

# **Queer Critical Literacies and Initial Teacher Education: Transnational Moments**

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## **Introduction**

Gender and sexuality diversity are still considered controversial topics in many places. Education, particularly, has been a site of heated debate about the ‘appropriateness’ of curricula and classroom discussions that include critical reflections on gender and sexuality. Schools and higher education institutions in many countries are characterized by heterosexist pedagogical approaches that erase, devalue or actively oppress the experiences and lived realities of queer people (see for instance LGBT Youth Scotland 2018 and OUT LGBT Well-being 2016). A queer critical literacies (QCL) approach (Govender & Andrews 2021) challenges heterosexism by promoting critical analysis and reflection on discourses and representations of gender and sexuality. QCL brings diverse representations into classrooms where these were predominantly (actively or unconsciously) excluded before, enables readings of texts that recognise and validate (a)gender and (a)sexual diversity, and critically confronts the heterosexism inherent in dominant discourses in societies that informs the production and reception of texts. QCL, like critical literacies more broadly, has a social justice agenda that seeks to transform societies through pedagogical approaches that build consciousness of systems of domination, access, diversity and design (Janks 2010).

However, coherent frameworks for QCL are still emerging (Govender & Andrews 2021). Educators are still grappling with how to approach (a)gender and (a)sexuality diversity in meaningful and transformative ways, especially in societies with widespread homophobia. The authors of this chapter work in initial teacher education (ITE) at universities in Johannesburg, South Africa, and Glasgow, Scotland, and we have both incorporated QCL in different ways in our courses. Our approaches to QCL have been influenced by socio-political factors including the histories of queer rights in our respective contexts. In this chapter, we use autoethnographic research methods (Adams & Holman Jones 2011) to reflect on courses and lessons where we incorporate QCL into ITE. This, in many ways, is reflected in the queer border crossings we make from reflecting on processes of teaching and learning, to personal and cultural experiences, to emotional tensions tied to ways of doing QCL in teacher education. First, we present brief comments about our positionality as educators and discuss policies and historical factors that influence the teaching of QCL in Johannesburg and Glasgow. Second, we unpack the queer critical literacies approach and explain its utility in diverse contexts, and describe the autoethnographic method employed in this chapter. We then discuss key moments in our teaching and how we incorporated QCL in our classrooms. We conclude the chapter by reflecting on these transnational approaches and how they reflect the context-specific ways that QCL might be brought into ITE. We argue that QCL is important in ITE in diverse global contexts because teachers can play a role in transforming school contexts and challenging heterosexism and queerphobia, if they are empowered to teach in ways that interrupt heteronormativity (Martino & Cumming-Potvin 2016).

#### **Letters to our readers**

***Greetings from Johannesburg, South Africa (Grant Andrews)***

I work as a lecturer at a school of education at a major university in South Africa. Many of my courses focus on topics of gender and sexuality, and I teach in ways that encourage critical thought around these topics and on the role that my students will play in challenging harmful and oppressive ideologies when they become teachers.

South Africa was the first country in the world to explicitly enshrine protections for gender and sexual minority groups in its constitution in 1996. LGBTQ rights activists were actively involved with national politics during the transition from apartheid, advocating for greater legal protections (Carolin & Frenkel 2019) that eventually led the country to legalize same-sex marriage in 2006, only the fifth country to do so worldwide (Vincent & Howell 2014). South Africa is still one of the very few countries in Africa where protections exist for LGBTQ people, whereas the majority of African countries still criminalize same-sex sexualities or acts, with some nations punishing homosexuality with life in prison or even death (Msibi 2011). Thus, South Africa is often praised as a leader in LGBTQ rights on the continent.

However, even as social and political gains have been made after the end of apartheid, attitudes are still largely conservative and queerphobic amongst various groups, and there is ‘an enormous gulf between constitutional protections on the one hand, and the violence and discrimination experienced by many South African gay and lesbian citizens on a day-to-day basis’ (Vincent & Howell 2014: 473). South Africa is a country with rampant violence. For queer people, violence and ‘corrective rape’ – where queer people are raped in the belief that this will ‘cure’ them of their same-sex attraction or nonnormative gender expression – are common occurrences, particularly affecting Black lesbian women in rural or township areas (Koraan & Geduld 2015). In addition, homophobic discourses in the country are common, framing same-sex sexualities as “[u]nnatural’, ‘unAfrican’ and ‘unGodly’” (Vincent & Howell 2014: 475).

