Self-Study and Diversity II
Inclusive Teacher Education for a Diverse World

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Self-Study and Diversity II is a book about the self-study of teacher education practices in a diverse world. In this volume, the authors examine the preparation of teachers through a shared orientation to diversity grounded in a commitment to addressing issues of identity, equity, diversity, social justice, inclusion, and access in their professional practice. The first chapters are autobiographical studies in which teacher educators reflect on how their personal identities as minorities within a historically oppressive culture inform their professional practice. These powerful narratives are followed by accounts of teacher educators addressing diversity issues in the United Arab Emirates, India, South Africa, and Thailand. The closing chapters attend to the challenges of preparing teacher candidates to become inclusive educators in a diverse world. Even though each chapter focusses on a particular dimension of equity and social justice or dilemma of practice, the insights in these self-studies are relevant to all teacher educators interested in improving teacher education by respecting diversity and becoming more inclusive.

Particular strengths are the diversity of authors and international scope of the book.
Self-Study and Diversity II
Professional Learning
Volume 20

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Rationale:
This series purposely sets out to illustrate a range of approaches to Professional Learning and to highlight the importance of teachers and teacher educators taking the lead in reframing and responding to their practice, not just to illuminate the field but to foster genuine educational change.

Audience:
The series will be of interest to teachers, teacher educators and others in fields of professional practice as the context and practice of the pedagogue is the prime focus of such work. Professional Learning is closely aligned to much of the ideas associated with reflective practice, action research, practitioner inquiry and teacher as researcher.
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    About the Contributors
The two volumes of *Self-Study and Diversity* serve as landmarks on the journey of the self-study methodology and community in responding to issues of diversity, equity and social justice in teacher education.

The *Oxford Dictionary* defines a *landmark* in two ways. First, as “an object or feature… that is easily seen and recognized from a distance, especially one that enables someone to establish their location.” By identifying self-studies with a focus on diversity and compiling them into a thematic volume on professional learning, *Self-Study and Diversity* marked the progress of diversity, equity and social justice in the first decade of self-study. The contributors were mainly members of dominant cultures (at least if one regards women as such) who thoughtfully addressed diversity in classrooms and universities, sought to teach for social justice and/or reflected on their positionality.

Similarly, *Self-Study and Diversity II: Inclusive Teacher Education for a Diverse World* marks the progress of diversity, equity and social justice in self-study over the past decade. The themes in the first volume continue to animate the field. Autobiographical studies remain important, as do individual and collaborative studies of teacher educators engaged in practices intended to promote social justice. Authors in this volume reflect the international scope of teacher educators engaged in self-study research addressing diverse populations and issues within education. Three chapters are situated in a United States context, with the other eight set in South Africa, Thailand, India, United Arab Emirates, and Canada. Furthermore, the voices represented are increasingly those of members of cultural minorities. This volume also marks a shift in the diversity discourse from the margins of self-study, and teacher education more broadly, to being one of the important issues of concern to teacher educators.

**LOOKING BACK**

The *Oxford Dictionary* also defines *landmark* as “an event, discovery, or change marking an important stage or turning point in something.” While these volumes are undoubtedly markers, are they *turning points* or *milestones* in the self-study of
teacher education practices? In order to consider this question, it is important to situate these volumes in the historical development of this discourse community.

Self-study of teacher education practice emerged during the ascendency of a number of related movements in education. Not least of these was the fight for legitimacy of the qualitative research methods more common in the disciplines outside of psychology, with its unit of analysis focused mainly on the individual and very little on the social context. Teaching-learning is not individual but rather is done in relationships. Teacher educators prepare both pre-service and in-service educators in and for classrooms embedded in wider communities. While education often had been a field within other disciplines (educational psychology, politics of education, sociology of education, and so on), at this time educationists were asserting education as a discipline in its own right, with theories and methods not borrowed but proper to education itself. When studying teachers and teaching, researchers used units of analysis in which individual teachers and learners were embedded, and qualitative methods from the social sciences, and text-based and arts-based methods from the humanities increased the power of educationists to describe and explain their data.

Along with methods from non-psychology disciplines came a wider focus for some educationists on education as a means for re-balancing social inequities and for developing the strengths of a wide diversity of learners to contribute to democratic societies. These voices became more prominent in an internet discussion on the SSTEP list in 2001, which some members treated as a hostile personal attack (i.e., an internet “flame”) and others championed as a passionate contribution to a conversation about diversity from members living in the borderlands of identity. That divisive experience was still being discussed a year later at the Castle Conference in 2002, at the end of which the editors for the 2004 conference proceedings invited suggestions for the theme for the next meeting.

To illustrate the gap in social justice within self-study, in the single chapter on diversity in the *International Handbook of Self-Study of Teaching and Teacher Education*, titled “Knowledge, Social Justice and Self-Study,” Griffiths, Bass, Johnston, and Perselli (2004) recounted the lead-up to the Castle Conference in 2004. At the conclusion of the 2002 conference, “a suggestion was made that the fifth conference should be themed around diversity” (p. 692). The “proposed theme obviously touched an edge” (p. 693) evidenced by studious silence and questioning of the process for identifying the conference theme. Ultimately, social justice did not become the conference theme but it did become an important theme in a number of conference papers in the proceedings (Tidwell, Fitzgerald, & Heston, 2004). It also provoked Griffiths et al. (2004) and others to challenge the self-study community to do more to locate itself “in dialogic relationship with others, deliberately seeking perspectives that cut across the dialogue and shake up our cosy existence” (p. 701).

Despite having “touched an edge,” as chronicled by Griffiths et al. (2004), the 2004 Castle Conference editors (including co-editors of this volume, Deb Tidwell and Linda Fitzgerald) sent out the call for proposals under the theme, “Journeys of Hope: Risking Self-Study in a Diverse World.” At the American Educational Research
Association meetings in Chicago in spring 2003, S-STEP members developed “edgy” issues in sessions with such titles as “Questioning beyond the Comfort Zone: Raising Issues through Self-Study.” And enough researchers submitted diversity-themed self-studies to the 2004 Castle Conference that Tidwell and Fitzgerald were able to put together the first volume of this book when authors of those papers were invited to expand their work into book chapters.

When *Self-Study and Diversity* was published in 2006, social justice was still an emergent area in self-study. The Griffiths et al. (2004) *Handbook* chapter mainly highlighted the paucity of social justice work in the self-study community prior to 2004. In the absence of published self-studies explicitly addressing social justice—“few self-studies focus on social justice or even mention it” (p. 292)—the authors mainly dialogued about their thoughts and practices. They identified themselves as “committed to self-study and social justice” (p. 654) with self-study’s “respect for humanity…I accord with social justice” (p. 654) and social justice work involving knowledge of the self. They wondered why others failed to see these interconnections, to recognize the rich possibilities for self-studies of diversity, equity and social justice, or to appreciate the value of self-study in overcoming unconsciously learned privilege and prejudice. The first volume set about to fill in some of those gaps.

