Embodying Responsibility? Understanding Educators' Engagement in Queer Educational Justice Work in Schools

Irina Schmitt

Queer social movements (QSM) inform crucially and in different ways "queer educational justice work in schools" (Quinn & Meiners, 2012, p. 4). This chapter examines how QSM and schools interact by analyzing the logics underlying educators' social justice work on gender and sexuality, and how these logics relate to engagement in and sense of responsibility for queer social justice education. The material, interviews with thirty-nine educators in Vancouver and Toronto, Canada, suggests that interaction between schools and QSM is often embodied by educators who are engaged in QSM as well as in schools, school boards, and unions.

Accordingly, the questions this chapter addresses are: What are the strategies of queer educational justice work formulated by educators in schools and QSM, and how do they relate to an attachment and a sense of responsibility? I argue that it is possible to differentiate three strategies of queer educational justice work: reflexive identity politics, intersectional

I. Schmitt (✉)
Department of Gender Studies, Lund University, Lund, Sweden
e-mail: irina.schmitt@genus.lu.se

systems critique, and individual humanism. These strategies reflect the fact that school-based and QSM-based queer educational justice work are closely connected and often embodied by the same people, and inversely, that educators without such connections express a lack of access to the knowledge needed to do queer educational justice work in schools. I also contend that responsibility for queer educational justice work is attached to queer educators, that is educators who are or are seen as queer, through fear. With this reading of "queer" I hope to destabilize the notion of an easily identifiable victim of homophobia or transphobia, pointing to the processes of being queered as an ascription of otherness that in the context of this chapter is linked to responsibility.[1] I argue that it is necessary to analyze this attachment of responsibility to understand educators' engagement in queer educational justice work, and how such an attachment of responsibility can undermine the work of QSM and queer educational justice work in schools. With this discussion, I hope to provide educators and schools with a deeper understanding of some of the gaps in translation of existing policy into the curriculum and into school culture, and give insights into ways of creating change.

In our conversations, participants discussed school- and QSM-based social justice work, and the entanglement of regulative progress, economy, and the resistance-to-change factor that can be rooted in religious or political convictions (Dehli & Fumia, 2002), fear of upsetting principals and parents (Bower & Klecka, 2009), insecurity, and the sense that things are fine as they are (Meyer, 2008). Talking with educators from different contexts has allowed me to analyze approaches to queer educational justice and how responsibility is assigned to queer bodies in the context of local interrelations of QSM-based and school-based work. Thus, it complements research on gaps between Canadian teachers' self-understanding and their practices of social justice education on gender and sexuality (Taylor et al., 2016).

While the initial aim of the study was to understand teachers' knowledge and skills relating to queer students and content, the issue of community engagement emerged from the material. QSM engagement was an important factor, but it was not an uncomplicated one. Logics and strategies differed also between participants connected to QSM. With this chapter, I discuss strategies of engagement rather than analyze moments of interaction to understand the role of QSM-based work in an overarching sense. As shown by Dennis Francis (2017, p. 371), fear can hinder especially non-queer educators from addressing hetero-cisnormativity

in education. The work of QSM in schools in Canada is still crucial, yet it acts in a setting where the attachment of responsibility limits how the knowledge produced by queer education networks is accessible to all teachers through curriculum and teacher education.

In what follows, I present the participants and research setting as well as the theoretical context and research process, before analyzing the three strategies. Finally, I discuss how responsibility is attached to queer educators in a context of fear.

Participants and Queer Social Movements

This chapter is based on thirty-two interviews with thirty-nine educators held in the fall of 2010 in Vancouver and Toronto. Some participants worked in schools as teachers or administrators (in Vancouver Hannah, Michael, and Jeremy; in Toronto Tracey, Ruth, Jody, Amy, Laura, Wayne, Angela, Phillip, Brian, Tom, Terri, Daniel, Julie, Kevin, and Karen) or counselors and support staff (in Toronto Bobbie, Pauline, and Ana); some of these were engaged in queer education networks. Others worked through QSM (in Vancouver Andy, Dev, Elly, Maya, and Geena; in Toronto Jamie, Colin, and Monica), and school boards or teachers' unions and federations (in Vancouver Tony, Andrea, Nathan, Jason, Deb, Ramona, and Anne; in Toronto Rick, Lisa, and Sean), and many of these had trained as teachers. Some of them knew each other from queer education networks and well-established collaborations between schools, school boards, unions, and QSM. QSM-engaged participants agreed that the knowledge produced in queer educational justice work was important for changing oppressive understandings of gender identity and sexuality for all students, rather than for queer students only.