In educational spaces, attitudes towards sexuality are similarly conservative. In 2019, the Department of Basic Education announced that the country would expand comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) in schools, beginning at Grade 4. This announcement was met with a moral furore by religious and civic groups, as well as by many parents and teachers. Chaskalson et al. (2019: n.p.) explain that initiatives like the expansion of CSE sought to “provide adolescents and young people with knowledge, skills and efficacies to make informed decisions and positive lifestyle choices regarding sex and sexuality”. However, the furore that followed demonstrated how South African society is largely still conservative around issues of sex and sexuality despite progressive policies. One of the political parties in South Africa, the African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP) staged marches to government offices as they claimed the curriculum ‘encourages children to engage in oral, anal, homo and heterosexual practices, among other horrific sexual teachings’ (quoted in Chaskalson et al. 2019: n.p.). The discourses surrounding the anti-CSE protests were similar to those found in anti-LGBT rights circles in South Africa, including accusations that the curriculum is a Western import and erases ‘African culture’, and blatant homophobia and transphobia in anti-CSE online groups (Chaskalson et al. 2019).

Studies in South African schools demonstrate widespread homophobic violence and discrimination on the part of students, teachers and community members. Dennis Francis, in his review of literature on school experiences of LGBT youth (2017), notes that multiple studies across provinces demonstrated that ‘schools perpetuated and reinforced social prejudices and discrimination toward LGBT learners’ and ‘LGBT youth are victimized and harassed and yet lack the protection and support of teachers and school leaders’ (6). A national survey conducted by OUT LGBT Well-being (2016) showed that among other harms, young people reported the following forms of discrimination and violence while they were at school:

1. 55% of LGBT youth experienced verbal insults in schools
2. 35% were threatened with physical violence

3. 18% experienced physical violence such as being 'punched, hit, kicked or beaten'
4. 11% had been sexually abused or raped while at school.

The research indicates that schools in South Africa are generally unsafe spaces for queer people. A queer critical literacies approach can equip teachers and learners to consider the ways that ideologies might be reproduced through school curriculums, and offers a framework for critically engaging with questions of gender and sexuality in language and texts. The QCL approach also challenges dominant discourses around gender and sexuality diversity in South Africa.

### ***Greetings from Glasgow, Scotland (Navan Govender)***

As an early career academic in the field of applied language, literacy, and literature education, and with a particular interest in critical literacies, I am drawn to the ways in which both communication and ways of communicating are intrinsically connected to power, identity, and ideology. As a queer cisman of South Asian heritage, having grown up in South Africa, and now living and working in Scotland, the politics of queer identities and cultures have come to affect my work in research and teaching. Living and working across national, continental, and cultural boundaries also revealed the broad range of politics, identities, cultures, and possibilities in (a)gender and (a)sexual diversity.

Recent policy developments in Scotland have sought to position the country as a progressive nation, despite the increasing conservatism in Westminster, and the UK more broadly, and current rule of the Conservative Party in parliament. This is particularly relevant for issues related to (a)gender and (a)sexual diversity. For instance, in 2018 the Scottish Government announced that it would implement LGBT-inclusion in its national curriculum for all state schools (Stone & Farrar 2021). Started in 2015 by the Scottish Government's LGBTI

Inclusive Education Working Group, and then taken on at the end of 2018 by the LGBTI Inclusive Education Implementation Group, the new educational policy shift

sits within a wider policy context of health and wellbeing in the Curriculum for Excellence, which includes Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC), the Early Years Framework, children's rights and the Building Safer Communities programme which collectively contribute towards the Government's aim of making Scotland the best place in the world to grow up. (Scottish Government 2019)

Such a move to situate (a)gender and (a)sexual diversity in mainstream, state schooling also builds on a recent history of inclusive policy shifts in Scotland and the UK more broadly: from the legalization of same-gender marriage across England, Wales, and Scotland, and the passing of the Equality Act 2010; to the LGBT Action Plan initiated in 2018, and growing pots of educational resources for doing LGBT inclusive education by Scotland's Time for Inclusive Education (TIE) Campaign and LGBT Youth Scotland.

Despite these big-P Political (Janks 2010) changes in legislature, the experiences of (a)gender and (a)sexually diverse folk in Scotland demonstrates a lack of material and cultural change. Consider the following statistics from LGBT Youth Scotland's (2018: 5) survey, *Life in Scotland for LGBT Young People*:

1. 46% of LGBT young people and half (53%) of transgender young people rated their school experience as 'bad'
2. 71% of LGBT young people experienced bullying in school on the grounds of being LGBT. This is a rise from 69% in 2012 and 60% in 2007
3. 82% of transgender young people experienced bullying in school on the grounds of their gender identity. This has risen from 77% in 2012

4. Transgender young people are now more likely than they were in 2012 to rate their university experience as 'good', with an increase from 37% to 60%
5. 9% of LGBT young people and 27% of transgender young people left education as a result of homophobia, biphobia and transphobia in the learning environment.