**FIRST VOLUME THEMES**

The 2006 *Self-Study and Diversity* volume was organized into five sections. The first comprised two chapters of autobiographical research in which teacher educators reflected on their identities. In the first, “Woodstock to Hip-Hop: Convergent Lifeline and the Pedagogy of Personal Quest” (Pritchard & Mountain, 2006), a white male teacher educator collaborated with a younger, male African American teacher to explore how their life stories drew them to social justice work. In the second, Spraggins (2006), an African American male, looked inward to the development of his psyche to explore how his racialized and gendered identities informed his practice and how excavating his internal prejudices sensitized him as a multicultural teacher educator.

The second section focused on the application of theory to autobiographical self-study. Taylor and Coia (2006), who have recently edited *Gender, Feminism, and Queer Theory in the Self-Study* (Taylor & Coia, 2014), explicitly grounded their autobiographies in feminist theory, while Perselli (2006) and Vavrus (2006) did the same with Marxian theory and critical pedagogy respectively.

In the third section mainstream teacher educators gave explicit attention to their efforts to address social justice through teacher education practices. Freidus (2006) explored how she could promote a constructivist approach to teaching that was also grounded in social justice, while Kroll (2006) focused on how she incorporated equity issues into her course on pedagogical inquiry. East (2006) looked at private rules in classrooms to surface inconsistencies between behaviors and espoused beliefs.

The fourth section consisted of collaborative self-studies centered on social justice. Fitzgerald, Canning and Miller (2006) critically reflected on their practices
as instructors in a teacher education program designed to prepare reflective practitioners for a democratic society, while Gudjonsdottir and Kristinsdottir (2006) and Good and Pereira (2006) respectively puzzled collaboratively over inclusive education and the power of the deficit model in the subjective experiences of educators. In all three studies, the collaborative self-study process prompted the authors to explore uncomfortable dimensions of social justice in their work.

The final section highlighted self-studies supported by the use of artifacts and visual representations. Griffiths, Windle and Simms (2006) studied photographs to interrogate power relationships in their research unit; Manke and Allender (2006) reviewed a range of artifacts to consider the tensions between harmony and discord in their practices as humanistic educators; and Tidwell (2006) examined her drawings of nodal moments in her teaching to reflect on cultural differences in how she and her students experienced teacher education classes.

EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN 10 YEARS OF THE S-STEP JOURNAL

We reviewed articles in Studying Teacher Education: A Journal of Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices from its inception in 2005 through 2015, to examine representation of diversity. What was the prevalence of equity and social justice as themes in the self-study literature? How many articles were written by scholars from countries that are not predominantly English-speaking? An examination of the titles, abstracts, and institutions from 11 volumes, 27 issues and 195 research articles identified that 56 (28.7%) met at least one of the criteria. Fifteen (7.7%) of the articles examined the identities of minority teacher educators, with this theme evident in the title in 12 cases. Another 21 (10.7%) involved teacher educators (not identified as minority) examining efforts to address equity and social justice in their practice, with this theme evident in the titles of 17. Finally, 15 (7.7%) were written by authors from non-English speaking countries, as denoted in the home institution identified. This suggests both positive engagement with equity issues and a need for more inquiry into serving the increasingly diverse populations of schools. Also, the limited engagement by international teacher educators serves as an opportunity and challenge for the self-study community as it grows.

ORGANIZATION OF THE SECOND VOLUME

In the decade since wrestling a diversity theme into the call for proposals for the 2004 Castle Conference, many of the contributors to the Self-Study and Diversity volume had gone on to write about diversity issues in journal articles, chapters, books, or to edit others doing so. The book proposal to the publisher in 2005 could say after a search of the literature, “There does not appear to be a text in the current literature that combines self-study with addressing diversity issues in teaching and learning, and provides accessible practices for readers to implement in their own research and teaching.” The equivalent section of the 2013 proposal for the
current volume acknowledged one book on the topic from each of four publishers with strong commitments to self-study. We promised a greater “depth of exploration in diversity,” and “more voices from diverse communities and more international perspectives, reflecting the changes in this field of study.”

Critical Autobiographical Self-Studies

The first five chapters are essentially critical autobiographical self-studies that feature narratives in which minoritized teacher educators critically reflect on their stories of coming to know themselves and their cultural contexts in order to become effective teacher educators and agents of change.

The importance of understanding and accepting one’s own identity as a teacher educator is the focus of Julian Kitchen’s “Inside Out: My Identity as a Queer Teacher Educator.” As an openly gay teacher who has “come out to education students annually for over a dozen years,” Kitchen made a conscious choice to be open. He recounts his experiences as a queer teacher educator in order to examine the importance of teacher educators’ cultural identities generally and, specifically, how being gay informed his identity as a teacher educator. In this narrative self-study, he uses the term inside out to explore his journey and how coming to understand himself has helped him become a better teacher education professor.

This theme is developed further by John Hodson in “Learning to Dance: Pow Wow, Maori Haka Indiagogy and Being an Indigenous Teacher Educator.” The North American Pow Wow and Maori Haka have informed his identity and practice as a teacher educator. For Hodson and many Indigenous educators, a return to traditional culture is crucial to self-reflection and developing identity and community. Through stories of dancing in Pow Wows and his time among the Maori, he offers a vivid account of a personal and professional journey that convinced him “that real human change is a process of exceedingly small increments that are propelled by a community that literally envelopes you in learning.” For Hodson, cultural activities are the form that helps Indigenous people function authentically and effectively as teacher educators.

The importance of minority identity while struggling to succeed in a dominant culture is the theme of “Vivencias (Lived Experiences) of a Feminist Chicana as Praxis: A Testimonio of Straddling between Multiple Worlds” by Diana H. Cortez-Castro. Cortez-Castro’s testimonio of overcoming challenges in order to serve Latina teacher candidates speaks to the importance of minority teacher educators in modelling resiliency and promoting diversity, equity and social justice. “The idea behind sharing my story is to invite others to disrupt their own silence as I have and to tell their own story, and their own way of knowing, their own vivencias,” according to Cortez-Castro.

