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Queer Pedagogies: Critical and Affirming Educational Practice

In a very broad theoretical stroke, critical pedagogies seek to address, deconstruct, and transform – in and through education – oppressive social systems in which people experience oppression, discrimination, or invisibility due to their specific lives and identities that are different from, or fall outside of, sociocultural regulatory structures and practices that cause such oppression in the first place (cf., *e.g.*, López Pereyra, 2020). In a more critical stroke, one could call into question the actual driving force of critical pedagogies if they do not receive more terminological specifications. In other words, who benefits from this (possibly) broad and general mélange of ‘critical pedagogies’ if it remains unclear which people and which issues exactly they address, and which oppressive sociocultural systems exactly they seek to transform. One of such specifications could be achieved and generated by adding the conceptual power of ‘queer’ to the terminological sphere of ‘critical pedagogies’. This special issue aims at exploring this nexus between ‘queer’ and ‘critical pedagogies’ to move the engagement with sexualities and genders into the educational horizon more deeply and rigorously.

The merger of ‘queer’ and ‘pedagogy’ is admittedly not a new research endeavor and relates to critical educational research emerging in the 1990s, primarily from Western academia. Two of the seminal papers initiating this ‘queering’ of pedagogies include the eponymous work by Britzmann (1995) with the telling title *Is there a queer pedagogy? Or, stop reading straight*, and the later work by Luhmann (1998) on *Queering/Querying Pedagogy? Or, Pedagogy is a Pretty Queer Thing* (published in the edited volume titled *Queer*

Theory in Education by Pinar, 1998). Different from what might think initially at first sight, these conceptual papers indicate that queer pedagogies are not just about (but can also include, at least as a necessary starting point) achieving an equal representation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, or trans people, identities and issues in educational spaces.

Rather, Luhmann (1998, 143) calls into question the alleged, almost logical effect of such representation with a somewhat ironical remark: “[W]ith representation comes knowledge, with learning about lesbians and gays comes the realization of the latter’s normalcy, and finally a happy end to discrimination.” What is needed more are deliberate educational attempts to critique and reflect on the very norms in society that are patterned around genders and sexualities – and that cause the oppression, exclusion, and discrimination of *certain* sexual and gender identities in the first place (e.g., LGBTIQ+) while privileging those gender and sexual identities that are complicit with social and cultural norms (e.g., bi- and cis-gendered heterosexuality). Therefore, probably the most powerful driving force that any queer-informed pedagogy can achieve is “to explode rigid normalizing categories into possibilities that exist beyond the binaries of man/woman, masculine/feminine, [...] and gay/straight”, as Meyer (2007, 15) pointedly argues, while powerfully affirming the existence of diverse sexual and gender identities.

Another helpful source for this attempt here to delimit the scope and purpose of queer pedagogies is to turn to Franck’s (2005, 680) terminological viewpoint that queer pedagogies can be understood “as an approach to teaching and learning that grows out of the merger of Queer Theory with progressive pedagogy aimed at creating social change through the interactions of teachers, students, and knowledge in the classroom.” While the latter part of this quote locates queer pedagogies firmly within the scope of educational spaces and participants, the first part includes a theoretical complication that has to do with the terminological (in)determinacy of ‘queer’ as a concept, which Hall and Jagose encapsulate as follows:

queer studies is the institutionalization of a new – or at least newly visible – paradigm for thinking about sexuality that emerged simul-

taneously across academic and activist contexts in the early 1990s, constituting a broad and unmethodical critique of normative models of sex, gender and sexuality. [...] More than shorthand for 'lesbian/gay' – or even the more capacious but still identity-bound LGBT – queer speaks to the unintended but profound naturalization of the dominant system of sexual classification [...]. (Hall & Jagose, 2013, xvi).

What this position implies for the merger of queer theory with queer pedagogies is that there cannot be a single set of procedures that one needs to follow to carry out queer-informed research in education – precisely because it sets out to be broad and unmethodical, and by extension, needs to remain flexible in and applicable to diverse research contexts. On the other hand, this openness challenges the researcher to develop a queer focus that works for their particular context but that is still attuned to the key concerns of Queer Theory, *i.e.*, the nexus between critiquing normativities and naturalizations of sex, gender, and sexuality while affirming sexual and gender diversity in a most inclusive sense (cf. Merse 2017, 204).