Schools, it would seem, continue to be sites of symbolic, emotional, and physical violence.

While policy shifts have sought to include (a)gender and (a)sexual diversity in the curriculum, the resources predominantly place queer issues, identities, cultures, and so on, outside of the main disciplinary subjects in schools. That is, the available resources do not necessarily support teachers and learners to embed (a)gender and (a)sexual diversity into their curriculums and pedagogies, but instead act as springboards for *discussing* queer politics and people or making them visible through posters. While discussion may bring queer issues into the classroom, moves toward action and transformation are vital for ensuring that inclusivity is not just superficial (K Govender & Andrews 2021; Kumashiro 2002). Therefore, 'the extent to which the LGBT Action Plan [and other related policies in Scotland] represents shifts beyond policy status quo is questionable, with some areas – such as the experiences of LGBTQI+ people seeking asylum, LGBTQI+ rights post-Brexit, and pressing equality issues in devolved UK states – completely excluded, thus arguably reproducing existing absences, silences and enduring 'sticking points' in policy and politics' (Lawrence & Taylor 2020: 3).

### **A framework for queer critical literacies**

The queer critical literacies approach draws from the fields of queer studies and critical literacies (Govender & Andrews 2021). It provides a framework for a teaching approach that challenges dominant norms and discourses of gender and sexuality, and allows for students and educators

to question how these discourses affect ways of knowing and engaging with their worlds and themselves. A queer critical literacies approach recognizes that texts and bodies are situated within matrices of power that favour dominant groups, particularly through enforcing ideologies of heterosexism, cisgenderism and patriarchy. These ideologies give legitimacy to particular expressions and experiences of gender and sexuality, and disparage, invisibilize or delegitimize diverse (a)gender and (a)sexual identities and epistemologies; for example, heterosexism sees heterosexuality as the ideal and only legitimate form of sexuality, and cisgenderism sees only cisgender identities as valid or 'normal.' Thus, the experiences of straight, cisgender people (particularly males) are often overrepresented in everyday texts, and these experiences are naturalized in ways that marginalize gay, bi, trans, asexual, nonbinary and/or queer people, among other forms of gender and sexuality diversity.

For example, very few classroom texts, including prescribed literature or textbooks in formal school curricula, represent LGBTQI+ identities, and even when these identities are represented, they are often shown in ways that might favour binary definitions of gender or represent diverse sexuality as 'abnormal' (DePalma 2016). Queer critical literacies can challenge these representations and the discourses that inform them, as well as questioning how existing representations and discourses of (a)gender and (a)sexuality might influence the way we see ourselves and others.

The term *queer* in the concept queer critical literacies has two interconnected meanings; first, *queer* is used as an adjective to describe people with nonnormative gender and sexual identities and/or those who identify with a label under the LGBTQI+ umbrella (Andrews 2019); and second, *queer* is used as a verb to describe the process of 'interrupting heteronormativity' (Martino & Cumming-Potvin 2016) and cisnormativity. This process includes challenging dominant epistemologies and ideologies that exclude those from gender and sexual minority groups from recognition, representation and legitimacy in spaces like schools, everyday texts