Scholars and classroom teachers from nondominant cultures are often frustrated by the unjust ways children from their cultures are characterized and essentialized by dominant culture schools. This theme, which is evident in Cortez-Castro’s
testimonio, is developed further in “Researching Our Ways: Latin@ Teachers’ Testimonies of Oppression and Liberation of Funds of Knowledge.” In this chapter, Rosa Mazurett-Boyle uses participatory action research to study how Latin@ teachers in her school district become empowered to recount their stories as counterstories to disrupt the dominant narrative about minority learners. This research helped educators write curriculum that validated the funds of knowledge of nondominant students and households, and, thus, contributed to halting the cycle of oppression in schools.

Patience Sowa, who was raised in Ghana and completed graduate studies in the United States, uses self-study to explore her experiences as a teacher educator in the United Arab Emirates. In “Making the Path by Walking: Developing Preservice Teacher Notions of Social Justice in the United Arab Emirates,” she puzzled over how to teach social justice to women for a global society in a society with customs and traditions that may contradict this vision. She wondered how to navigate within these boundaries in order to help preservice teachers critically think about their contexts and the world around them. The title of the chapter reflects her discovery that there are no easy answers and that the path forward must be walked alongside students living in the culture.

Teacher Education Practices in Diverse Settings

The Sowa self-study is a bridge to the next series of chapters, which focus on how to work alongside learners in a diverse range of cultural settings: India, South Africa and Thailand.

“Mediation of Culture and Context in Educating a Teacher Educator to Become a Researcher: Self-Study of an Indian Case” by Tara Ratnam explores the tensions that arise when mediating culture and context in a collaboration in a practitioner’s educational setting. It raises questions about how mentors can foster teacher educators’ scholarship within agreed upon collaborative relationships through genuine accommodation. While this issue transcends cultural boundaries, part of the interest in this study is the Indian context and how this informs the dynamics between Ratnam and her practitioner colleague. There are unpredictable and unavoidable extra-professional socio-cultural and personal factors that operate. For example, is there a danger of negatively interpreting genuine secular constraints as indications of internal psychological tendencies?

In “A Self-Study of Connecting through Aesthetic Memory Work,” Daisy Pillay and Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan recount their process of connecting with their personal and professional selves and with each other using what they term “aesthetic memory-work.” They then show how their partnership extended this aesthetic memory-work process to a workshop for 13 university educators at a national conference. Through consideration of the poetic re-presentation of workshop participants’ memory stories, the authors contemplate their emerging learning about aesthetic memory-work and consider the potential significance of this work for
SELF-STUDY AND DIVERSITY

connecting with the Other in a South Africa which “carries a destructive legacy of omnipresent disconnection and fragmentation.” For all of us, there is much this approach may be able to do to create spaces for problematizing established forms of separateness and for moments of acknowledging our entangled connectedness.

“Teaching Genetics to Pre-Service Teachers from Diverse Background: A South African Self-Study,” is the story of biology teacher educator Eunice Nyamupangedengu’s transition from teaching high school genetics for 14 years in Zimbabwe to teaching genetics to pre-service teachers in much more multi-cultural and multi-racial South Africa. She faced challenges from different levels of student preparation, different cultural assumptions that they brought to the subject matter, and limited proficiency in the language medium of the course, English. Her self-study helped her to create culturally relevant content and pedagogy in the science of genetics course, not often encountered as content in multicultural education. She discovered that “the universal values of caring, compassion, hard work, enthusiasm and passion about one’s work” are “a language and a pedagogy that can be understood by any student from any racial category, culture and class.”

Another science teacher, Chatree Faikhama, in “Self-Study Preparing Science Teachers: Capturing the Complexity of Pedagogical Content Knowledge in Teaching Science in Thailand,” situates his study in the Buddhist context of Thailand. He discusses the insights that emerged from his self-study research into science teacher educators’ Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK). Teacher educators are not only required to have a strong PCK for teaching science, but also PCK for teaching science teachers. He demonstrates the value of “the combination of using self-study as a research methodology and employing PCK as a lens to understand the complexities of teaching practices in teacher education.” Of particular interest is the connection he makes regarding self and reflection in self-study research and Buddhism. He sees “this understanding of the Buddhist reflective process on self as a bridge toward self-study research for Asian researchers.” As bridges allow for crossings in both directions, he also proposes that Buddha’s teachings can enrich the paradigm in self-study research.

Promoting Social Justice through Teacher Education

A challenge facing the education system in most Western countries is the fact that teachers are predominantly mainstream in background while many (and, often, most) students come from racialized minorities. How can they learn to become inclusive educators who adapt their dispositions and practices to better serve their students?

Nathan Brubaker, as a White teacher educator preparing predominantly White teacher candidates, confronts this challenge by shaping a critical thinking course into a place in which teacher candidates “critically question their assumptions about classroom discourse, civil rights teaching, and diverse perspectives about the topic of freedom.” In “Cultivating Democratically-minded Teachers: A Pedagogical Journey,” he illuminates the complexities of learning to teach “through dialogical
pedagogies that simultaneously construct and are constructed by diversity content.” Brubaker reminds us that the true work of social transformation starts within oneself. It begins “inside your own heart and mind” (Lewis, 2012, pp. 14–15). Perhaps, if more teacher educators worked from within to shape their pedagogy in the direction of democracy, more teacher candidates would readily engage themselves in pedagogical journeys to democratically-minded teaching.

In “Pre-service Teachers’ Cultural Competence Development Using Multicultural Children’s Literature,” Shuaib (African-American) and Sohyun (Korean) Meacham draw on their own minority literacy experiences as a means of disrupting simplistic ways of making sense of how teachers and students make sense of literary representations of multiculturalism. Through courageous sharing and moving beyond painful personal experiences, these minority teacher educators help their predominantly White teacher candidates shift their conceptions away from dichotomies such as Black-White and good vs. bad. Thinking shifts towards experiencing and examining literary texts from multiple perspectives and in ways that “inherently defy dichotomous representations.”

LOOKING FORWARD

The international perspectives from members of diverse communities—not just about, but by—is the milestone that we seek to mark in this volume. We conceptualized this book after the AERA conference in Vancouver, British Columbia in 2012, which inspired it by foregrounding Canadian First Nations, by well-attended sessions led by Indigenous scholars such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012), and by self-study papers addressing diversity in many varieties. However, in the lengthened gestation period of this volume we have been able to invite more international colleagues to contribute.

At both the Castle Conference in 2014 and the following AERA in 2015, self-study scholars whose first language was not English set a challenge for the self-study community. They asked English speakers to stretch the boundaries of theories and methods they used to encompass alternative versions of “self-study.” Rather than just a one-way translation of the words from one language to another, they asked for a transformation of the concepts as they travel back and forth across linguistic and cultural borders.