The invitation to participate in the study had not focused on queer educators; I had asked more broadly about schools' competences in working with LGBTQ students and topics. That twenty-seven of the participants were lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, or queer can be read as a first result. Though such categorizations risk problematic reification, they also illustrate a tendency toward who is "on the right side" (everybody) and who feels the responsibility to act (those embodying difference), and I will discuss these participants' sense of responsibility further down in the text.

That thirty-one participants were white, and none Indigenous, can partly be analyzed as a reflection of my own whiteness and lack of strategic

attention in the process of contacting prospective participants to make the project more relevant for people with diverse experiences of oppression. Partly, it reflects on who held positions of power in the unions, school boards and QSM that I got in touch with.

Thus, many of the participants who did queer educational justice work, in schools, teachers' unions, or school boards, were active in and interacting with formal or informal QSM. These were contexts of knowledge production and networking otherwise lacking in schools. For this reason, I am working with an understanding of QSM as multifaceted, including queer organizations which do large-scale educational outreach work, in and outside of schools, as well as smaller groups for knowledge production and outreach, and informal networks.

Queer educational justice work happened as outreach activities of local organizations, or through teachers who were active in such networks and organizations. Starting out from small autonomous networks, some activists in this study had made their way into school boards, federations, and policymaking. This is community-driven work, and parts of the networks are close-knit by many years of shared activism. As one participant argued, engagement by schools, universities, and policymakers, as well as activists, is needed to make "a coherent whole." Importantly, queer educational justice networks and organizations question the liberal, colonial notion of individual teachers who save individual children from individual acts of discrimination (Britzman, 1995; Meiners, 2002), and call for a focus on the collective work of knowledge production and pedagogical change from oppressive norms of gender and sexuality.

Queer Pedagogical Analysis: Who Feels Responsible for Queer Educational Justice Work?

The analysis in this study is informed by queer-feminist education researchers' critique of depoliticizing logics of oppression (Britzman, 1995). Two central contentions of this critique are relevant for this article: First, that they conflate queerness with violence against queer people, suggesting that queerness is defined by vulnerability to violence (Airton, 2014, p. 397; Monk, 2011), which also creates a "proper subject" for queer pedagogies (Talburt & Rasmussen, 2010, p. 11). A second critique focuses on the propensity for single-issue narratives in anti-discrimination work and policy based on a logic of individuation (Daley, Solomon, Newman, & Mishna, 2007; Meyer, 2007). Not least in the Canadian

context with its colonial history and present, it is important to take into account scholarship that analyzes normative gender categories as violently colonial (binaohan, 2014; Driskill, 2004).[2] Such discussions of gender and sexuality as historically specific are important for the analysis of educators' strategies toward issues of gender and sexuality in schools.

Thus, queer-feminist education research works both with claims for the existence and representation of queer subjectivities, and for the queering of education, aiming "to unsettle the myth of normalcy as an originary state and to unsettle the unitary subject of pedagogy" (Britzman, 1995; 2012 [1998], p. 293). I understand the need both to claim and identify positions and belongings in societies that work in the logic of individuation, and hope to disrupt this logic by engaging these tensions between queer representations in and queering of education.

Working with these discussions, I use queer as a theoretical and methodological tool deriving from politics of resistance and deconstructive analyses of the regulatory workings of norms. It is a site of struggle, understanding the interrelatedness of oppressions and productions of power, necessarily critiquing the contingency of growing racism in the stabilizing of "queer" (Puar, Pitcher, & Gunkel, 2008). The present analysis is especially informed by Jen Gilbert's (2014, p. xiii) problematization of "being on the right side of an issue" that

> is not enough if, in standing there, we erode the possibility for new, more expansive understandings of sexuality and learning.

Gilbert problematizes Western liberal positions, arguing that they do anti-discrimination work in schools by acting upon notions of repressive tolerance (Brown, 2008 [2006]), which shuts down rather than opens up conversations about sexuality in school.

Conversely, I engage with the complication of notions of injury and of responsibility suggested by Mary Lou Rasmussen, Fida Sanjakdar, Louisa Allen, Kathleen Quinlivan, and Annette Bromdal (2015, pp. 40–41):

> Accountability and responsibility cannot be located in a specific individual, nor a specific event, place or time. This is not to say that responsibility and accountability no longer matter. It is recognition that neither are they virtues, straightforward or easily apprehended.

The authors "interrupt the notion that education can repair ignorance, fear and anxiety" (2015, p. 40). I use this contention to analyze why some educators feel personal responsibility to do queer educational justice work at the intersections of schools, QSM, school boards, and unions, intersections often embodied by a small and intensely engaged group of people. As the analysis will show, (not) feeling responsible and being made responsible are decisive motivations for the level of engagement in social justice work for the participants in this study.