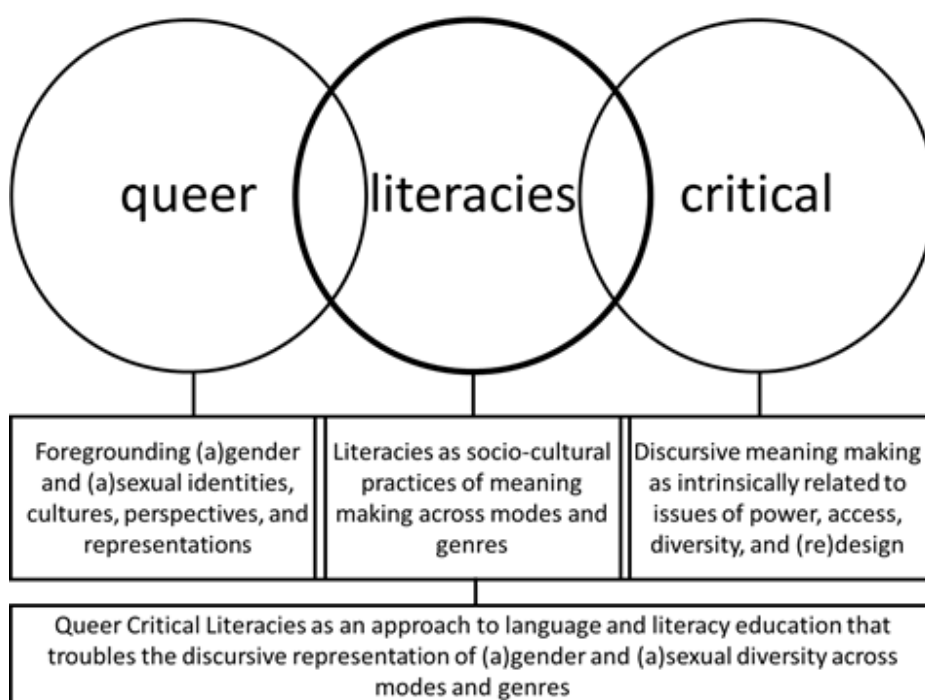
and political discourse. A part of this process is to 'denaturalize' heterosexuality and cisgender identities, to demonstrate how these sexual and gender identities are constructed in systems of power, and to show how gender expression, bodies and intimacies are policed and regulated; in other words, 'the criteria defining recognizability and respectability are examined and questioned' (DePalma 2016: 836). Queer critical literacies thus focus on the normative discourses around gender and sexuality in order to challenge the assumption that particular bodies are linked to particular genders and sexualities.

This process of queering is appropriate for the field of critical literacies, and indeed has been an important part of how critical literacies operate in many settings. If critical literacies invite teachers and learners to 'analyze power and inequality in human relationships for the purpose of creating a more just world' (McClung 2018: 403), then settings that are queerphobic and that reproduce normative discourses of gender and sexuality call for greater inclusion of queer critical literacies. Schools and universities are important spaces to introduce approaches and materials that foster queer critical literacies as these spaces are seen as sites of legitimate knowledge making and are primary sites of formal learning. Engaging meaningfully with gender and sexuality, and situating these topics as legitimate and important in educational settings, can 'expose how the suppression and marginalization of diverse voices lead to significant epistemological shortcomings, impositions and the devaluing of certain types of knowledges including experiential knowledges of gender and love' (Govender & Andrews 2021).

Strategies for implementing QCL are still emerging, and we reflect on some of the moments in our practice of QCL to demonstrate the tensions and opportunities that can arise in this approach. In our framework for QCL (Govender & Andrews 2021), we blend four moves of critical literacies (identification, deconstruction, disruption and transformation) with forms of questioning that allow students to queer knowledges, texts and discourses. Students are able to see literacies (practices of meaning making) as socio-culturally defined, and can begin to

recognize how their ways of knowing, being and doing are impacted by systems of power within which they operate. Students build dispositions that are critical towards the norms, assumptions and knowledges of gender and sexuality that they might bring with them to the classroom. We work with multiple modes and genres to demonstrate the various ways discourses of gender and sexuality operate. Figure 1.1 illustrates how the QCL approach integrates the various theoretical and methodological approaches outlined.

[insert Figure 1.1 here]



**Figure 1.1** A framework for queer critical literacies (Govender & Andrews 2021)

### **Capturing moments: autoethnography and teacher education**

You tell these stories because you believe they do something in the world to create a little knowledge, a little humanity, a little room to live and move in and around the constraints and heartbreaks of culture and categories, identities and ideologies (Adams & Holman Jones 2011: 109).

Adams and Holman Jones explore the interconnections between reflexivity, queer theory, and autoethnography by telling the stories of their identities and classroom practice in higher education. Weaving narrative with theoretical and research-based enquiry, their work demonstrates the possibilities for navigating storied lives with academic rigour – and that the lines between these two are not always so clear-cut.

Autoethnography has been described as ‘an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)’ (Ellis, Adams & Bochner 2011: 273). It is a methodological approach to doing research in the social sciences that bridges big-P and little-p politics (Janks 2010), revealing the nuanced connections between the personal or communal and the socio-cultural. Where big-P Politics refers to the larger (global) relations of power such as homophobic and transphobic policy-making, heterosexism, or even racism in and out of LGBTQI+ communities; little-p politics refers to the power relations embedded in everyday interactions between folk, the words spoken in conversation, and the ways in which lives play out day-to-day. By looking and relooking at everyday events, texts and interactions (what we call here, collectively, *moments*) through a critical lens, autoethnography enables us to critically reflect on, address, and potentially transform dominant, often oppressive, ideologies of gender and sexual normativity.