If teaching diverse learners through culturally responsive and inclusive curriculum is critical to a diverse and changing world (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005), then this second volume is both a marker of progress and of the degree to which social justice is still a ways from the center of discourse in the self-study of teacher education practices. It will be interesting to see where diversity will be situated in the field when a third volume may appear in a decade.

The editors have made a conscious effort in this volume both to convey the growing diversity in the field, and to push the agenda forward, to seek new voices, to widen the discourse community, and to open self-study to transformation. Should
there be a third volume in a third decade, perhaps the papers will be multi-lingual, and they may represent a diversity of which we are not yet fully aware. Following our colleague Patience Sowa, let’s join together to make the path by walking, and in true self-study spirit, do so by walking our talk.

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2. INSIDE OUT

My Identity as a Queer Teacher Educator

It is our first class with the practice teaching cohort... Tom, after recounting his professional accomplishments, shared short vignettes about being a husband, father and teacher who leads with his heart... I too am committed to relating authentically with teacher candidates, yet feel discomfort as I introduce myself. I briefly recount my career as a classroom teacher, teacher educator and scholar. My voice tightens as I transition from the professional to the personal: “I live in Toronto with my husband of 26 years...” A few days later, as I introduce, myself to classes in professionalism and law, I feel awkward. Sometimes, I say partner instead of the more emphatic husband. Sometimes I hesitate, and the revelation waits for the second class, or the third. (Journal, September 18, 2009)

I have come out to education students annually for over a dozen years. For many of these years, I have facilitated workshops on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) issues in education. I am the public queer presence in the teacher education department, although I carry many other identities through my teaching, research and service. Still, coming out in class does not get any easier.

I have made a conscious choice to be out. Each year I overcome my shyness and apprehension as it is critical that students see a queer presence on campus and learn how to deal with issues of sexual orientation and gender identity. Two years ago, in an opinion piece in a widely-circulated daily newspaper, I publicly explained why I feel called to be out and proud as an education professor.

MAKING IT BETTER NOW FOR GAY, LESBIAN YOUTH: EDUCATION PROFESSOR SAYS BEING ‘OUT’ CAN MAKE A REAL DIFFERENCE

The suicide of 15-year-old Jamie Hubley and Rick Mercer’s recent rant on the Rick Mercer Report have highlighted for Canadians the tragic reality of homophobic bullying in schools.

Mercer challenges “every teacher, every student, every adult” to act. In particular, he challenges gay and lesbians in public life not to be invisible.
Many gays, myself included, are out to friends, family and colleagues. We are living proof that it does get better, that we can live fulfilling personal and professional lives in Canada.

Rabbi Hillel more than 2,000 years ago asked: If I am not for myself, who is for me? But if I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when? These are useful questions for everyone—particularly gay and lesbian professionals—in the aftermath of Jamie Hubley’s death.

When I became a teacher in the 1980s, I chose to be discreet about my sexual identity. In the face of homophobia in education, this decision helped ensure that I had the opportunity to become a teacher. Thanks to the pioneering efforts of gay activists, it became possible to be open about my private life. When I first contemplated “coming out” to my high school students, I did not feel that I would be supported sufficiently by colleagues. Later, I was too busy as a graduate student to make this a priority.

Rick Mercer’s rant challenges people like me to consider taking a stand, but sometimes the timing is not right.

When I became an adjunct professor in 1999, I chose to be out to my new colleagues and to the teacher candidates I was preparing to enter the classroom. I felt that it was important that I at least be a role model to aspiring teachers, gay and straight. When I became a tenure-track professor of education, I drew on my experiences as a gay man when discussing teachers as role models, bullying in schools and human rights cases in a course titled Professionalism, Law and the Ontario Educator. I also facilitated Positive Space workshops designed to increase awareness and acceptance on campus. I was satisfied that I was making a small positive difference.

“This is like this new animal: these kids who are coming out in high school,” Mercer said on the CBC’s *The Current*. Last year, after a series of suicides by gay teenagers in the United States, I had a similar eureka moment. Thanks to my collaboration with a high school teacher who ran a Gay-Straight Alliance in a public high school, I became aware that life for gay teens today is harder than it was for many in my generation. They know who they are earlier, which can make it much harder to wait until graduation for things to get better. In his last blog posting, Jamie Hubley wrote “I don’t want to wait 3 years, this hurts too much.” And, while many students may be generally tolerant, there is also much teasing and even cruel bullying. This straight teacher was making a significant difference where she worked and wanted to do more. It seemed time to join her in this work.

This year, we presented a two-hour workshop, Sexual Diversity in Secondary Schools in the secondary teacher education program at Brock University. Feedback from teacher candidates was overwhelmingly positive. They were
very interested in finding out more about lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans issues, and about the experiences of students in schools. Many expressed a commitment to addressing homophobia when they see it in schools, and some were prepared to make equity for gays and lesbians a priority in their work. Once we have presented to the remaining classes early in 2012, we will have reached over 200 secondary teacher candidates.

Rick Mercer said in his rant that we must “make it better now.” It is important that more gays in public life choose to make this a priority. It is my experience that we can make a difference and that there are many straight people ready to join us in this work. (Kitchen, 2011)

In recent years, the need for work in this area has prompted me to engage more deeply: facilitating additional workshops, studying my practice (Kitchen & Bellini, 2012a, 2012b), writing for editorial pages (Kitchen & Bellini, 2012c), conducting research on Gay-Straight Alliances (GSA) (Kitchen & Bellini, 2013), and reviewing the place of queer theory in teacher education (Kitchen, 2014a).

In this self-study chapter, I recount my experiences as a queer teacher educator in order to examine the importance of teacher educators’ cultural identities and, particularly, how being gay informs my identity as a teacher educator. I employ the term inside out and the images it evokes as a framework for this chapter.

In order to thoroughly study my narrative of experience, I need to know it inside out (Oxford Dictionaries, 2013). Before sharing my story, I explain how I employ narrative self-study (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004) to story my personal and professional experiences. As methodological thoroughness should be accompanied by critical insight, I also employ queer theory as a critical lens for understanding how these experiences link to broader cultural phenomena.

Three distinct meanings of turning something inside out guide my storytelling. The first meaning is to “cause utter confusion in” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2013). As my identity formation as a gay man and a beginning teacher was complicated by struggles with heteronormativity and homophobia, the first section focuses on my personal and professional coming out stories. A second meaning is to “turn the inner surface of something outward” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2013). This image reflects my progress towards making my gay identity explicit in my work as a teacher and teacher educator. The final section, which builds on the idea that to turn inside out is to “change something utterly” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2013), explores how I have situated myself as a queer professor over the past eight years. I examine my increased engagement in teacher education workshops on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues, heightened profile inside and outside Brock University, self-study work in this area, and recent involvement in queer-themed research.