This broadness is a welcome characteristic in the ongoing development and diversification of queer pedagogies as both a research practice and an educational practice. At least three main tendencies can currently be observed that mirror this diversification:

1. Very recent research suggests that queer pedagogies are gradually beginning to be de-centered from their Western origins and applied to more contexts globally. Works such as *Schools as queer transformative spaces. Global narratives on sexualities and genders* by Kjaran and Sauntson (2020) as well as *Queer epistemologies in education. Luso-Hispanic dialogues and shared horizons* by Pérez and Trujillo-Barbadillo (2020) are but two examples that indicate that queer pedagogies can never define a one-size-fits-all methodology applied in very specific contexts only, but are constantly re-defined, interrogated, interrupted and broadened through the specific needs, concerns, and questions of the diverse contexts where they are now in use.

2. Despite the methodical indeterminacy of queer studies at large, this does not free research in queer pedagogies from defining and applying methodologies with academic rigor and consistency, adjusted and tailor-made to the research objective in question. This, in turn, means that the broad scope of established educational research methodologies and paradigms can be put to productive usage (*e.g.*, from ethnographies to surveys to observations) – thus making up for a potential methodological weakness that lies in the queer theory itself. The research collected in the examples provided above in (1), and also in this journal issue, mirrors this move towards rigorous and innovative applications of context-specific methodologies, yielding much-needed and insightful new results.
3. Another tendency that has been gaining increasing momentum over the last years is the application of queer pedagogies to specific school subjects, mirroring a productive narrowing-down that acknowledges subject-specific requirements to which queer pedagogies at large might not be able to cater. Such research is a promising addition to the insights generated in more general queer-informed educational and pedagogic research, producing a more nuanced mosaic of insights into educational spaces and practices. One very powerful example, also from a global perspective, is the application of queer-informed perspectives to the domain of (second or foreign) language education (*cf.*, *e.g.*, Nelson, 2006; Merse, 2017; Eisenmann & Ludwig, 2018; Evripidou, 2021).

This journal issue at hand seeks to mirror this ongoing and prolific diversification of queer pedagogies as a research discipline and of queering pedagogies as a research practice. The individual papers that follow indicate how ‘queer’ can be applied productively to researching educational topics, spaces, and practices – and thus provide much-needed microscopic insights into educational horizons for which only a little research has existed so far. This closing of gaps in queer pedagogies includes developing a critical theory of inclusion by reviewing the notion of ‘Otherness’, systematically analyzing gender violence of students in university public spaces,

engaging with the experiences of diverse families in educational spaces in Mexico and Latin America, tapping into teaching practices of teachers to determine (des)orientations for queer pedagogies, and observing an English language classroom in which a canonical literary text by Shakespeare was re-read from a queer vista.

Thus, Critical and Queer pedagogies seek to transform pedagogical practices perpetuating fundamentalism and hegemonic positions in educational spaces. Within the framework of these transformative pedagogies, queering teaching practices enable the establishment of socially active and diverse teaching that transcends current educational frameworks and builds social awareness of sexual and gender diversity.

Moreover, queering schools challenge the hetero-patriarchal social and cultural constraints pervasive in educational settings. Therefore, teachers are called to prioritize and acknowledge their students' subjective learning experiences and critically question these experiences. In addition, educators are encouraged to adopt a dissident, diverse, and political perspective that confronts a broader social consciousness.

Lastly, Queer Pedagogy aims to comprehend the guidelines for deconstructing established epistemological concepts and heteronormative forms in educational spaces. As such, teachers must act as critical agents of the historical, social, political, and cultural processes that unfold within the classroom. Disrupting normative viewpoints necessitates reflective work, which prompts us to position ourselves from a perspective of Otherness and critically question each step taken within the teaching-learning process. Therefore, queering the educational spaces is critical.

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