Recent literature provides useful illustrations of the possibilities of queer and critical autoethnography. Javaid’s (2020) exploration of their own experiences with the stigmatization of sexual violence in both their personal and professional (research) life is one example. Javaid

considers how their own experiences with sexual violence had resulted in them 'becom[ing] invested in researching the topic of sexual violence against men to understand more about this neglected phenomenon' (2020: 1200), and how this in turn resulted in further experiences with the stigma. Taking up an autoethnographic approach thus enabled Javiad to capture those experiences with colleagues, research participants, and others, and to 'transform [their] experiences of pain into knowledge' (2020: 1200).

Similarly, Govender (2017) and Hibbard (2020) draw on their own classroom experiences in higher education institutions as a means to grapple with their nonnormative identities. In both cases, their stories of coming out to students, in curriculum content and in professional spaces, were intrinsic to their personal identities as queer and Trans\* folk, respectively. While autoethnography provided a methodological tool for capturing these experiences, it was the critical lens through which they (re)evaluated those experiences that turned the everyday into knowledge for understanding identity, power, education, culture, and ideology in context. Therefore,

by looking at critical incidents and experiences (as texts) in relation to issues of power, teachers and students might interrogate the ways in which social and political power influence the everyday construction of individual identities, how individuals take up or resist hegemonic orders, and the ways in which individuals occupy positions of privilege and subordination at different times and in different spaces (Govender 2017: 353).

Finally, Andrews' (2020) publication demonstrates the insight that a critical autoethnographic study provided in understanding the shifting forms and uses of disruption in higher education. In his study, Andrews captures moments of teaching and learning in initial teacher education (ITE) to trace and evaluate how

disruptions that had once been coloured by unflinching homophobia and assertions of restrictive gender norms now became much more tentative, and other students were less apprehensive about engaging in conversations after these disruptions took place, even challenging the students who sought to silence critical conversations of gender and sexual identities and norms (2020: 11).

This is paired with a deep consideration of the changing power dynamics taking place at the time in relation to ongoing student movements in South Africa and the call for decolonizing higher education.

Therefore, drawing on this notion of a critical and queer autoethnography, we present and analyze two moments from our careers in ITE. We describe each moment before drawing on a QCL framework to unpack how these moments relate to issues of power, ideology, and meaning-making.

### ***Johannesburg: Teaching texts with African queer characters (Andrews)***

In presenting courses at undergraduate and postgraduate levels to students, I include topics of gender and sexuality in multiple ways, ranging from text selection to examples used during classroom discussions. I incorporate these discussions due to my positionality as a gay man who has experienced discrimination and marginalisation due to my sexuality and gender presentation. In addition, I present this material to preservice teachers because I recognise how stigma is reproduced in schools due to heterosexist curricula, social structures and attitudes of teachers and school leaders (Francis 2017), and thus the school environment can be important in addressing the widespread homophobia and transphobia in South Africa. I am purposeful in

developing queer critical literacies in addition to the other competencies that my students require in order to be successful English teachers.

One of the courses where I introduce a variety of texts with queer themes is a fourth-year English course on marginalised stories. As this course usually is presented in the final year of study for students, they already have a wealth of knowledge from previous courses that dealt with identity, as well as a great deal of school-based teaching experience to draw on when analysing the texts in my course. Many of these students have developed a strong sense of empathy for their learners' contexts, as they often have completed teaching experience in urban, township and rural schools and worked with diverse learners. This experience can contribute to classroom discussions, since many students bring examples of their own understandings of gender and sexuality diversity to the classroom or share experiences that they have had while teaching.

The fourth-year English group is usually around 80-120 students. In the course, I present a number of short stories and films, and I alternate texts from year to year as I find new relevant materials to present to students. While these texts discuss various types of marginalisation based on race, culture and class in different societies, I purposely include texts that focus on gender and sexuality diversity each year. This is because many students are reluctant to discuss this topic openly in South African universities (Andrews 2020), and the texts offer me a way to challenge students' preconceptions while developing queer critical literacies. In previous years, I have included the film *The World Unseen* (2007) by British filmmaker Shamim Sarif, which represents two Indian-South African women in 1950s South Africa who develop a romantic relationship despite their oppressive surroundings. I have also used the short stories *How to Carry On* by South African author Sally-Ann Murray, focalising a white middle-class mother who reflects on the experiences of her child who is presented as a trans male in the text, and *Jambula Tree* by Ugandan author Monica Arac de Nyeko, which explores two black girls in a small

Ugandan town who are surveilled and marginalized because of their same-sex relationship. In addition, I include a number of academic articles that speak about issues of gender and sexuality diversity in South African society and schooling.