I conclude by turning to three questions asked by Rabbi Hillel (as quoted in Rae, 1998) that guided my thinking in the editorial “Making It Better Now for Gay, Lesbian Youth” (Kitchen, 2011). I consider why all teacher educators should attend issues of sexual orientation, gender identity and heteronormativity.
J. KITCHEN

KNOWING INSIDE OUT THROUGH NARRATIVE SELF-STUDY

In order to know something inside out, one needs to engage in a rigorous process of discovery. As “the study of education is the study of life—for example, the study of epiphanies, rituals, routines, metaphors, and everyday actions” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. xxiv)—studying our own lives as educators enhances “our ability to understand how our past impacts our present” (Coia & Taylor, 2009, p. 5). Such a process of “self-construction, self-identity, and agency” (Coia & Taylor, 2009, p. 5) helps us to understand that we bring to the classroom both our teacher identities and our multiple personal identities. While our experiences are deeply personal, the “dilemmas and questions come from the specific and inescapable cultural context within which we live and breathe” (Coia & Taylor, 2009, p. 5). All autobiographical writing has the potential to “transform our relationships to ourselves, to our students and to the curriculum (Samaras, Hicks, & Garvey Berger, 2004, p. 909), but insight “is more likely to be realized when practitioners engage in exercises that stimulate rigorous reflection and thinking” (Kitchen, 2009a, p. 39).

Over the years, I have employed narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and narrative self-study (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004) in order to explore my identity as an educator and improve my practice. In the International Handbook of Self-Study of Teaching and Teacher Education Practices, Clandinin and Connelly (2004) state, “Narrative inquiry is a multi-dimensional exploration of experience involving temporality (past, present and future), interaction (personal and social), and location (place)” (p. 576). Narrative inquiry has been central to my own development as a teacher, educational researcher and teacher educator. Through narrative inquiry, which I first encountered in 1993, I began to explore how my stories of experience informed my personal practical knowledge (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) and my responsiveness to students. As I came to know myself better, I also came to know better the needs of teacher candidates in my classes. This led me to become a more caring and responsive teacher educator and to develop my conception of relational teacher education (Kitchen, 2005a, 2005b).

While there are many methodologies that are complementary with self-study, narrative inquiry is particularly helpful in exploring and critically examining the self in the self-study of teacher education. Narrative inquiry is a dynamic inquiry process that recognizes “a reflexive relationship between living a life story, telling a life story, retelling a life story, and reliving a life story. At its heart are the telling of stories and the more difficult yet equally important task of re-telling stories “that allow for growth and change” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 71). Over the years, as I have retold life stories, my appreciation has deepened for narrative inquiry as a method for making sense of these experiences, the personal practical knowledge underlying them, and their social context. As a methodology, narrative inquiry offers a range of methods for telling and retelling stories of our experiences, the experiences of others, and the dynamics in our teacher education classrooms. Over the years, as means of prompting, telling and analyzing stories, I have used many of the personal
experience methods recommended by Connelly and Clandinin (1988), including journals, reflections, stories, philosophies of teaching, and autobiographical writing.

Although I have grappled over the years with my identity as a gay man and how that informs my practice, this is the first time I have engaged in a rigorous examination of my identity as a queer teacher educator. In conducting this research, I review my cache of personal and professional writings over twenty years. In particular, I examine “Lost between the Lines: A Personal Search for Culture and Identity” (Kitchen, 1995), in which I wrote at length about my personal struggle coming to terms with my identity. I also draw on my recent written reflections and published papers related to queer issues in education.

KNOWING INSIDE OUT: CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES

While narrative inquiry offers insight into one’s experience in the world, one also benefits from critical perspectives on the context in which the individual lives and works. As Miller (1998) argues, too often “educators use autobiography in ways that reinforce classroom representations of a knowable, always accessible conscious self who progresses, with the help of autobiographical inquiry, from ignorance, to knowledge of self, other, and ‘best’ pedagogical and curricular practices” (p. 367). She worries that personal accounts that are not informed by critical theory “serve to limit and close down rather than to create possibilities for constructing permanently open and resignifiable selves” (p. 367). We can better understand ourselves, others and the world around us when we deliberately apply multiple critical lenses in order to interpret experience. These lens include feminism (Olesen, 2000), which challenges male privilege and marginalization of women, and Critical Race Theory (Ladson-Billings, 1998), which critiques the unexamined racial and cultural assumptions endemic to society and engrained in traditional views of education.

In this chapter, I primarily draw on the critical perspectives offered by queer theory. Queer theory, by challenging heteronormativity, offers new insights into previously unexamined elements of the self and how they are manifested in the context of practice. In “Inqueerities into Self-Study: Queering the Gaze on Teacher Educator Identity and Practice,” I wrote:

Queer theory offers a bent, rather than straight, perspective on people, texts and contexts. “Queer theory offers educators a lens through which they can transform praxis so as to explore and celebrate the tensions and new understandings created by teaching new ways of seeing the world,” according to Meyer (2012, p. 10). Experience is richest when it continues to grow, yet often it is not challenged in our direct experiences to see ourselves and our practices in new ways. We do not see what we don’t look for. Sometimes things hide in plain sight, overlooked until our attention is drawn to them by circumstances, the observations of others or something we have read. (Kitchen, 2014a, p. 128)
Queer theory is a critical discourse that “seeks to disrupt and to assert voice and power” (Tierney & Dilley, 1998, p. 59). It disrupts heteronormativity, the assumption that heterosexuality and traditional gender roles are normal, while other orientations and representations of gender identity are abnormal and threatening (Quinn & Meiners, 2011). Fearing that heteronormativity “homogenizes and erases our difference” (Anzaluda, 1987, 250), queer theory “offers methods of critiques” (Britzman, 1995, p. 154) against white, male discourse that normalize identity and shield power and privilege. While they embrace the diverse found in the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender identities and communities, most queer theorists are concerned that such fixed identities related to gender and sexual orientation might be constraining (Adams & Holman Jones, 2008). Sedgwick (1993) argues that “constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made to signify monolithically” (p. 8). Many theorists view queer sexual minorities “as exhibiting revolutionary potential” (Pinar, 1998, p. 6) and hope that their critiques will radically transform society.

These critiques of heterosexual privilege and heteronormativity have led queer theorists to challenge educational institutions for their uncritical acceptance of gender roles and identities (Pinar, 2007). Of greatest urgency is the need to increase safety by pressing educational institutions to confront the homophobic and transphobic harassment and bullying that permeate schools as agencies of social reproduction (Quinn & Meiners, 2011; Meyer, 2012). Homophobic harassment and bullying, however, are only the most blatant manifestations of heteronormativity. Heteronormativity is embedded in the implicit message about appropriate behaviours in the hidden curriculum (Jackson, 1968). These need to be challenged in order to move towards “curricular and instructional changes that aim towards more inclusive learning environments” (Luhman, 1998, p. 147) in which queer lives are visible and accepted in the curriculum and school culture.

