Annotated Bibliography: Queer Pedagogy & Identity in the Composition Classroom

**Introduction**

My area of research specifically focuses on the application of Queer Pedagogy in relation to teachers and students identities within the classroom. Stacey Waite in her book, *Teaching Queer,* acknowledges that queering the classroom is necessary because writing is an extension of our identities and therefore an extension of our bodies (17). Writing is an act which inherently involves the body. Written expression of experiences comes from the body. Often, academia attempts to distance the body from the teaching experience for the sake of professionalism (Buyserie and Ramírez 8). Teachers may be encouraged to present themselves free of emotion for the sake of positionality. I believe this happens with students as well. Often, students feel they must separate their personal identity from their classroom identity. I have witnessed my own students grapple with classroom discussion to try and find answers to fit what they believe I am looking for as opposed to speaking freely from an authentic self. The fear of not meeting a teacher’s expectations can wash out student’s voice. Elimination of voice erodes identity and the student’s body as an extention. This is especially pertinent with students who do not identify with heteronormative, cisgender binaries implicitly and explicitly reinforced in the classroom.

The composition classroom should aim to equip students with rhetorical tools to amplify their own unique voices; otherwise, binary classroom structures create no space for queer identities and bodies to exist. Queer pedagogy encourages students to embrace their unique identities and voices as *strengths* and encourages students to lean into aspects of their identities that do not fit a binary structure. Composition teachers can model the breaking of binaries through restructuring classroom lessons with queer pedagogy in mind and reembodying the teaching experience (Buyserie and Ramírez 8). Throughout my research, I have tried to tailor my sources to be inclusive of minorities within the LGBTQ community, specifically, trans folk.

Beth Buyserie, Ricardo Ramírez. “Enacting a queer pedagogy in the composition classroom.” *ELT Journal*, Volume 75, Issue 2, 2021, Pages 193–202, <https://doi-org.dist.lib.usu.edu/10.1093/elt/ccaa072>

**Summary**

Buyserie and Ramírez conduct a study with ten University level composition teachers to explore how enacting queer pedagogical practices in the classroom can “challenge[] normativity in language and writing practices” (2). The article begins by first acknowledging that heteronormativity in the classroom implicitly creates an attitude that LGBTQ+ individuals are “in need of support, and thus, perpetuat[es] a pathological and marginalizing discourse” (2). Therefore, teachers of composition and English should be open to “new understandings and teaching” in the field. A problematic aspect in the composition classroom is the disembodiment which occurs when instructors presume an academic “emotion-free” persona which can prevent wholistic teaching and learning (3, 8 & 9). In the study conducted, University instructors completed two readings on queer theory which built on their prior knowledge and “lived experience” on queer pedagogy (5). During an interview, instructors identified areas of their own classroom pedagogy they wanted to investigate or destabilize with queer pedagogy in mind. Then, instructors redesigned one classroom assignment with attention to queer pedagogy. Teachers reflected in an interview or written document on how queer pedagogies influenced their redesigned assignment. The study concluded that identity is a part of writing and composition. Therefore, curriculum should be inclusive of non-normative identities. Implicit or explicit reliance on queer theory may also enhance the teaching of composition. The study summarizes how the body and self are a part of the composing process. Therefore, normative teaching styles risk disembodying students who don’t identify with binary methods of learning which prevents students from learning as a “whole” (8). Adopting an attitude that writing is inherently queer enables teachers to break away from normative teaching tactics.

**Pedagogical Application**

In an ENGL 1010 or 2010 classroom, teachers should consider how they are teaching in a way which is disembodying themselves and their identity and how this can potentially model problematic classroom personas. By staying authentic without blurring the lines of professionalism, instructors can model vulnerability and lived experience. Hopefully, this vulnerability can encourage students to express their most authentic selves and bring their own lived experiences into the classroom. Much like the study Buyserie and Ramírez conducted, ENGL 1010 and 2010 instructors should consider queering their assignments and see how this can be a reembodying experience for both teachers and students. Queering an assignment can be as simple as allowing students to turn in work without a strict form in mind or allowing students to play with multi mediums. As teachers seek ways to break down the emotionally clean slates of academia, hopefully, a student teacher relationship based on mutual respect and compassion will form which enables the learning experience and creates space for queer identities in the classroom.

*Keywords: Queer pedagogy, queer theory, embodiment, composition, ELT.*

Boyd, Ashley S., and Taylor Bereiter. “‘I Don’t Really Know What a Fair Portrayal Is and What a Stereotype Is’: Pluralizing Transgender Narratives with Young Adult Literature.” *The English Journal*, vol. 107, no. 1, National Council of Teachers of English, 2017, pp. 13–18, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26359512>.