My aim with presenting these texts to students and using a queer critical literacies approach is to develop their critical capacity around questions of diverse identities, particularly in contexts that they are familiar with. As these the texts represent the realities of discrimination which gender and sexual minorities face in Africa, students usually reflect on culture and religion when we discuss these texts in class, and the topic of race is often raised, especially in confronting notions of homosexuality being 'unAfrican' (Vincent & Howell 2014: 475). Students have often felt comfortable to discuss their teaching experience at schools, such as explaining how they discussed sexuality in their classrooms and how they dealt with bullying of queer or gender nonconforming learners. Some students have even shared how they have personally experienced discrimination due to being queer, and have challenged students who expressed homophobic views in our class discussions. These interactions demonstrate how students related the topics to their own lives and to their social contexts. Students were able to reflect on how language, perspectives and ideologies influenced the ways they reacted to the texts under discussion. For example, some students were able to voice their challenges in finding the language to describe the gender-variant child in Murray's short story, and in their essays at the end of the course, many students used more inclusive and affirming language. Many students also began to recognize that texts are not only produced in contexts, but are also read differently in different contexts (Janks 2005).

Presenting these texts is a deliberate attempt to challenge the silence around queer people and their experiences in South Africa, and to 'interrupt' heteronormativity and cisnormativity by asserting the existence and validity of nonnormative experiences (Martino & Cumming-Potvin 2016). I ask students to reflect on why some of them become so uncomfortable

when working with the texts with queer themes and characters, such as the tendency of many students to laugh when the two female-presenting protagonists of Sarif's film share a kiss. I also ask them to explore why texts like these are rarely taught in South African schools, and what this says about dominant ideologies in formal learning environments.

The final assignment for the course is an essay where students are asked to analyze and compare forms of marginalization in two of the texts, and also to consider how they would teach these texts or similar texts to learners in schools. This approach, and the use of critically reflective writing, could lead to "identification (locating oneself in the content of the classroom) [...as well as] application (using the content of the classroom to reconsider one's own experiences)" (Govender 2019: 356). Due to common discourses of gender and sexuality diversity being "[u]nnatural', 'unAfrican' and 'unGodly'" (Vincent & Howell 2014: 475), there is often discomfort around discussing these texts, and even some of the essays that students have submitted contained the sentiments that as teachers, they would 'set learners straight' (in other words, enforce hetero- and cisnormativity) if learners presented as queer. The work of queer critical literacies thus can lead to critical reflection about gender and sexuality, both within the individual and in relation to their societies, but is not necessarily transformative for every student.

### ***Glasgow: Gender constructions in advertising (Govender)***

In the English specialism for the Professional Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) at my university, I have incorporated the QCL framework as a means to engage students with critical literacies as an approach to deconstructing texts that represent (and conflate) gender and sexuality. To do this, the student teachers and I analyze a series of short advertisements, and then turn to the QCL pedagogical framework to reflect on the ways in which the texts were selected, sequenced, and deconstructed, and the potential (re)design activities that might be



imagined to get secondary learners to transform their thinking and practice. Due to the limited time that PGDE English students have to engage with English language, literacy, and literature content and methodology in their diploma, it has become necessary to ensure that queer, and other significant perspectives are embedded into the fabric of their teacher education provisions. The texts we use include (presented in order of use in class):

**Text 1: Lynx (2006) *Billions***

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KWvs94CcYgo>

As a normative text, this advertisement represents both gender confirming actors and heteronormativity. Female bodies are objectified and dehumanised while placing a single male body at the centre of the narrative.

**Text 2: Old Spice (2010) *The Man Your Man Could Smell Like***

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=owGykVbfgUE>

This text represents another version of the normative, but excludes women and gender variant men entirely. The advertisement centres a single, hypermasculine, heteronormative male body and narrative.

**Text 3: Lynx (2017) *Find Your Magic***

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LZ4KNrCkDH0>

This final text represents a relatively subversive representation of male bodies and masculinities by including a broader range of gender and sexual identities. However, as a mainstream advertisement, there are certain exclusions and (mis)representations that persist.

We view each advert in turn, pausing after each to discuss the main features of the text and the social issues they represent: from visual metaphors and innuendo, to frame position and word

choice. We typically map these ideas on a whiteboard to track various students' contributions when unpacking the text. That is, we move from discussing the whole text (and first impressions), into identifying and discussing particular moments and film techniques in the text, and then trying to pull the threads together by returning to a discussion about the whole text and the discourses they contribute to. It is at the final stage that we begin to attend to the overarching critical question: Whose interests are served?. Moving across the categories of questions from the QCL framework (namely: identification, deconstruction, disruption, and transformation), we do multimodal critical discourse analysis through conversation.

