



Review

How inclusive is “inclusive education” in the Ontario elementary classroom?: Teachers talk about addressing diverse gender and sexual identities



Pamela Malins*

Western University, 1137 Western Road, London, Ontario, N6G 1G7, Canada

HIGHLIGHTS

- Educators were significantly influenced by resistance, particularly from parents.
- Caution or avoidance was expressed despite expectations for inclusive education.
- Professional development is needed to assist educators with complex conversations.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 23 March 2015

Received in revised form

18 September 2015

Accepted 12 November 2015

Available online 23 December 2015

Keywords:

Curriculum

Gender

Pedagogy

Queer theory

Inclusive education

ABSTRACT

In this exploratory study, five elementary educators in Ontario, Canada, were interviewed regarding the extent to which they addressed diverse gender and sexual identities in their classrooms given current, promising programmatic curriculum in Ontario that prioritizes inclusivity. The data in this study were explored through the lens of queer theory. Findings are presented under three dominant themes: the politics behind pedagogy, what is appropriate to discuss in school, and professional development as a way to start the conversation. In conclusion, teachers reported struggles to operationalize new curriculum and required support and guidance to negotiate potential parental resistance.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Contents

1. Introduction	129
1.1. Situating the research	129
1.2. A note about terminology	129
1.3. Context	129
1.4. Literature review	130
2. Methodology and methods: queer theory, social constructionism, and the tools of inquiry	132
2.1. Theoretical framing	132
2.2. Methods for data collection	132
2.3. Participants	132
2.4. Data analysis	133
2.5. Ethical review process	133
3. Results: the complexity of addressing gender and sexual identities in the elementary classroom	133
3.1. The politics behind pedagogy	133

* Present/Permanent address. Home: 1504 - 77 Maitland Place, Toronto, Ontario, M4Y 2V6, Canada.

E-mail address: pmalins@uwo.ca.

3.2. What is appropriate to discuss in school?	134
3.3. Professional development as a way to start the conversation	135
4. Discussion: implications for teachers	135
5. Conclusion	136
Acknowledgements	137
References	137

1. Introduction

1.1. Situating the research

Political struggles for same-sex marriage rights continue to be experienced around the world, particularly in Australia, Asia, and Africa. Meanwhile, many countries in Europe and the Americas have legalized gay marriage, despite continued resistance, for example, in various regions across the United States. One of the front-runners advocating for this social change was Canada who, in 2005, became the fourth country to legalize gay marriage and is the setting for this research. Whether living out or closeted, all countries are home to individuals who identify as gay. Many countries are now home to same-sex parents. Furthermore, many schools are educating young children who either have same-sex parents or may identify as gay themselves. In places where gay marriage is legal, it seems logical that children are educated about these unions and informed about their legal rights. As a resident and elementary teacher in the province of Ontario, I am particularly interested in shifts that have taken place in programmatic curriculum (Doyle, 1992) that reflect sensitivity and respect towards an increasingly diverse population in Canada. Specifically, there is curricular focus on “inclusive education” which recognizes diverse gender and sexual identities. The *Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1–8: Language, Revised* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006) –hereafter referred to as OCL—and the *Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1–8: Health and Physical Education, Revised Interim Edition* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010)¹ (OCH) are laudable curriculum documents which retain promise as potential international exemplars as schools world-wide implement anti-bullying initiatives; however, this study contributes towards evidence that there is still considerable room for growth to ensure Ontario teachers operationalize new curriculum and policy initiatives to serve gender and sexual minority youth before Ontario can be a world leader for inclusive education.

1.2. A note about terminology

Before proceeding, it is important to outline my conceptualization of inclusion. Given the focus on Ontario curriculum and policy for this paper, I draw on the statement provided in the OCH regarding inclusive 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.

¹ The interim edition replaced an original document intended for press, which was held back due to lobbying from conservative groups who felt some material was inappropriate. This document has since been revisited and released in February 2015.

Diversity is valued, and all members of the school community feel safe, comfortable, and accepted. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p.57)

Furthermore, this document also defines “Inclusive language” as the following:

Language that is equitable in its reference to people, thereby avoiding stereotypes and discriminatory assumptions (e.g., police officer includes both males and females, whereas policeman refers only to males)” (p. 155)

Based on these definitions, I am framing the notion of inclusion as something that moves beyond the mere gesture of including someone to a way of life that also shares respect for difference and where people are treated equitably. Similarly, when speaking about individuals, equitable language makes the way we speak about identities more accessible to everyone. Queer Theory problematizes socially established norms and illustrates the fluidity of gender and sexuality to limit oppression and hierarchical structures.

It is also useful to understand various definitions of curriculum applied in the paper. Curriculum documents themselves are what Doyle (1992) referred to as the Institutional Curriculum or Programmatic Curriculum, which he described as a “shared conception or paradigm of schooling” that is “tacitly understood” (p. 487). Programmatic curriculum becomes a political instrument integrating social expectations into the school environment. Recognizing the role that teachers play in translating programmatic curriculum into practice, Doyle (1992) described the Experienced Curriculum as a “set of enacted events in which teachers and students jointly negotiate content and meaning” (see also Cornbleth, 1988; McCutcheon, 1988; Posner, 1988; Zumwalt, 1989). What children *experience* in the classroom curriculum and also what they don’t experience are of equal significance and can be intentional or unintentional. Apple (2004) described hidden curriculum as the degree to which culture and values enter into classroom curriculum despite not always being explicitly stated in the written curriculum. Similarly, Eisner (1985) described how the *absence* of a subject also impacts students and teaches them about what we value or do not value. Eisner (1994) described this absence as null curriculum.

1.3. Context

The OCL suggests antidiscrimination principles encourage “staff and students alike to value and show respect for diversity in the school and the wider society” and require “schools to adopt measures to provide a safe environment for learning, free from harassment, violence, and expressions of hate” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006, p.28). In line with these principles, The Ontario Ministry of Education released Policy/Program Memorandum No.119, *Developing and Implementing Equity and Inclusive Education Policies in Ontario Schools* (2009a), with an accompanying document, *Realizing the Promise of Diversity: Ontario’s Equity and*

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6850900>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6850900>

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