LGBT identities and communities have also been subject to critique by queer theorists. Efforts to protect the privacy of gays and lesbians are viewed as effecting “a kind of confinement” while “simultaneously restricting access to the public sphere” (Quinn & Meiners, 2011, p. 138). Also challenged is the simplification of the “complex internal differences and complex sexualities” (Gamson, 1998, p. 597) in order to perpetuate the image of a single LGBT community. Objective categories of identity are dismissed as instruments of homogenization and erasure in favour of sexual and gender identity as complex and fluid (Anzaldua, 1987).

The richness of queer theory for me stems not from its systematic analysis of heteronormativity so much as its reminder to educators that “[g]ender codes constrain all individuals” (Meyer, 2011, p. 11). By questioning the constraints of fixed sexual orientation and gender identity, queer theory challenge me to ask important questions about my personal and professional identities. As Sedgwick (1993) observes, “when constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made to signify monolithically” (p. 8) one can observe “the open mesh of possibilities, gaps,
overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning” (p. 8). By employing a queer gaze to examine my narrative of experience, I am better able to look beyond surface appearances to tell “a story about being half in and half out of identities, subject positions, and discourses and having the courage to be fluid in a world relentlessly searching for stability and certainty” (Adams & Holman Jones, 2011, p. 114). Autobiographical writing informed by queer theory better conveys the lived experiences of LGBT people as nested in the folds of a complex heteronormative culture.

FROM CONFUSION TO ACCEPTANCE: MY IDENTITY AS A GAY MAN

At the heart of my personal and public journey has been a search for identity and holism. As a graduate student, I drew on narrative inquiry to examine my life experiences. In a course on culture and identity, I wrote:

Everyone else had an identity, but I had none. Or, perhaps, I had too many identities. Some were valid while others were false identities I assumed or had imposed on me. Others were real yet denied or suppressed. Overall, I think I was caught between identities, uncertain which, if any, were truly me...

As a white, anglo male, I am fortunate to possess all the benefits conferred on such “an unfairly advantaged person” (McIntosh, 1990) ...As a gay man, I pass as normal yet possess what sociologist Erving Goffman (1963) describes as an “undesired difference” which stigmatizes me from the mainstream...I, like a chameleon, seem to fit effortlessly into the mainstream... Although it is a disguise—allowing me to accept the privileges of normalcy, a privilege denied visible minorities—it is also a potential prison of self-pity and self-delusion. (Kitchen, 1995)

Heteronormativity was prominent in my earliest recollections of family and community:

I was aware of this difference from an early age, although I did not understand or acknowledge it. I also knew that I did not conform with societal norms, even before I knew they were taboo. Men and women were to pair off and raise families was the message my environment conveyed every day. As I learned that homosexuality was taboo exposed to the shameful stereotypes of pathetic, effeminate outcasts, I knew that I had to deny my shameful secret to myself and to other. I mimicked straight mating habits as I entered in romantic liaisons with girls to whom I was not attracted. (Kitchen, 1995)

By the time I graduated from high school, I had become more academically successful, socially connected and self-confident. At the same time, the tension between my secret identity and my public persona intensified. In a letter to a fellow graduate student, I reflected on the events that culminated in coming out:
Deep shock waves reverberated through the graduating class after it became known that Luke was gay. If he could be gay, anyone could be. For me it was an opportunity to observe from the sidelines the social consequences of my submerged orientation.

In the Fall, as we commuted to university together, Luke regaled us with stories of gay life... My interest was more than mere curiosity. Through Luke I was discovering a new world, one not as shocking or mysterious as I had feared based on media distortions...

Luke brought Jason to a party with the high school crowd. I watched the happy couple and the reactions of others.

Then I was seduced by a girl at the party. This was my last shot at normalcy. After three weeks of attending movies at which I was attracted to the male lead, the opportunity for consummation arrived at a party. Before we could go all the way, I resisted and returned downstairs citing social propriety. …Why did I pull back when I was well on my way to proving my masculinity? Why did I feel a sense of relief? I wrestled with these questions and my suppressed identity for several days, slowly realizing and accepting that I was gay...

Finally, I said, “Luke, there is a possibility that I may be bisexual.” Luke stopped in his tracks, taken unawares by my words and their implications. Also, as I learned later, he was confused by the nebulous nature of the words I chose. I was under no such confusion; for me there was no ambiguity. This was my moment of coming out, of freedom. (Abridged from Correspondence, July 24, 1996)

Coming out to myself, family and friends proved a liberating experience. It has led to a stronger sense of identity, as well as positive relations with family, close friendships, and a 32-year relationship with my (now) husband, Dan.

While I learned to be true to myself and authentic in my personal relationships, I was reluctant to be defined by my sexual orientation: “Labels are true as identifiers but are often used falsely to reduce rather than understand a person... we lose tone and shade when we reduce ourselves to caricatures and stereotypes” (Kitchen, 1995). At the same time, I questioned this sentiment: “Is this discomfort due to a lack of honesty or a sense of a greater picture? Is there a level of internalized homophobia present?” (Correspondence, February 3, 1994)

In re-living these experiences over 30 years later and re-visiting my previous telling of these stories 20 years later, I draw on narrative inquiry and queer theory to identify key tensions for me as a teacher educator and for heterosexual teacher educators reflecting on issues of sexual orientation and heteronormativity.

One tension is the challenge of coming out and living out in a heteronormative culture. My turmoil reflects a reality for many queer youth grappling with identity
formation. Although I experienced little overt homophobia, heteronormativity caused me to deny my identity. I felt shameful in a world that equated marriage to an opposite sex mate with acceptance and respectability (Evans, 2002). Educators need to question such implicit codes rather than passively allow them to be taken for granted by students constructing their own identities and coming to understand other people. While it may no longer be true that “queer-as-deviant can be invoked at any moment” to undercut acceptance, respect and self-respect (Evans, 2002, p. 116), heteronormativity is often unexamined and unchallenged in teacher preparation. This is illustrated in my journal entry about teaching alongside Tom and in a myriad of ways that teacher educators assume that students and teacher candidates are straight. When I conduct workshops on LGBT issues and homophobic bullying, I share my story to put a human face to the issue (Kitchen & Bellini, 2012b). Also, these workshops explicitly identify LGBT students as present in schools and offer strategies for reducing homophobia and diminishing heteronormativity.