We follow this process for each of the texts. It is important to note that students invariably refer to the previous adverts. Comparison becomes vital for revealing the design choices employed, with each new advert revealing something about the previous. Students' discussions begin to mix and intermingle which is represented by the criss-crossing lines on our mind maps on the whiteboard – the separate mind maps constructed for each advert become visibly interconnected, and intertextual, repeating and undoing ideas as we move through the lesson asking critical questions: What is the difference between how men and masculinities have been represented in each text? Where are women, and (how) are they included? What kinds of femininities make it into the texts, who does them, and why does this matter? How have LGBTQI+ identities been represented, if at all, and how do we know?

Admittedly, these are relatively 'safe' texts (Govender 2015) that do not include queer intimacies or visibly subversive queer bodies. However, this is important to note as the students and I find that we have to look very carefully to spot the nonnormative identities which are only represented in Text 3. On the one hand, this raises the question about my own (in)securities in presenting and using texts with queer intimacies. On the other hand, in using everyday texts that the students and I recognise and that reflect the western society we inhabit, the process of having to search for nonnormative gender and sexualities echoes our daily experiences and

invisibilities (Govender 2019). When students do spot queer identities, such as the male dancer in heels or the same-sex/gender attraction hinted at in the record store, Text 3's seemingly inclusive approach to representation can then be troubled. Over and above this, issues of race/ethnicity, age, bodies and body-types, consumerism, and language variety arise depending on what and who the students notice.

Turning from analysis to critical reflection, the students and I then consider the pedagogical significance of the lesson. Three main ideas have emerged over the years: 1) the role of critical text selection as a critical literacy practice, 2) sequencing as a practice of positioning, and 3) critical discourse analysis (CDA) as a method of questioning for secondary English classrooms. The dimensions of description, interpretation, and explanation provided by CDA (Fairclough 2001) therefore help to frame teachers' pedagogical decisions and question-making in critical ways.

We use the QCL pedagogical framework to help us think through these particular practices and issues. That is, we reflect on the selection, sequencing, and processes of analysing the texts by considering whether and how these actions relate to QCL's processes of identification, deconstruction, disruption, and transformation. We therefore also consider how teaching is a kind of design whereby we construct environments and (im)possibilities for engaging with difference and diversity – in this case, (a)gender and (a)sexual diversity.

While 'decisions about texts can have far-reaching consequences for skill development and even for secondary students' attitudes toward reading' (Watkins & Ostenson 2015: 246), critical text selection also sees those decisions as positioned and positioning (Janks 2010). That is, teachers inevitably play a gatekeeping function by making decisions about what content, whose stories, whose identities, and what value systems (do not) make it into the classroom space. The questions we ask of the series of texts are the same questions we ask about the ways in which those texts have been used to do teaching and learning.

Similarly, the sequencing of texts does not happen by mistake. I have thought about what ideas and identities to reveal, and in what order. This has its affordances and limitations: I wanted to trouble how masculinities have been represented as well as our own assumptions about gender and sexuality when reading texts, but this reproduces practices of backgrounding women, Trans\* identities, race/ethnicity, and so on. By moving from Text 1 to Text 3, we begin to notice how patterns of representation have shifted in some ways and remained the same in other ways. We move from more normative representations of gender and sexuality toward more disruptive representations, all the while considering whether or not these changes have been disruptive enough. Sequencing, then, is vital because:

heteronormativity is pervasive, and maintains its ascendant position through the take-for-granted repetition of norms in multiple texts [and therefore] teachers and students will need regular opportunities to critically analyse gender and sexuality norms across a range of texts and contexts (Sandretto 2018: 8).

By embedding critical analysis in everyday practice and curriculum content, and using this model to inform questions (and their responses) we are able to move from text, to (intended) meaning, to social context (Fairclough 2001; Govender 2018; Janks 2010; Rogers & Mosley Wetzel 2014). This, then, puts us in a position to (re)imagine more socially just futures.

