is shaped by formulaic restrictions of heteronormative discourse. Yet, increasing numbers of gay and lesbian youth choose to self-identify in high school despite the resulting homophobia and social alienation that rises to the surface as a result of this self-identification (Sadownik, 2002). Consequently, their private lives are made public and unwittingly become the central mechanism of their publicness. For queer, gay, or lesbian youth, both the public and personal are always in play, the structuring of one’s social and political life is contingent on heterosexual modes of address and one’s relation to, and positioning against, these assignations. Here, as Berlant and Warner (1998) suggest, the private or personal are both self-defining and are a means by which the queer, gay, or lesbian body is named and politically circumscribed. The point we wish to make is that both the private and the public are ordered, privileged, and proscribed in different ways at different times, depending on whether one’s identity is being claimed or assigned. Where, then, does a queer body locate itself in a public, heterosexual, historically masculine curricular space? The queer body is already hidden, hyper-sexualized, private. Thus, as Warner (1993) suggests, the queer body is already, regardless of its own subjectivity and social positioning, limited by its relegation to this private sphere. In the classroom, whether or not a self-identified lesbian youth chooses to be “out,” her identity is named—albeit silently—by the myriad of social norms to which she does not adhere and publicly, or paradoxically, by the Othering that is endemic to a marginalized public identification. From the standpoint of school citizenship, one’s ability to negotiate the space of the classroom and its curriculum is incumbent on one’s social positioning. This conversation becomes further complicated with the intersectionalities of race, class, and ethnicity. Therefore, one can see the ways that the entry doors to civic life begin to slam shut upon the queer body’s approach.

**Queer citizenship is not part of curricular theory** Queer citizenship is not part of multicultural or anti-racist teaching as it has been popularly constructed. The queer body, in its racialized, class-based, ethnically diverse subjectivities, has few access points in this dialogue. Without access, there can be no discernable voice, no political presence, no “legitimate” civic identity. Consequently one’s identity as citizen proper is greatly compromised. While attempts to infuse curriculums with gender and sexuality have met with reasonable success, the recipe is largely an add-and-stir model in which gay and lesbian issues are treated as pedagogical isolates, focused on just long enough to substantiate a politics of Otherness. Now, publicly identified, the queer body is a socialized and political misfit known only through, and in, its Otherness. For the queer student, this takes the form of a hidden and explicit curriculum that is unable and unwilling to fully incorporate pedagogies and contents that more than tolerate the inclusion of queer content through specific and planned curricular goals. By isolating curriculum and pedagogies, educators also lose opportunities to construct classroom knowledges that break down the hierarchical structure of
the classroom, where the teacher is all-knowing and students are deficit bodies bringing little or no useful knowledge to the classroom. Marginalized students often call for the pedagogical inclusion of curricula that has been typically relegated to the private (outside of school) sphere. By failing to incorporate these experiences, schools exclude relevant pedagogy for those most likely to be pushed out (Fine, 1991; Loutzenheiser, 2002).

Within education, the problem of restructuring heteronormative curricula and pedagogies involves reforming both the definition and enactments of citizenship. Often, notions of citizenship put forth in a rush to all-encompassing inclusivity reify the very paralytic structures they are working to overturn. The result is a citizenship discourse that, while partially inclusive in its categorical frameworks of naming, does not address the underlying dominant ideologies. These same underlying ideologies prohibit some newly named political bodies from engaging in the practice of citizenship. The inherent rights and freedoms of heteronormative citizenry are not accorded equally to the queer body, the body of color, the Othered bodies of those who do not fit neatly within the sociopolitical parameters. The result is the formation of boundaries in our classrooms.

Arguably, a case for inclusivity in and of itself is not a useful framework for queering a discourse of citizenship. As with anti-racist and multicultural discourses, inclusivity borne of heteronormative social institutions and motivations means that the resulting assimilationalist decoupage simply covers over larger ideological mechanisms of oppression. Engaging this discourse is a useful mechanism with which to open up the less-than-permeable barriers surrounding queer visibility and political agency. As a vital component of a reconceptualized curriculum studies, the language of social justice is well suited to speak to the metapublic desire for assimilation and immobilization.

What Does Queer Theory Have to Offer Education?

As noted previously, the term queer purposefully disrupts how identity is constructed. Our use of queer theories "seeks to disrupt the discrete, fixed locations of identity by understanding sexuality and its meanings not as a priori or given but as constructed, contingent, fashioned and refashioned, and relational" (Talburt, 2000, p. 3). Popular usage and understandings have led to identity markers such as race, gender, and sexuality being viewed as fixed and unchanging. This results in an ultimate naming around which individuals are organized into groups that are too often viewed as universal. For example, queer students whose queerness simultaneously disallows being recognized as female, working class, differently abled, or of color. Queer allows for an understanding of the individual more clearly met at the intersections of these myriad identities.