A second tension is between needing to be accepted as gay (and accept myself) and wishing to be recognized as a complex, multi-faceted individual. On the one hand, as Monette (1992) writes, there remains “lingering self-hatred” and “closets in closets” (p. 173) that make it difficult to fully love and accept oneself. To some extent, despite my openness for many years, I consciously presented in a manner that was acceptable to colleagues and students. On the other hand, my reluctance to be stereotyped reflected a recognition that sexuality and gender identity are fluid and multi-faceted, not static categories. By refusing to be constrained by categories delineated by others, I assert my individualism. Either way, or allowing both possibilities to exist simultaneously, it is important that heterosexual privilege and the othering of non-conforming identities be challenged and critiqued (Kumashiro, 2002). Better understanding our gender identities and sexual orientations can help us as teacher educators become more responsive to the range of diversities in our students and communities.

As I look back at these experiences and my first efforts to make sense of them, I am mindful of how much and how little has changed in the intervening years. The stigma of homosexuality has diminished, human rights protections have increased, and same-sex couples in many countries are legally recognized as families. More students and teachers are out, and there are vibrant queer communities throughout the world. And yet many youth and adults, knowing “that social norms and bullying continue to make it difficult to live and love openly in schools” (Kitchen, 2014b, p. 311), remain confused and closeted. Looking back, I am more forgiving of my young self. Recalling the wisdom of Rabbi Hillel, I think it was prudent to ensure that I was safe personally and professionally before taking any action. I also recognize the courage it took at the time to become fully open in my personal life and, increasingly, in my professional life.
OPENING UP: FROM CLOSETED TEACHER
TO OUT TEACHER EDUCATOR

My transition from closeted teacher to out teacher educator was a gradual one. I began my career in a Catholic school, where I kept my identity hidden even as I established a household with my life partner. When I switched to another school, I gradually became completely open with my colleagues, but chose to remain discreet with students. As I lived near the school and was active in the LGBT community, many senior students were aware that I was gay. I considered becoming the first teacher at my school to come out of the closet but chose to focus my energies on doctoral studies and new career opportunities.

A new opportunity emerged a few years later, when I was seconded to University of Toronto as a teacher educator. I would remain there for seven years when, doctorate in hand, I left to become a tenure-track professor. It was there that I heeded the call to leave the closet, to turn my inner self outward.

The Call to be Open as a Teacher Educator

“I was so depressed I attempted suicide,” Sarah recalled to her former teachers. Bright and popular, Sarah had been the president of the school council. Despite high school success, she had been driven to despair by fear that her friends and family would spurn her if they knew she was a lesbian.

This was the most dramatic revelation from a panel of queer graduates during a professional development day at my former school in 2001. I was there along with several teacher candidates from the teacher education cohort I facilitated. Listening to Sarah’s story was gut-wrenching for me as a teacher. I wondered what I could have done to lessen her pain. At the time, I had been out to colleagues but not students.

I recalled feelings of marginalization as a closeted student, even though my emotions did not rise to dramatic levels. I was more like David, who coped by being oblivious to his yearnings. I particularly admired Roger, who was quietly yet unabashedly open with his peers and parents.

When the straight teacher to whom Roger turned for support asked for my advice, I let him tell Roger that I was gay and willing to talk. Roger chose not to speak to me but, several months prior to the panel, a chance encounter led to coffee and conversation. Roger was happy and thriving in medical school. When I expressed my wish that I could have done more, he assured me that my disclosure meant much to him.

With a quiver in my voices, I publicly thanked the panelists for sharing their stories. While I was out to colleagues, I had not yet revealed my identity to teacher candidates. I felt their eyes upon me and wondered how they were absorbing this information. After reflecting in the days following, I determined
that I could do more as a queer teacher educator. If not me, who? If not now, when? Ever since, I have been out with my classes and a queer presence on campus. (Adapted from Journal, February 13, 2001)

In recalling this event, I focus on the importance of creating safe school spaces for all students. My journey of self-discovery has always been linked to my commitment to becoming a better teacher by engaging students in meaningful learning. (Kitchen, 2005c, 2008). By understanding my personal practical knowledge (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) through narrative inquiry, I hoped to better serve my students. In assessing my teaching, I wrote, “My sense of alienation has diminished me as a teacher, but my sympathy for outsiders and love of diversity have enhanced my teaching” (Kitchen, 1995). Through these self-study efforts, I felt “stronger and wiser” and expressed optimism about my ability to “cope with change and thrive on chaos” (Kitchen, 1995). The greatest change during these years was an increased commitment to relationship in teaching. This developed through the learning community I experienced in university and through my doctoral thesis (Kitchen, 2005c, 2008), I developed my understanding of relational teacher development (Kitchen, 2009b) and education (Kitchen, 2005a, 2005b): “Relational teacher development is sensitive to the role that each participant plays as teacher and learner in the relationship…it stresses the need to present one’s authentic self in relationships which are open, non-judgemental and trusting” (2005a, p. 17). As I became more comfortable with myself as a teacher, I engaged teacher candidates more deeply and relationally in the learning process.

Listening to the alumni panel, I felt a pedagogical duty to be a good teacher and role model. Mindful of Dewey (1938), who wrote that “teachers discriminate between experiences that are worthwhile educationally and those that are not” (p. 33), I arrived at the conclusion that coming out as an educator was pedagogically sound. LGBT students need to see queer educators as confidantes and role models. Straight students and teachers need relate with queer teachers. While I acknowledged a level of risk, I was prepared to assume it as I had a secure job to which I could return. I was also confident that the risk would be modest as I was respected as an effective teacher educator.

While openly gay, I was not an activist. My initial motivation was simply to be open and honest. Subsequently, I sought to be a role model, for LGBT and straight students and educators. My presence in their midst was statement enough, as the story below illustrates:

A small conference I attended several years ago began with an icebreaker activity. Sue, the event organizer, passed along a ball of string and invited participants to break off a piece of whatever length we wished. We were then invited to tell about ourselves as we wound the string around a finger. Sue began by telling about her family and her work. Others followed in the same vein. I felt uncomfortable as I listened to others and waited my turn as the second last speaker. Other than my colleague, Matt, I did not know anyone in the room.
While I was openly gay, I did not feel ready to share my personal life with a group of strangers. I snapped off most of my string. Deborah, who followed, smiled and did the same. When my turn came, I spoke only of my professional work. Later that afternoon, Matt told me that he felt uncomfortable wondering about my predicament. At dinner, I discussed this episode with Deborah, who revealed that she was in a common-law relationship. Over the course of the two-day event, I casually spoke of my personal life and my relationship with my husband. (Kitchen, 2014a, p. 127)

By being a positive presence in my institution, I helped Matt rise above his own heterosexual male positioning to notice how this incident might make LGBT people feel. While I should have been open from the beginning, I did overcome my shyness in this professional event. I chose not to criticize the host directly, but hoped my subsequent revelation drew subtle attention to the awkwardly heteronormative character of the activity.