These seemingly contradictory contentions, a critique of "standing on the right side" on the one hand and complications of responsibility on the other hand, unsettle assumptions of stable positions for queer students as always-already victims of violence, and queer adults in schools as always already responsible to change that.

This inscribes this chapter in a queer tradition of analysis that focuses on the norms that produce subject positions, as vulnerable to violence or as responsible for queer educational justice work, and that understands conceptualizations of social justice as materially productive of inclusions and exclusions (Butler, 2009; Spade, 2015 [2009]). Beyond showing the productive interrelations between personal engagement and continuous social justice work in schools, it analyzes how a lack of such engagement allows for a lack in social justice work. I argue that the sense of responsibility which QSM-engaged participants express gives them access to knowledge and continuous knowledge production that is necessary for queer educational justice work. It is not in the first instance their experiences as queer that produces this knowledge, but the intense work of knowledge production done on the basis of educators' experiences in larger and smaller networks.

METHODOLOGY, AND THE TRICKY QUESTION OF CONFIDENTIALITY

Working in a queer-feminist research tradition relates to the methodology as much as the theoretical framing of this chapter (Ahmed, 2012; Britzman, 1995; Butler, 2009; Lather, 2001). Central issues are the critique of researchers as neutral objective subject, of reproductions of societal power structures, and ongoing discussions on research as reflective of the shifting power relations that form a study during the entire process, including ways of contacting participants, during conversations and during analysis (Potts & Brown, 2015). This includes reflections of researcher

subjectivities; it does matter who we are when we meet research participants, but not in a causal chain of events. It mattered in our conversations that I was someone from outside Canada, albeit with earlier research experience in Canada, and that I was a queer white academic who had read similar texts to those that some of the participants referred to (Schmitt, 2010). There were moments of recognition, and moments of uncomfortable silence (Gorman-Murray, Johnston, & Waitt, 2010).

In Vancouver, fifteen people met with me for fourteen interviews; one of the conversations was with two teachers. In Toronto, a key participant generously organized most meetings, and twenty-four people met with me individually or in pairs for eighteen interviews. The interviews were semi-structured; all but one was recorded digitally and transcribed by research assistants. I kept a research diary, spoke with colleagues in both cities who helped me contextualize my questions, studied current education policy (Schmitt, 2012), and was invited to join community events such as a vigil, a fundraising event, and the Toronto Halloween parade. Briefly, I became part of a "community of speakers" in which understandings of social justice were expressed and formed (Ahmed, 2012, p. 81).

There are good reasons to credit activists by using their names (Rasmussen, 2006, p. 7), and I asked participants how I should refer to them. Fourteen agreed to have me use their names, twenty-five preferred a pseudonym. Analytical emphasis lies on the narratives and discourses of experiences and strategies, rather than on attaching blame or praise to individuals (Lather, 2001). With these two considerations in mind, I ultimately used pseudonyms for all.

For the analysis, I worked with both the sound files and the transcripts. Using a feminist post-structural discourse analytical approach (Baxter, 2002), I read the material for participants' discourses, terminologies, and practices of social justice concerning sexuality and gender identity. The pattern emerging from this, the three strategies of engagement, is not meant to be read as static. Rather, it highlights the critical role of networks and communities of knowledge production in queer educational justice work.

In the analysis, differences in how queer educational justice work is related to QSM manifest; the participants' narratives show that locally specific contexts inform, but do not fully account for, their approach to social justice work. As I discuss in the following section, in the federal Canadian setting, structures and cultures for social justice education differ between provinces and between public and private school boards.

MATTERS OF PLACE

This study is set in the public-school sector in two Anglophone metropolitan centers, chosen as both cities' public-school boards had strong but different frameworks for anti-discrimination and social justice work on gender identity and sexuality (Dehli & Fumia, 2002; Mulligan, 2006, pp. 50–51; Schmitt, 2012), as well as close-knit networks of education activists, school boards, and unions working on queer educational justice. Nationally, the Canadian Human Rights Act states sexuality, and since 2016 gender identity and expression.