### **Transnational approaches to queer critical literacies**

The framework we present calls for adaptive approaches that consider processes of production and reception of texts in educators' specific socio-political contexts, and that are sensitive to the particular backgrounds and experiences of students. Based on our different contexts, we approached queer critical literacies in ways that would tap into the affordances of our unique

student bodies and social settings. These approaches demonstrate the ways that QCL can be incorporated into initial teacher education to engage with the unique backgrounds, perspectives and experiential knowledge that students bring to classrooms in order to participate in critical discussions of representations and identities. As the goal of QCL is to ‘trouble the discursive representation of (a)gender and (a)sexual diversity across modes and genres’ (Govender & Andrews 2021) in ways that are accessible to a range of educational levels, both authors included texts that represent diverse gender and sexual identities. We taught these texts in ways that could create consciousness in students about how heterosexism and cisgenderism not only inform the production of everyday texts and how texts are selected in educational spaces, but also impact on the way students engage with texts that they encounter. This diversity elicited critical conversations about which identities are represented in various modes, from advertising to short stories and films about African queer characters. This allowed ‘the criteria defining recognisability and respectability [to be] examined and questioned’ (DePalma 2016: 836).

The most significant factor informing how we approach our different courses is the socio-cultural settings we teach in. As the course in the first example is taught in Johannesburg, with common discourses of homosexuality being unAfrican (even from public figures and politicians) and widespread homophobic and transphobic violence, there was an imperative to present the realities of violence and discrimination in the QCL classroom. As these forms of violence are also widely experienced in schools (See OUT LGBT Well-being 2016), the students’ roles as future teachers were troubled through the inclusion of critical readings on heterosexism in school environments (including Francis 2017). The author is also deliberate about choosing texts that represent queer people of diverse *racial* identities, especially in light of discourses that homosexuality is a Western ‘import’ into Africa. The discussions were often heated, with deeply personal reflections from some students, and others showing resistance to discussing the topics.

For the course taught in Glasgow, the students' contexts and experiences are very different, and more nuanced conversations on representations become possible. Social attitudes and public discourses can be seemingly more accepting of queer people in Glasgow, and thus students might be more familiar with representations of diverse identities. However, what is termed as LGBT-inclusive education in Scotland risks being situated outside of specific subject areas, being relegated to renewed policies and practices in Relationships, Sexual Health & Parenthood (RSHP) (Education Scotland 2019) that are implemented as separate health and wellbeing initiatives at schools under the guise of cross-curricular work. Teacher education and continuous professional development programmes therefore need to consider how LGBT-inclusive education, and wider (a)gender and (a)sexual diversity, fit into the everyday practices of curriculum design and praxis of teachers (Stone & Farrar 2021).

The QCL approach in this course therefore attempted to situate QCL in the English subject area by focusing on critical analysis of specific textual elements that reflected limiting discourses of gender and sexuality. The selection and sequencing of texts scaffolded a gradual recognition of how gender is constructed through different modes and how it is implicated in dominant understandings of sexuality, and allowed students to recognize disruptive representations in order to challenge dominant ideologies. The representations of men and masculinities in the various advertisements demonstrate how concepts of gender are socially constructed, and how pervasive and normalized heterosexism and cisgenderism are.

This example therefore also illustrates how the work of critical and inclusive pedagogies is not yet completed, despite increasing rhetoric and public discourses of hyperinclusivity (Govender 2019; Güthenke & Holmes 2018). Glasgow, and Scotland at large, is still a context where queer inclusion is met with public vitriol. For example, the TIE Campaign continues to receive backlash for their LGBT-inclusive education progress, where the 'reoccurring theme among the responses was to conflate homosexuality with paedophilia and child abuse, and to

compare the teaching of gay, bisexual, lesbian and transgender issues in schools to child-grooming and the promotion of pornography' (The Glasgow Guardian 2020: n.p.). QCL can provide a framework for transforming this.

These approaches to QCL are important in initial teacher education because queer or gender nonconforming learners are often victimised within school spaces in contexts in the West and in Africa. Our transnational approaches to QCL demonstrate that students in these very different spaces can become more conscious of how texts interact with dominant discourses in contexts, and how this might shape social relations. This chapter has demonstrated how different approaches can be taken in contextually relevant ways in order to reach the aims of QCL. Our autoethnographic reflections on these approaches show how the educator's positionality is also an important factor in the QCL teaching environment.

### Questions for change

Consider a course or unit of work that you teach:

1. To what extent do the texts you use represent normative gender and sexual identities and experiences?
2. How might a Queer Critical Literacies pedagogical framework enable you and your students to trouble these normative representations by
  - a. Identifying and deconstructing how normativity has been constructed in those texts (i.e. the grammar of power),
  - b. Disrupting normative representations by exploring subversive texts and alternative representations from queer and nonconforming perspectives (i.e. the grammar of subversion), and

- c. Transforming representation and language/literacy practice by engaging students in the production of texts from critical, inclusive and queer perspectives?