Not surprisingly overidentification results in books that offer teaching strategies for students with difference as their only identity moniker with chapters such as, “Teaching the African American Child,” or “Including Gay Students in Your Classroom,” which makes each group mutually exclusive. For example, neither race nor sexuality can be separated from the other, as the construction of one, in many ways, relies on the construction of the other.

Queer theory, as articulated here, is not the Liberal extraction that imagines we are all the same. It is a political and theoretical structuring or paradigm, an intellectual fault line along which the potential for slippage and rupture is ever present. It is not a call for queer to simply fix itself. Queer theory rejects desexualizing, and rejects assimilation that takes as its foundation that the only way to gain rights or citizenship is to cleave to and argue that “we are just like them.” Within this theoretical model, what one is called or named, and how one chooses to identify oneself is acknowledged as a vital component of agency and citizenship, and of pedagogies that reach more students.

Relying on readings of schools that complicate, disrupt, and note the erasures inherent within the construction of private (i.e., sexuality) and public (i.e., heteronormative schools realms) invites educators to focus on what is present and evident, as well as what is hidden or silent. We argue that queer theories and the queering of theory offers curricular and pedagogical studies as sites of contestation that may, in turn, open up pedagogical and curricular projects and unsettle heteronormativity in schooling.
Queer theory also offers the ability to look locally and contextually, using theories of fluidity and intersectionality to make sense of, take action, name, or refuse naming. This questioning of the finality of a singular identity can be employed to better understand how race and sexuality intersect, or how sexuality, gender, and class intersect. These questionings and understandings are also useful in relation to curricula and curricular development. What might it mean if these queries were addressed to social studies or literature? What types of critical readings might it encourage in students and teachers?

Missing discourses and . . .

Within schools and among teachers, students, and activists there has been debate about whether gay and lesbian issues ought to be included in multicultural education. While many schools have instituted some form of multicultural education program, the majority do not address the concerns of queer youth within the official curriculum. These missing discourses tell queer youth that they are not worthy of inclusion, that they are and ought to remain invisible (Crocco, 2001).

To further complicate matters, there is a gap between the multiculturalism of academia and multiculturalism (the U.S.) or anti-racist pedagogies (Canada) in schools. While there is excellent work within critical multiculturalism and social reconstructionist realms (Grant & Sleeter, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Nieto, 2000; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2001), much of what actually occurs in the school as policy is of the “Can’t we all just get along,” or “foods and festivals” variety. These strategies often fail to move outside the individual and consider systemic causes and effects or issues of power (Grant & Sleeter, 1999). Even critical multicultural education often speaks in identity-constructed balkanizations, with little fluidity or intersectionality between those for whom race, class, sexuality, or gender has primacy.

However, just as there is pressure on the system to be more inclusive in relation to race in the hopes of altering student achievement (but not necessarily the culture of the school), similar pressures are on schools in relation to gay and lesbian (but not necessarily bi-, transgender, or queer) issues. The rising incidents of violence against students who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or questioning has forced a limited convergence of interests between advocates for the inclusion of gay and lesbian topics in the schools, a few educators at both the K-12 and post-secondary levels, and a small percentage of the general public (Bell, 1995).

While discussions involving gays and lesbians are gaining a limited foothold in schools, issues of those who identify as transgendered or queer seem to draw increased uneasiness. Since teachers often decide what actually occurs in their classrooms, it follows that this discomfort translates into curricular silences.

. . . essentialist inclusions

Yet, even when gay and lesbian (rather than queer) issues are raised in the classroom, the scope is limited. Some teachers, particularly at the secondary level will, for example, spend a day in a social studies course talking about human rights and include that gay people ought to have rights too, or present lessons on stereotypes or tolerance of difference for a class period. This is not to say that these introductory moves are not important, but they have unintended and limited results.

For example, what do lessons that take as their only gay and lesbian content the highlighting of the sexualities of those who have been identified as non-heterosexual (e.g., Oscar Wilde, Virginia Woolf, James Baldwin) accomplish? Is it yet another turn that says “they are really just like us”? These moments of inclusion often encourage a separating out of those in the added group but do not complicate and/or merely reify difference.

In classrooms where non-heteronormative sexualities are discussed, the Gay Person is usually considered Outside within the classroom. This reinforces the status quo of race and sexualities, because within these conversations gay and lesbian people are often White, middle-class, urban, wealthy, and able-bodied. These approaches leave queer issues and heteronormativity on the shelf, and render issues of sexuality silent when discussing race and vice versa. They are still centered around the Other of the gay and lesbian body. And much of the curriculum focuses on changing individual attitudes or beliefs, which does not interrogate
power relations or the role of school cultures. The loosening of identity strings offers and opens opportunities for students to speak back to the curriculum. This counteracts the possibility that control and direction of curricula and pedagogies lies solely in the hands of teachers or schools. It invites the unexpected and the realization that with multiple readings comes multiple outcomes and answers.