Similar to most education systems in the global North, the Canadian education system is a context for the reproduction of whiteness formed by (post)colonialism and immigration. In the conversations, participants reflected on how gender, gender expression, and sexuality are produced through other forms of identification and oppression such as colonialism, racism, sexism, religious beliefs, and poverty (Loutzenheiser, 2007, p. 103). Nonetheless, Black participants and participants of Color discussed the racism within queer communities and the lack of interrelations between queer and anti-racist activism (Kumashiro, 2002; McCready, 2004). I use the terminology of "Black" and "person of Color" to stress differentiated yet related experiences of racism and following critique of the previously common Canadian ascription "visible minorities" as depoliticizing. In conversations about hierarchies of oppression that made it easier to get attention for racism than for homophobia, but also problematizing that suicides by queer young people were more visible than suicides by Indigenous young people, problematic narratives of racialization and gender identity and sexuality as mutually exclusive emerged (Driskill, 2004). The legacy of Western understandings of gender and sexuality as tools of colonialism to enforce new social structures of personal relationships and society is important to remember here and is challenged by Two-spirit and queer Indigenous scholars and activists (binaohan, 2014; Morgensen, 2016; Wesley, 2014).

The Vancouver School Board had an explicit policy to support "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Transsexual, Two-spirit, Questioning" students, and an anti-homophobia and diversity consultant. Yet, not least in the context of diminishing funding for that work, participants in Vancouver emphasized working through QSM and queer educational justice networks, which included people working at the school board or unions, both in the current work and in narrating the history of changes (Gilbert, 2014, pp. 16–18; Haskell & Burtch, 2010, p. 23). As Andy, who worked

with a QSM that did workshops in schools, phrased it, "everyone is perfect working together, everyone." Interested teachers invited QSM representatives to come to their schools, and teachers were engaged in outreach work through the networks and organizations that they were part of. For many of the teachers, their engagement in social justice work did not end when the school day was over; and for some, this engagement led them from active service as teachers to full-time work at teachers' unions or the Vancouver School Board. Many schools had a "safe contact" who distributed information about anti-homophobia and anti-transphobia work. Participants demanded clearer political and administrative leadership for social justice work, though this leadership was not to infringe on teacher autonomy, on the decentralized structure of schools, or on teachers' collective agreements.

The underlying narrative in Toronto spoke of human rights as enforceable legal rights, and the knowledge of political victories that are manifest in elaborate policy and structure (McCaskell, 2007). Within the Toronto District School Board, social justice work focused on policy integration and explicit anti-homophobia and anti-transphobia work (Ferfolja, 2013), including the Gender-Based Violence Prevention Office and a school for students who had experienced homophobic and transphobic violence at their previous schools. Teachers were to refer behavioral questions to colleagues such as child and youth counselors. For some this created clarity, while others questioned the demotion of the pedagogical issue of social justice to a matter of mere "behavior".

Educators in both cities situated social justice work within the larger context of diminishing education funding and politics that also affected queer students (Russell, 2006). This also concerned the circulation of relevant policy and resources: knowledge of regulations and resources required personal commitment when the structures for implementation of social justice work failed (Rudoe, 2018).

Analysis: Three Strategies on Social Justice Work

Despite the differences between the two cities, with QSM organizations being part of everyday queer educational justice work in schools in Vancouver, and participants in Toronto referring more to the school

board's work, more relevant distinctions emerged between the participants' conceptualizations and strategies of social justice concerning sexuality and gender identity (Haskell & Burch, 2010, p. 13). The participants' strategies elaborate the differentiation made by Emily C. Graybill, Kris Varjas, Joel Meyers, and Laurel L. Watson's study (2009, p. 576) between approaches based on ethics or rules, with rules-based approaches reflecting Gilbert's "being on the right side" and an ethics-based strategy reflecting Rasmussen, Sanjakdar, Allen, Quinlivan, and Bromdal's discussion of responsibility. I identify the different strategies used by participants in achieving social justice as "reflexive identity politics," "intersectional systems critique," and "individual humanism." Strategies overlapped and participants could refer to different ones. Nonetheless, as I discuss in the analysis, the strategies clearly reflect educators' engagement in queer educational justice work and QSM.

Reflexive Identity Politics

This strategy entailed a focus on pedagogy as a way to translate politics and policies into learning on social justice issues concerning sexuality and gender identity. With this strategy, identificatory positions and power relations were expressed through terminologies of queer, social justice, hate (not phobia), and equity, rather than bullying. Queer educational justice was discussed as teachers' responsibility, and also as something that becomes attached to queer teachers. Participants pointed out intersections, often positioning violence against queer people in relation to other forms of oppression such as racism, sexism, and classism; and Jamie, who worked at a QSM in Toronto, argued that "if I only tease out one [issue], then really, I am not doing the work."

Vancouver-based teacher and QSM activist Jeremy discussed the pedagogical limitations of anti-bullying logics, demanding to make "safety" "the core underlying basic thing first before anything else can happen" in schools, but reflected that this shift would be unwelcome in the given education system. This discussion of the logics of social justice education is important, not least in Vancouver, where QSM were discussed as a regular resource in the local strategies of queer social justice education. Elly, working through a local QSM, considered some limitations:

> One thing that we worked on developing was like, okay, oppression happens to so many people, so why don't we talk about that, instead of just

having the gay kids in front of the classroom, right? So, so a big thing that we see in the schools is that if you start talking about what students are experiencing, and how they are experiencing stereotypes and how they are experiencing discrimination, and you can connect that to experiences of homophobia, then they get such a better understanding – they can relate to it a lot more.

