






Conclusions: Queering “Politics of Pain” Through Activism and Educational Outreach Work

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Being a queer activist or queer researcher evokes a variety of emotions. One of those emotions is pain which is experienced in our interactions with other queer bodies and through our writings, reflections, embodied experiences, and activism. We feel the pain impacting on our bodies, touching our inner self, both as individual subjects, but also as members

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of a queer community, constituted by and through discourses of exclusion and marginalization. In that sense, queer pain is shared, even globally, creating a community of pain. Thus, through sharing of pain, pain becomes a “social construct,” the inner becomes the outer, and through the pain we feel the border between the inside and the outside, between the queer other and the heteronormative society (Ahmed, 2014). The pain enters politics and becomes part of a political struggle for social justice.

The edited book and its chapters are an attempt to respond to queer pain by giving examples of how pain can be mobilized but also queered through affectivity of pain, by which we give affective response to pain through queer activism and educational outreach work. However, it also draws attention to how we become invested in pain. In other words, the wound becomes part of our identity (Ahmed, 2014, p. 32), and it can either motivate or discourage us to act against the conditions that contribute to our pain and oppression.

The opening up of the wound, the impact of pain on the queer communal body, is today more evident in some global contexts than others, as discussed in some of the chapters. For example, in Brazil, the latest political changes have resulted in increased pain for the queer community, where the neo-conservative political movement under the leadership of the new homophobic president has undermined queer rights and previous work accomplished by queer activists. Poland is another example of pain inflicted upon the queer communal body, and due to this a contribution from Poland did not become part of this book. The difficulties to tackle with sexuality and gender diversity within education and the interconnections of these difficulties to problematic history and present situation of a country are also analyzed in the chapter by DePalma who describes in her historical analysis why it is not easy to talk about sexuality and gender diversity in schools in Spain despite the rather good situation concerning LGBTI rights. However, saying that, the chapters in this book contribute to the queering of the politics of pain by opening up new ways to connect queer activism to educational settings, and support queer youth in their quest for being themselves without experiencing homophobia, transphobia, or heterosexism. This becomes strikingly evident in the chapter by Kjaran on Iran. His analysis shows how queer or gay activists are able to do educational outreach for queer youth and adults via internet and social media in a country where same-sex sexual relationships are criminalized and can be punished by death.

Thus, the key themes running through the book, appearing in some chapters and not others, can be summarized under the headings: the hidden opportunities in educational policy, laws, and curricula; competing discourses in terms of sexuality and gender diversity in schools; and different approaches to outreach work. In the remaining of this chapter, these themes will be discussed and summarized, followed by a brief discussion on how we can take educational activism and outreach work further, and what challenges are there to overcome.

Some chapters address changes in the legal scape in terms of gender and sexuality diversity, and how these changes have opened up spaces, although liminal, for doing outreach work in schools. Kjaran and Lehtonen, drawing from the Nordic context, discuss in their chapter how recent changes in the curriculum and educational acts in terms of LGBTIQ inclusivity have both made it easier for an educational outreach worker to access schools, and do outreach work, but also set particular parameters for doing this kind of work. In other words, these changes have in some instances normalized some aspects of queer education, and what can be said and done during the outreach work, but at the same time other aspects are pushed out. In South Africa, LGBTIQ rights are stipulated in the constitution and other legal documents, which means that schools should be inclusive of sexuality and gender diversity. However, as Francis and Khan point out, there is a gap between policy and practice, and one way to work against heteronormativity, homophobia, and transphobia in schools is to educate teachers and make them aware of how to include these issues in the classroom spaces. They suggest art-based education to increase critical awareness regarding sexuality and gender diversity. Other chapters also address policy issues and how these have either made outreach work difficult or somehow opened up spaces of doing this kind work in schools.

For example, in Taiwan a rather progressive legislation in terms of sexuality and gender diversity has influenced schools and how they organize sex education. Thus, some schools have offered the representative of local LGBTIQ organizations to give talks at schools. This has, as explained in the chapter by Yang, however, raised some criticism from conservative groups that have organized their own initiatives and groups to counter the work done by queer activists. Other chapters give examples for these kinds of counter-narratives or discourses originating from conservative groups in which schools have been turned into a battleground for competing

ideologies. Tensions between different groups or between different people with various backgrounds doing educational outreach or social justice work with and in schools were also described in a chapter by Schmitt. In this chapter which focused on Canadian situation, experiences by several interest groups such as queer social movement activists, teachers with queer network background, and teachers with trade union or other community organizing background were analyzed and differences found.

The questions thus remain, what can be done and what schools can do to give their students education about sexuality and gender diversity, which is in line with the guidelines given by the UNESCO in terms of sex education (UNESCO, 2016). These guidelines demand sex education that should be inclusive to all students and age appropriate. The chapters presented in this book give some examples of how that can be done, drawing different approaches in doing outreach work and advocacy in schools and other educational settings. The approaches include norm critical pedagogy, mostly used in the Nordic context, in which the aim is to disrupt the dominant norms around heterosexuality and make students more aware of the privileges. These are often connected to the discussion on white, straight, able-bodied, cisgender, masculine men as normal and most valued. This perspective can be helpful in drawing attention to how identity categories can bring privileges to some, but disadvantages and oppression to others.

