



Challenging norms: University students' views on heteronormativity as a matter of diversity and inclusion in initial teacher education



Dr. Cristian D. Magnus^{a,*}, Dr. Mattias Lundin^b

^a Heidelberg School of Education/Heidelberg University

^b Cluster Kompetenz und Profession: PostDoc Bildungswissenschaften, Projekt heiEDUCATION, Heidelberg School of Education, Standort: Zeppelinstraße 3, Raum 205, Germany

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 21 March 2016

Accepted 20 June 2016

Available online xxx

Keywords:

Diversity

Heteronormativity

Teacher education

LGBT

Qualitative research

ABSTRACT

Diversity, as seen in this article from a sexual orientation perspective, is currently an emerging topic on many levels in Europe. This article sets out to examine how future teachers and educators articulate that very aspect of diversity; normative ideas about sexuality that tend to oppress and that are related to educational settings. The understanding of how future educators engage in this topic is a key factor for future work promoting the inclusion of lesbian, gay, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) people in schools and enriching school life for all. This supports establishing a positive climate, which ultimately helps students to thrive in a democratic environment (Lerner & Boyd, 2013). This is a challenge on all levels of the educational system: policy- and governance-wise as well as on the level of institutions and individuals.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Heteronormativity implies exclusion in educational settings

With respect to the diversity of sexual identities (Kugler & Nordt, 2009), it can be suggested that many of the problems faced by equality in schools have their roots in the evasive and non-reflected role of heteronormativity, which implies exclusion. When it comes to establishing a positive climate for all, it seems the situation has great potential for improvements, especially in schools. Accordingly, the European Agency For Fundamental Rights (2014) points out that when it comes to discrimination and harassment of LGBTIQ people, more work needs to be done. Discrimination and harassment is an important challenge, not only for LGBTIQ educators and students, but also for all individuals involved. Heteronormativity can have negative effects on everybody in educational settings, but especially on LGBTIQ people.

1.1. The situation of LGBTIQ people in education

Previous research (Buston & Hart, 2001; Epstein, 1994; Herek, 2004) that addresses the situation in schools has shown that the school environment can be both heteronormative and heterosexist, for example as all students are anticipated to be heterosexual. Another study carried out by Kjaran and Kristinsdóttir (2015) in Iceland illustrates that expressed values

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: Magnus@heiedu.uni-heidelberg.de (D. C.D. Magnus).

contribute to a hegemony that has negative implications for students who do not comply with the sexuality norms in the school environment, for example by an expressed lack of respect, and by a heteronormative discourse that made them feel not fully accepted. From a societal point of view, it is important to understand the mechanisms of these norms to be able to design an inclusive school environment. However, there are also problems and distress to be avoided. According to Takács (2006, p. 6):

“Particularly vulnerable are young LGBT people who experience estrangement from family and friendship networks, harassment at school and invisibility, which can lead in some cases to underachievement at school, school drop-out, mental ill-health and homelessness.”

Not only do these issues and problems deny LGBTIQ people equal access to key social goods, such as education, they also marginalise them in society and make them one of the vulnerable groups who are at risk of becoming socially excluded (Takács, 2006; p. 6). Biechele et al. support Takács' results, showing that 27–38% of gay adolescents have experienced insults and 22% of them said that teachers would not react to these insults (Biechele et al., 2001). 27.2% even say that teachers laughed about gay jokes. Only 18% report an intervention by a teacher. With these examples we wish to turn our focus to the role of teachers in schools, because according to Gorski:

“... evidence heretofore gathered suggests that teachers largely are not being prepared to recognise homophobic bias, much less to subvert heteronormativity. Schools and colleges of education have been shown, in many cases, to breed deeper heterosexism in teachers.” (Gorski et al., 2013; p.225)

Regarding the training of pre-service teachers, research has addressed these problems previously: Szalacha (2004) for example reviewed a number of such studies and concluded that there is a need for institutionalised training combined with research. She also reviewed research on pre-service and in-service teachers' attitudes. On that matter she found that the majority of studies originated from urban areas and English-speaking countries. Richard (2015) explored teachers' intervention practices with respect to sexual diversity. She suggests that teachers who implement an inclusive practice with respect to sexual diversity are those who have acquired knowledge in at least one of three ways: by living as an LGBTIQ person (experiential training), by being closely acquainted with an LGBTIQ person (contact training), or by education (professional training). Taking these notions into account, it is relevant to address the views on heteronormativity found among European student teachers and students in educational science. This points at the aim of our study.

1.2. Aim of the study

This study aims to add to the discussion tentative core features of heteronormativity in educational settings, to enable educators and students to work towards equality and inclusion of LGBTIQ people and to prevent discrimination and harassment. The research question is formulated as follows:

How do student teachers' views on heteronormativity relate to educational settings and what do these views imply for diversity and inclusion in these settings?

The outcome of the research is intended to contribute to what could be done in the early stages of teacher education to promote the processes of inclusion and diversity. The starting point of this research is critical, and this stance is attached to the use of heteronormativity as a key concept.

2. Theoretical background: concepts of heteronormativity and how to approach it in education

Heteronormativity is a concept originating from Michael Warner:

“... so much privilege lies in heterosexual culture's exclusive ability to interpret itself as society. Het[erosexual] culture thinks of itself as the elemental form of human association, as the very model of intergender relations, as the invisible basis of all community, and as the means of reproduction without which society wouldn't exist.” (Warner, 1993; p. xxi)

Warner lets us understand that society involves normative features as he points out that heterosexuality is not only taken for granted, but also regarded as the basis for a community and a key model. To use this definition means being critical to these norms, that is a critical approach towards the limited view of regarding heterosexuality as the exclusive way of interpreting society and so forth. Furthermore, the critical approach implies questioning these norms by pointing out where notions in accordance with Warner's definition might be at risk of limiting other ways of forming identity.

We define the term heteronormativity by using the two assumptions that Ambjörnsson refers to when explaining the hetero norm (Ambjörnsson, 2006): the dichotomisation of gender and the differentiation of sexualities. Without these two notions, any heterosexual norm would be hard to define. The dichotomisation of gender examines the distinction between women and men, and the different societal expectations of these stances. The *differentiation of sexualities* refers to the distinction between heterosexuality and homosexuality (as well as other sexualities), and it examines how students relate to desire. Heteronormativity in educational settings has been addressed previously in research. King (2004), for example, argues that teachers in general are seen as asexual. Therefore, if someone is open about their sexuality, especially if they are homosexual, that would be accounted for as sexualised.

The previously presented two basic foundations for heteronormativity, as presented by Ambjörnsson (2006), are understood as the dichotomisation of gender and the differentiation of sexualities, where the dichotomy of gender is a

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/356835>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/356835>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)