Discussing the logics of education in this way speaks to a demand to change approaches to learning on a larger scale, going beyond reparative or add-on models of anti-discrimination (Monk, 2011, p. 191). Elly's comment echoes Hilary Malatino's skepticism toward a kind of queer educational justice work that contains queer people as "other" (Malatino, 2015) and Jón Ingvar Kjaran and Jukka Lehtonen's discussion of QSM being given the role of filling educational gaps (Kjaran & Lehtonen, 2018, p. 1040). Instead, Elly argued for a pedagogy based on solidarity that creates an understanding of how oppression works.

Educators argued that anti-homophobia and anti-transphobia work can reproduce an understanding of discrimination as a matter of ignorance, not as complex productions of power. Jody, teacher and QSM activist in Toronto, discussed this frustration:

One of the big, of the most massive issues that I see is how many white teachers there are, white straight teachers […] so you can, like, have the framework but then the people who are delivering it – like, there is this disconnect.

For Jody, lack of appropriate representation created problems of plausibility in classrooms. At the same time, she critiqued the assumption that education against homophobia and transphobia is only relevant when queer students or teachers are visible or "out" to their teachers, classmates, or colleagues (Rasmussen, 2006, p. 26).

Educators using this strategy argued that many teachers were only abstractly aware that anti-discrimination was constitutionally stipulated. This resonates with Gilbert's analysis that "being on the right side" is not sufficient to address social justice concerns. They highlighted the necessity for an analysis of power relations that sees queer students and adults in schools not merely as individual subjects of useful policy or momentary educational interventions, and works with ongoing pedagogical change.

Intersectional Systems Critique

This strategy understands oppression as systemic and structurally embedded in all aspects of education, including teacher training, curricular changes, and structures of education administration. Therefore, queer educational justice work needs to address the understanding of how and on what premises education is organized and what is considered relevant to learn in schools. Two aspects that were discussed were strategies of change work, that is, the question as to whether pedagogical work is more relevant or the control of compliance with existing policy, and the question of how to address disparities between advanced policy and a lack of translation into practice.

Jason, who worked with queer education questions at a Vancouver school board or union,[3] emphasized the structural intersectionality of homophobia:

> Homophobia is the norm in BC [British Columbian] schools. Racism is the norm in BC schools. Sexism is still the norm in this province. And in Canada too. So – and there are a lot of intersections between all those issues.

Nathan, who also worked with queer education questions at a Vancouver school board or union, also declared that education in Canada is "patriarchal, hierarchical, colonial – you know, it's still set up on a British model, so it's hard to kind of break away at that." He argued that it was not sufficient—although momentarily necessary—to relegate certain students' wellbeing to activities separated from everyday schoolwork, such as Gay/Queer–Straight Alliances or a separate school, in what Lori MacIntosh has discussed as the "Band-Aid" approach (2007).

If the problem is intersectional and systemic, so must be the solution. The understanding that educators can use policy as a tool for resistance was strong in this group, though Deb, who worked through a school board or union in Vancouver, argued that there was a lack of societal consensus for anti-homophobia and anti-transphobia work that existed for anti-racism work, and that more staff education addressing the intersections of oppressions was necessary. Similarly, Kevin, a Torontonian teacher and QSM activist, argued that there needed to be

> education, education, education, 'cause I believe that the reason we are teachers is because we believe we can make change through education,

and that's where we really need to put our money where our mouth is and stop writing policy and start putting the money into implementing policy.

Importantly, both linked the individual teacher in need of more education, which is a classic trope in any anti-discrimination discourse, and which has been importantly critiqued, to the structures of education.

Another discussion focused on compliance. Rick, a QSM activist working at a school board or union in Toronto, argued that there was "not as much compliance as we should have" and continued: "[m]any of the tools we need are there and being developed [in our society]. What's missing is the security to do it." Rick also wished that teachers would feel more comfortable to be out at work, as this would make it easier for them to support queer students: "I think the system would be different."

Ramona, a QSM activist working for a school board or union in Vancouver, argued that many teachers did not have access to such tools, or to queer educational justice conversations: "Everybody knows it's not okay to be overtly homophobic; I don't think we're at a place where everybody knows that they should be teaching positively." This led to a situation where many teachers, as Torontonian teacher and QSM activist Karen pointed out,

> pretend not to see it or hear it, because they don't know how to deal with it. […] It's not the guidance counselor's job necessarily. It is not the principal's job to do the discipline. It's your job to get to know them and find out what's going on, if they are bullying in your classroom or in your school.