Related to norm critical pedagogy is the intersectional approach, which has been used in some parts of Latin America and Africa, to raise a critical awareness of how sexuality and gender intersect with other social categories such as race, class, and ethnicity, and creates new positions and subjectivities. In a racial and class segregated and diverse society such as Brazil, intersectional approach has been used in the outreach work as described by Nardi, Quartiero, and Rodrigues in their chapter. This has opened up opportunities to bring into classroom spaces diversity not only in terms of sexuality and gender, but also their intersections with ethnicity, race, and class. This has also been done in the Southern and Eastern African contexts, described by Reygan as well as Francis and Khan in their chapters. In South Africa, art-inspired workshops for teachers on sexuality and gender diversity have raised critical awareness around the intersections of race, sexuality, and gender diversity. Thus, by using art-inspired critical pedagogy the workshop had the aim of bridging the gap between policy and practice.

Autobiographical or narrative approach in doing outreach work is used in various cultural contexts, both in the global south and north. The chapter by Astudillo and Barrientos describes how a Chilean Catholic LGBTI organization, *Pastoral de la Diversidad Sexual*, engages in outreach work mostly in Catholic schools by drawing on the testimony of its members. The aim of the group is to change attitudes towards sexuality and gender diversity in Chilean society through *confession of the self* (Foucault, 1978); using one’s own experience and embodied pain of belonging to the marginalized other to educate and transform the heterocisgender norms. Thus, as the authors demonstrate in their chapter, by sharing the embodied experiences, and by engaging in *politics of pain*, that it is possible to confront and disturb the same norms that are regulating and oppressing those bodies that are considered to be outside of the heterosexual matrix (Foucault, 1978).

This has particularly been true of intersex bodies that have been constituted historically through the discourse of medicalization and pathologization. Moreover, in outreach work, intersex people have often been left out and rendered invisible as members of the greater queer community. Or the I in the list of letters (LGBTIQ+) has been defined shortly without drawing critical attention to cisnormative understanding of gender and bodies, and more detailed information on intersex experiences. Thus, the chapter of Enzendorfer and Haller draws on autobiographical approach, by addressing the importance of including intersex voices in outreach work and queer school projects. By sharing their story, intersex activists not only talk about their own embodied experience but reflect critically upon society and particularly the binary structure of gender in most societies. Thus, this approach, which entails sharing of embodied experience by bringing in politics of pain, is also critical and in that sense in line with norm critical pedagogy used within the Nordic context. By focusing on binary thought and how this kind of ideology constitutes our bodies and subjectivities has the opportunities to queer heteronormativity within schools and educational institutions.

Queering through sharing embodied experiences is also discussed by Arnold and Langer. The authors argue that the presence of LGBTI activists as speakers and the use of autobiographical storytelling as a method help to shift the usual cis-heteronormative framework of most Austrian schools. However, it is not enough only to tell “your queer story” and engage in politics of pain in order to destabilize heteronormative assumptions and work against processes of Othering. These stories, as

the authors point out, need to be connected to critical reflections about gender and sexuality, in which the fluidity of identities and desires is highlighted.

To sum up, approaches and perspectives with regard to queer outreach work in schools discussed in this edited book are diverse, but at the same time they all engage with critical aspects of queering heteronormativity and the workings of Othering, heterosexism, and heterocisgender privileges. In that sense, outreach work in the global south and north draws attention to the importance of the queer activist movement in initiating changes and in fact, *working the cracks* (Collins, 2000) of the dominant discourses on sexuality and gender diversity in educational settings. Saying that, there are however some global challenges in doing outreach work that can be noticed throughout all the cultural settings discussed in the book.

Firstly, there is the issue of funding and resources in doing this kind of activist work in schools. Generally, those organizations and activist groups that work on these issues, and are referred to in this edited book, are mostly based on volunteer work, and are most often underfunded or have to rely on their members for funds. An exception here are some queer organizations in the Nordic countries who get some official funding. On the other hand, organizations that offer counter-narrative to the work done by these queer organizations are often financially well supported by various conservative and religious groups. In that sense there is an imbalance between these groups.

Secondly, to gain access to schools and educational spaces is often difficult and need to be negotiated. In some countries, there is a good cooperation between schools and queer activists, but even where that is the case the outreach work is more than often limited to schools located in bigger urban locations. Thus, the main challenge here for many queer outreach workers is to enlarge their network and gain access to educational spaces. In order to guarantee that, schools need to have an official policy to refer to when it comes to outreach work given by outsiders. In many cases, this is not at hand and thus as in the case of Taiwan, educational spaces are open to groups that work against sexuality and gender diversity by invoking homophobic and transphobic discourse, and to those groups that try to counter this kind of narrative and discourse.

To sum up, the findings presented in the chapters throughout the book have a number of potential implications and opportunities for the development of outreach work and queer activism in educational settings, both

in the global north and south. They also give some examples of how it is possible to queer or disrupt heteronormativity, gender binary and cisgender ideology, and homophobia in educational spaces through outreach work. We hope that this book gives ideas for future research projects and international co-operation in analyzing and developing new approaches, methods, and ideas of educational outreach work with schools by civil society organizations and queer activists on sexuality and gender diversity issues, and in finding ways of doing meaningful educational outreach work around the globe.

However, it needs to be emphasized that this volume is, by necessity, selective and does not make any claims to global “representations” or solutions. That being said, there is clearly the potential for transforming schools globally in terms of sexuality and gender diversity, through outreach work and queer activism, even though we are experiencing backlash in some countries with regard to LGBTIQ+ rights. This reminds us of the need to engage in politics of pain, and through that pain we can make changes and transform schools by queering heteronormativity. Thus, in line with Muñoz (2009), there is a hope of queer futurity or utopias within schools, both in the global north and south. These queer futurities can be defined as transformative, imaginary spaces or spaces in becoming, wherein all students can be included irrespective of how they identify on the basis of their gender or sexuality. In that kind of futurity, outreach work might not even be needed, and schools can focus on what they are supposed to do: Educate students, give them hope, and make them feel welcome and included.

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