Looking back thirteen years later, I can honestly say that being open proved a very positive decision. At University of Toronto, I would remain a full-time sessional instructor for another five years. Later, at University of Toronto, I facilitated a peer group for queer teacher candidates and acted as a resource on queer issues. I was upfront when I was interviewed for tenure-track positions and was successful in two of three searches. At Brock University, in addition to being completely open, I facilitated Positive Space workshops on LGBT issues. Colleagues in both institutions respected me for being open and becoming involved with queer issues on campus. Several commended me for my courage and were proud to have me as a colleague. Course evaluations remained very positive and teacher candidates praised the LGBT workshops I conducted. My editorial was made into a poster and displayed in the entrance of the faculty building. In short, my presence as an openly gay man and the acceptance signalled by my success made a difference.

CHANGED UTTERLY:
ENGAGEMENT AS RESEARCHER AND ACTIVIST

As a teacher educator, I had turned my inner surface outward as both a personal statement and professional commitment. My sense of purpose changed utterly after I re-connected with Christine Bellini, an event described in the editorial near the beginning of the chapter (Kitchen, 2011). Since then, Christine and I have been very engaged in LGBT advocacy and research. We developed new LGBT workshops and delivered them in all secondary school methods classes on campus, significantly expanding teacher candidates’ exposure to queer issues. We wrote a report on our workshop presentations (Kitchen & Bellini, 2012a) and a self-study on our experiences conducting it (Kitchen & Bellini, 2012b). Our work was informed by queer theory, particularly its critique of the heteronormative tendency to pathologize LGBT teens and minimize attention to
their needs. We paid particular attention to the ways in which the culture of schools marginalizes queer youth through normative language, toleration of harassment and bullying, and invisibility in the curriculum. We “pragmatically focussed on creating a discursive space in which teacher candidates could safely struggle with alternative conceptualizations of sexual identity and the duties of teachers” (Kitchen & Bellini, 2012b, p. 211). Christine shared stories from her experiences as a GSA advisor and employed case studies as a vehicle for converting good intentions into effective practice. While my activism increased and a new program of research opened up, I remained cautious and incremental in my approach to reform. We were careful to create a safe environment in which all teacher candidates would feel respected and cared for (Lee, 2011), “were reluctant to take a strongly ideological stance” (Kitchen & Bellini, 2012b, p. 211), and “avoided engaging overtly in ideological debate” (p. 215).

I became more engaged in research and writing related to LGBT issues, even though I already had a full program of research. Christine and I received funding for a project on GSAs in Ontario schools. As a result, we surveyed and interviewed GSA advisors about school climate and GSAs. This has lead to several papers on the survey findings (e.g., Kitchen & Bellini, submitted), with papers on the interview findings forthcoming. Also, deepening involvement prompted me to reflect more on my identity and on queer theory (Kitchen, 2014a) and to share my story in this chapter. Looking forward, it is likely that I will continue to be engaged as a researcher and activist.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

In this chapter, I have turned myself inside out by discussing my personal identity as a gay man and my professional decision to be out as a queer teacher educator. As I conclude, I return to Rabbi Hillel three questions: If I am not for myself, who is for me? But if I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when? This time, I ask them both to readers, straight or queer.

If I Am Not for Myself, Who Is for Me?

Dealing with issues of sexual orientation and gender identity can be controversial, particularly in educational and societal contexts which do not extend human rights to all or are very conservative. While I advocate for honesty and social justice, I caution educators to think before they act, as they should in dealing with any controversial issue.

For LGBT educators, unfortunately the risks are real. My story reveals some of these challenges, even though I have been fortunate in my experiences with colleagues and students. But these risks have abated as gay rights have become enshrined in many jurisdictions.
For straight educators, taking a stand for equality for LGBT people can also pose risks. One needs to talk to people about the best ways to handle issues, and develop at least some rudimentary knowledge. It can begin by simply acknowledging the presence of queer communities and indicating your own personal acceptance. Being aware of gender identity and sexual orientation also means acknowledging unexamined privilege as straight educators. This can be done by being conscious of one’s own identity and privilege and making this explicit with students. Take small steps, such as opposing homophobic bullying or using inclusive language, before venturing to more ambitious efforts.

*But If I Am Only for Myself, What Am I?*

While it is important to be safe, social justice work involves moving beyond oneself to serving the interests of others, particularly minorities and the marginalized. With privilege comes responsibility. Like Peggy McIntosh (2009), I am committed to “spending my privilege” (p. 1) to help others and foster awareness.

I urge my queer colleagues to venture forward a step or two, by being open with colleagues and with at least some students. I especially challenge those with tenure and financial security to be more open and more active. As I learned, the mere presence of openly queer faculty makes a positive difference with faculty and students. And being closeted sends its own message.

I challenge straight educators committed to equity, diversity and social justice to take a stand against heteronormativity and for justice based on gender identity and sexual orientation. This can be done by modelling comfort with the topic and making it explicit in one’s teaching. A discussion of discipline might include how to deal with students who say, “That’s so gay!” A curriculum activity might feature famous LGBT figures or queer topics. Yes, there is risk, but who are you if you are not willing to use your privilege to help others?

*And If Not Now, When?*

Educators have an obligation to make queer students and teachers feel welcome and safe in their midst (Evans, 2002). Simple actions can make a world of difference to queer teachers afraid of the reaction of colleagues. They also make a difference to queer students struggling with their own identities and straight students learning what it means to be good and caring citizens. It is my experience that being out now has made a difference to the people with whom I work and, I hope, to the students that they influence through their actions. I also know that my own development as a gay man and queer educator has been advance thanks to the kindness of straight colleagues who did not judge me based on identity and who encouraged me in my work.

Working together, straight and queer, we can help make it better now for straight and LGBT students.
NOTE

The language of sexual orientation and gender identity is challenging for people engaged in this work, and quite puzzling for everyone else. I generally use gay as in reference to myself as a man attracted to other men; also, it can be read as an umbrella term for members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community. The acronym LGBT is often supplemented with a Q for questioning or queer, as well as additional letters in recognition of other identities. I also employ the term queer. While queer is sometimes used as an umbrella term for the LGBT spectrum, I tend to use it to denote a political commitment to critiquing normative assumptions about sexuality and gender.

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