Karen and others argued that when oppression is framed as an individual behavioral problem, the task of addressing it is shunted from classrooms to counselors. Teachers needed to have access to analysis hetero- and cis-normativity in society and to pedagogies that strengthen social justice to be able to go beyond information about nondiscrimination. These conversations sum up a challenge that educators and policymakers face: The impact of anti-discrimination regulations is limited if teachers fear that compliance will put them in conflict with normative logics of school and with student and parent communities.

The language of compliance shifts the focus from the individual teacher to the analysis of structures and routines, formulating the possibility of consequences for those who do not adhere to the protective regulations.

This is a shift from activist work toward institutionalization, from individual, community-based to collective responsibility (Rasmussen et al., 2015). Yet the politics of consequence fail when educators lack the knowledge to understand and work with it (Goldstein, Russell, & Daley, 2007; Sykes, 2004), and schools often lack the resources to circulate the knowledges produced in queer educational justice networks.

Individual Humanism

Finally, this approach encompasses a pedagogical philosophy based on human rights. A shared sense was a focus on individual students who needed help in difficult situations. Teachers and staff felt that homophobia and transphobia did not happen (a lot) and many did not know whether there were queer students in their schools, leading to little sense of urgency (Loutzenheiser & Moore, 2009, p. 151). Homophobia and transphobia were discussed through a terminology of stereotypes, respect, human rights, zero tolerance, anti-bullying, and behavior, making homophobia and transphobia an issue of individual perpetrators, attached to progressive rationality and regulation (Rasmussen, 2016). In Gilbert's (2014) terms, participants were "on the right side," containing the issue of gender identity and sexuality within specific bodies and specific moments.

Most participants in this group associated queerness with forms of excess, either noticeable as homophobia or transphobia, or existing in visible representations of queerness. This "mobile, transferable and generalized queer subject has tended to invoke a homophobic conception of homophobia as harming only queers" (Airton, 2013, p. 554). Notions of "appropriate behavior" and prohibitive measures, such as stopping students from using "bad language," were the most accessible ones to teachers and staff in this group. They expressed a strong sense of equality and justice and acted whenever they encountered individual homophobic or transphobic events and behaviors. Anne, who worked at a school board or union in Vancouver, summed up the basis of her work as an educator with "a child is a child," though she also discussed the need for systemic change, viewing the situation of Vancouver's schools through the lens of child poverty. For Torontonian teacher Laura, this was a question of professionalism in education: "You may have bias, you may have personal beliefs, but when you get into that classroom you'd better not ever let that bias taint the decision you make about a kid."

Some participants in this group were unsure about available resources or legal frameworks, and spoke of a lack of information and training. They felt that they lacked knowledge to apply policy in the classroom, and expressed being overwhelmed by the task of fitting in social justice work with all the other demands on their time.

Discussion: Attaching Responsibility

These strategies—reflexive identity politics, intersectional systems critique, and individual humanism—show that educators' logics of social justice work are a decisive factor in understanding their engagement in queer educational justice work. The different strategies also reflect fundamental conflicts. Some participants expressed the necessity for ongoing work in classrooms, governing bodies, and especially through the continuous conversation with and through QSM to change the structure of education and of pedagogy to make it safer for all students. For others, this work was completed, in that their understanding of equity incorporated bisexual, lesbian, gay, Two-spirit, gender-nonconforming, and transgender subjecthood, without having to change their underlying norms and logics of education.

The Toronto District School Board (TDSB) provided strong leadership, and central work was done by people in the TDSB with QSM engagement, but not all teachers had sufficient access to these resources. Also, in Vancouver, both policy and support from the Vancouver School Board and the teachers' unions were in place. Clearly, policy changes regarding social justice have to be read in the context of diminishing resources, and the analysis of responsibility needs to engage a broader understanding of education in neoliberal settings (Malatino, 2015, pp. 398–399). While QSM play an important role in schools' queer educational justice work, in the Canadian and many other Western contexts, we need to read their work in this context of neoliberal understandings and structures of education.

Also, especially in Toronto, concepts of justice and inclusion were operative beside notions of danger, consequence, and punishment. Logics of shame and punishment, previously used against queer people, can paradoxically displace the analysis of structural heteronormativity with the idea of individualized, depoliticized homophobia (Monk, 2011, pp. 199–200). Approaches based on punishment can lead to pedagogies of "progressive censorship" (Sykes, 2004, pp. 77, 82) that reproduce invisibility for those

they are meant to protect (also Gilbert, 2014, pp. 97–98) or "simply suppress the most blatant forms of violence and harassment in an authoritative and top–down manner" (Goldstein et al., 2007, p. 185). By forbidding "bad language," terms such as queer or gay, in order to stem violence, schools deprive young people of the words needed to give language to their sense of self.