**Critical Race Theory Meets Queer Theory**

While the arguments can never be parallel, nor the politics of race and sexuality necessarily aligned, there is much to be gained from more fluid analysis of queer and anti-racist theories. As scholars such as Kumashiro (2001) have noted, anti-racist and anti-oppressive literatures have much to contribute to queer theory. Within the greater public imaginary, many marginalized groups are understood to be, and are read as citizens. Here, another lesson can be drawn from anti-racist discourses: that being read or recognized as citizen does not necessarily speak to those who are named *citizen* to actively participate in the public sphere, to engage in civil discourse, and to actively participate in the rights and freedoms of individual citizens (e.g., the right to be heard or the right to eat a school lunch in relative safety). Not unlike the racialized body, the queer body becomes vulnerable to these threats at both the level of community and self-understanding (Warner, 1993).

**Intersecting fluidities**

Queer theory asks readers to question how these identity constructions make space for, or constrain, student difference in relation to sexuality, but can also be applied to race, ethnicity, and class both in addition to, and intersectionally with, sexuality. However, even within queer theories’ desired fluidity and multiplicity there is often a failure to work the intersections of race and queer. Critical race theory (CRT)—a field that draws upon law, education, and political theory—offers possibilities for such intersections even while it often ignores fluidity or queered constructions (Gates et al., 1994; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lopez, 1995; Williams, 1995). Therefore, we argue that CRT can be informed by queer theories, and queer theories can be positively influenced by CRT.

Similar to queer theory, CRT embraces the paradoxical nature of using, working within, and rejecting a reliance on the courts (or schools) for equality. For queer theory, CRT can serve as a reminder that race matters. Too often, queer theories overlook or undertheorize race. This results in an overessentializing of the queer body as non-dominant in relationship to sexuality but part of the dominate in every other way. Newer generations of CRT push the notion of race as having primacy, which remains problematic. However, they also often productively demonstrate that intersectionality and fluidity need not be mutually exclusive (Crenshaw, 1995; Espinoza & Harris, 2000; Hutchinson, 2000; Valdes, 1997).

CRT offers specific discourses from which to question a reliance on civil rights discourses as the only avenue toward equality. Williams (1995) points out the paradoxical nature of a civil rights rhetoric for people of color, arguing that a belief in looking to the law for remedy is strong; yet, simultaneously understanding that one must be skeptical of real systemic changes occurring based on the actions of the courts. Much of the rhetoric in civil rights and within multicultural education has included a reliance on color-blind discourses that rely on assimilation as its end goal. CRT explodes the notion of color-blindness or race neutrality, just as, queer theory explodes heteronormativity and sexual sameness—ideas that remain very much in evidence in both teachers and students at all levels. When applied more holistically to anti-oppressive education, these theories can invoke complex understandings of race, sexuality, and civil rights discourse.

CRT offers language and a method to analyze concerns surrounding queer citizenship, exposing their assimilationist mores. Queer theory suggests that the courts might not offer tenable solutions, because queers are different than non-queerly identified bodies. It is on this basis, not a universal sameness, that the rights of citizenship ought to be recognized. In schools, specifically, CRT offers language to critique liberal multiculturalism. This often creates uncomplicated, individualistic notions of sameness, which again requires a desire for being just like those who hold the power—be it the idealized and mythical good student body, administrators, parents, curricular
planners, or teachers. Those who identify as queer, including queer youth of color, as with other marginalized students, cannot be successfully educated in a system that requires a rejection of difference in order to succeed. Productive approaches to understanding how to teach within the slipperiness of difference may emanate from analyses, which combine the intersections of race and sexuality.

**Conclusion**

As an area of increasing relevance for educators, sexual minority youth are undeniably overlooked in much of the existing literature in educational research. The queer body challenges us to acknowledge those who do not easily fit the normative molds that shape our schools, classrooms, and curriculums, including issues of ethnicity, race, and heteronormativity. At the same time, queer theory demands that complicated and intersecting renderings of sexual minority and other marginalized youth are utilized in the theories built, curriculums developed, students taught, and teachers trained.

In understanding the implications of naming, the promises and dilemmas of citizenship, and the intersections of critical race theory vis-à-vis queer theory, we have attempted to create a starting point for curricular reform. We propose that together these theoretical inroads may allow educators to navigate their own social-political discomfort with theories that incorporate a queering of pedagogy and curriculum. We suggest that queer and its theoretical intersections ruptures the inner recesses of assimilationalist discourse and normalizing curriculums. Finally, we argue that in concert, these theories will lay challenge to long-established and largely invisible heteronormative pedagogical infrastructures. The queer body may continue to be silenced in various ways, but its enduring presence will continue to demand flexible, new strategies for educational reform.

**References**


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