Especially in Vancouver, participants spoke about systems of oppression, such as sexism, racism, heterosexism, and poverty, rather than about politics of identity. Policy, however, works through identity and speaks in the logic of visibility (Hansman, 2008). While policy can offer ways of redress for those being victimized as queer (as racialized other, as dis/abled, as sexualized), it can also confine queer and other minoritized people to the position of victim. Britzman (1995, p. 158) unpacks the conundrum of visibility by asking for curricula to be "proliferating identifications, not closing them down." Likewise, Airton (2013, p. 534) proposes a "flourishing of queerness in schools," where educators can form strategic alliances based on such proliferation.

That the participants who were most engaged in queer social justice work in schools were those positioning as queer or as allies points to another symptom of the limitations of policy, as necessary as policy is. This is crucial: as long as non-queer educators feel disengaged toward queer educational justice work, this work will remain minoritized. Educators' engagement, formally or informally, sustained and informed queer educational justice work. For these educators, especially those working through reflexive identity politics and intersectional systems critique, social justice work was a way to create community for themselves and others. It was also linked to a form of pain. The knowledge that their work mattered profoundly was an undercurrent in the narratives, as was the understanding that, if it were unsuccessful, children and young people would suffer (more) (Taylor & Peter, 2011). They felt responsible.

For some, this sense of necessity was linked to the frustration that queer communities were simply not doing enough. Rick's earlier insistence that queer teachers be out at work shows that the ascription of responsibility to queer teachers comes not only from non-queer teachers uncomfortable with the task but also from within queer communities. Similarly, Kevin was frustrated that many people in queer communities were content with legislative recognition and abstained from working for educational change: "That's when things are taken away from us." While I do understand the hope attached to queer teachers creating visibility

through their own bodies, I also see how the attachment of interest and injury to people identified as queer contains the problem as a minority issue, instead of addressing it as a question of democracy and pedagogy (MacIntosh, 2007; Malatino, 2015).

These educators' strategies were rooted in personal convictions and experience and have grown in dedicated formal and informal queer education networks. Educators without such networks were often unsure about both regulative frameworks and classroom strategies, focusing on managing student behavior rather than on discriminatory structures of everyday hetero-cisnormative course materials and pedagogical practices, reflecting Britzman's (2012 [1998], p. 298) contention that:

> For those who cannot imagine what difference difference makes in the field of curriculum, the hope is that the truth of the subaltern might persuade these normative folks to welcome the diversity of others and maybe feel their way into people in order to transform, at the level of these very transferable feelings, their racist, sexist, heterosexist attitudes.

As Ahmed argues (2012), good policy can create the faulty impression that all is well. Instead, we need to read laws and regulations in the context of how neoliberal and neoconservative politics and cuts in resources affect educators and students. Policy will not be implemented broadly when teachers fear being stigmatized as queer and there are too little resources to engage teachers with the knowledge produced in queer educational justice networks.

... in a Context of Fear

In this second part of the discussion, I relate responsibility to the aspect of fear. Torontonian teacher and QSM activist Ruth argued that teachers "are petrified of how to do it" and Kevin noted that "people are terrified." Teachers feared they might intensify problems, or be read as queer. These fears challenge the idea that all hetero-cisnormative violence can be stopped by education about sexual and gender diversity alone (Bower & Klecka, 2009, p. 370; Gray, 2013; Meyer, 2008). These fears can also be read as embodiments of what Rasmussen, Sanjakdar, Allen, Quinlivan, and Bromdal (2015, p. 41) described as the "opacity of accountability and responsibility." I am interested in this way of attaching responsibility. In our conversation, Ramona explained:

> There was a big movement a while ago to do good work around vio-
> lence and social justice stuff that was everyone's job. And I think many
> people took up that, mainly in the form of multiculturalism, diversity, anti-
> bullying – like real generic, you know, no names, who doesn't want to
> teach diversity. […] we correctly identified that, for instance, white peo-
> ple shouldn't be teaching about aboriginal experience, right, and so we
> started doing this thing about inviting our First Nations workers, or our
> aboriginal colleagues, to come and talk about their own communities and
> share stories in that way. And I think what happened then was that many
> people, out of liberalism, like, and not the good kind, decided that it was
> too risky to speak for others, and not in a way that was thoughtful. Like
> I think many people, like, I try not whenever possible to say 'this is what
> people of Color believe' or 'this is what people of faith believe', because
> I am not either of those groups. But that doesn't mean that I can't teach
> anti-oppression, right? And so I think there was a bit of a backlash that
> came from a well-intentioned movement, to try and say 'let's make space
> in schools for gay people to talk about homophobia', and then somehow
> that got turned into 'nobody can talk about homophobia but gays'.

Ramona discussed how a movement of avoidance replaced the hard-won
understanding that oppressed groups should have precedence of repre-
sentation. This movement attaches the injury of oppression to seemingly
easily identifiable people and groups. Michael, a QSM activist and teacher
in Vancouver, talked about the experience that queer teachers are assigned
the responsibility for "gay issues."

Attaching responsibility to those considered most affected, and implic-
itly most competent, is a widespread practice of containment, reflected in
having units on anti-homophobia and anti-transphobia taught by exter-
nal activists, a practice problematized by Malatino (2015). It assigns both
victimhood and agency in a paradoxical gesture of attaching ownership
of a problem, and obliterates interlinkages between aspects of oppression.
Rasmussen (2006, p. 20) argues:

> When the art of inclusion is exercised through the construction of LGBT
> teachers and young people as objects of pathos or empowerment, it deflects
> analysis away from the broader social mechanisms invested in these same
> people's continued objectification.

This produces a need to create readable representations among those
working from communities of injury toward anti-oppression, and sets up

a faulty separation between those doing the representing and those considered in need of being educated. In assigning responsibility to oppressed bodies—teachers or people from QSM doing work in schools—non-queer teachers try to avoid being stigmatized. In the context of this book, we understand that that one lecture or that one teacher can be a lifesaver for a queer student. Yet, queer teachers and QSM-based educators engaging in social justice work can come to embody Otherness and be made responsible for making the nonattached happy by circumventing painful or confrontational moments in the process of change (Ahmed, 2012). Attaching both difference and responsibility to queer teachers is equally injurious to students and to the movement for change and confines the representation of interest and injury to people identified as queer, containing the problem as a minority issue (MacIntosh, 2007; Malatino, 2015).

Conclusion: Understanding Queer Educational Justice Work Through the Analysis of Responsibility

While political and pedagogical leadership is important, it does not solve problems of reactive pedagogies that concentrate on addressing discriminatory moments, instead of creating institutional change. As I have shown, for some, queer educational justice work, indeed all social justice work in schools, was about helping young people seen as different. For others, it was about making the world less structured by violent norms that position queer young people as different in the first place. Policy is a powerful tool for those educators who wish to use it; for others, it is but a yardstick for professional conduct. It is never self-acting.

When "being on the right side" (Gilbert, 2014) is the minimum engagement framed by policy and scarce resources for training and education, responsibility becomes attached to queer teachers and QSM-based educators through fear of stigmatization and fear for queer young people (Rasmussen et al., 2015). This creates a problematic situation where the knowledges produced within queer education networks and QSM, and even policy formulated based on these knowledges, are undermined and confined.

The knowledges produced by educators and teachers in queer educational justice networks and organizations are crucial for the wellbeing of many students and for changing oppressive understandings of gender

and sexuality. The material also shows that the best policy will remain unused if it is not brought into schools through teacher training and regular in-service training, and coupled with the deep knowledge produced in queer educational justice networks and QSM. This negatively impacts how queer educational justice work in schools can be done.

In neoliberal and neoconservative contexts, policy can be both a powerful tool and a method of containment that covers up for lack of the funding that would allow QSM to come to schools, for in-service teacher training and to support ongoing knowledge production. The work of QSM in schools is important: in times of cuts in funding or in contexts where social movements are under attack, the networks that educators create are the spaces where this work continues, with or without political support. Wherever possible, further focus on teacher training to give all teachers the knowledge needed to do social justice as a regular part of their work will be a way to attach responsibility to all teachers.

Notes

1. Equally, homophobia and transphobia are not readily separable, as homophobic acts and heteronormative structures often do not attack a person's sexuality but rather their nonnormative gender expression, and transphobia is often expressed in homophobic terms. Hetero-cisnormativity describes the privileging of stabilizing binary understandings of bodies and relationships.
2. While reference to Canadian colonialism was made by some participants, Indigenous understandings of gender identity and sexuality, as framed in

the term Two-spirit, were limited. For a discussion of the formation of Two-spirit as an umbrella term for what in colonial logics are called non-normative Indigenous gender identities and sexualities, see Driskill, Finley, Gilley, and Morgensen (2011).

3. I use the phrase "school board or union" for ethical reasons.

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