**Summary**

Boyd and Bereiter write that trans folk are often not acknowledged in the classroom but instead blanketed under an umbrella term of LGBTQ+ or queer. Being transgender is a unique and diverse experience from other queer identities and needs to be addressed as such. For example, transitioning is not the same as coming out, and often, trans folk are stereotyped in negative ways, where trans men are portrayed as deceptive, or trans folk in general are portrayed as hopeless. There is also an under representation of masculine trans folk within literature. Boyd and Bereiter feel challenged on how to introduce a variety of trans experiences with a limited amount of classroom time and wants to create an activity which will remedy this. The activity introduced focuses on young adult literature; however, the lessons application in a composition classroom with be further discussed below. For the lesson plan, Boyd chose three books: *I am Jay,* by Oris Beam, *being emily* by Rachel Gold and *Almost Perfect,* by Brian Katcher. Students were able to pick which book they wanted to read based on a synopsis. After reading the book, students shared with the classroom answers to these questions: “How did power structures effect transgender characters in your book? How did point of view effect your book? How is masculinity presented in your book? How would switching gender effect the character’s interactions in your book (16)?” Students recorded their answers on posters and shared their answers with the class, which allowed multiple trans perspectives to be addressed and discusses while preserving classroom time.

**Pedagogical Approaches**

Boyd and Bereiter describe an activity especially relevant to applying queer theory in the ENGL 1010 or 2010 classroom. Often, students are asked to analyze different texts for rhetorical strategies to consider perspectives different than their own and sift through student’s own biases. As a teaching activity on acknowledging different perspectives, teachers could select a few news stories, blog posts or critical essays written by trans folk. Groups of students can be asked to read the varying stories as homework and to close read for rhetorical strategies used within these pieces to convey author’s voice and at the same time, answer some of the questions regarding gender that Boyd and Bereiter list above. Students should be encouraged to think about the way power dynamics are at play within gender and how these power dynamics shape perspectives of trans folk. I especially like this activity because it feels queer to me both in representation of trans folk and in the nature of the activity. Making posters instead of adhering to typical discussion style classroom responses feels like moving away from a binary structured lesson. With posters, students are given freedom to think more creatively and outside the box with their responses to the readings.

*Keywords: Transgender, stereotypes, marginalized, composition, queer pedagogy.*

Kedley, Kate E. “Queering the Teacher as a Text in the English Language Arts Classroom: Beyond Books, Identity Work and Teacher Preparation.” *Sex Education*, vol. 15, no. 4, July 2015, pp. 364–377. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.1080/14681811.2015.1027762.

**Summary**

Kedley argues teachers can be read as texts based on their language and self-expression. To “queer” readings of themselves as texts, ESA teachers should refrain from using language which reaffirms heteronormative binaries within the classroom setting and seek ways to promote their own ambiguous gender and sexual expression. Kedley suggests teachers should “(1) view themselves and their language as a teacher-text in the classroom, and carefully examine how they are ‘read’ and what messages they send overtly and subversively; (2) queer themselves as a teacher text through ambiguity; and (3) engage in risk taking” (8). Kedley does not suggest heterosexual cisgender teachers lean into elements of their identity that do not exist, but instead, refrain from publicly displaying parts of their identity which reaffirm heteronormative power structures and assumptions. Kedley also encourages teachers to analyze the way their language may be unnecessarily gendering elements of the classroom or reinforcing heteronormative ideals. Kedley believes that inclusion of queer texts, teacher preparation and involvement in LGBTQ related issues, and aligning oneself as an “ally” of the LGBTQ community is not enough to support queer students in the classroom and actively break down harmful heteronormative assumptions. Kedley also encourages ESA teachers to take risks in their classroom by challenging the way sex and gender are reinforced as normative, public centers of every person’s life.

**Pedagogical Application**

English 1010 and 2010 instructors should consider how they are presenting themselves in the classroom and how heteronormative cis gendered values may be reinforced in the language they use throughout the classroom. The author points out that if you are in a heterosexual monogamous marriage, referring to your significant other as “partner” as opposed to husband or wife creates a space of ambiguity in which no heterosexual norms are reinforced. Being aware of the words you use and what norms are reinforced by your behavior can either teach or unteach destructive thinking often reinforced in the classroom. Inside an English 1010 and 2010 classroom, in addition to changing the way you may be reinforced heteronormative cisgender values, teachers could also have students analyze themselves as “texts” and how others might read them. This activity could practice analyzing the scope of perspectives and limits on perspectives. Teachers may consider using Chimamanda Adichie’s Ted Talk, “The Danger of a Single Story*,”* to assist in classroom discussion about the way people are boxed into single stories (https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda\_ngozi\_adichie\_the\_danger\_of\_a\_single\_story?language=en). By analyzing themselves and the limits others may have in reading themselves, students may be able to develop empathy and a greater understanding of how our perspectives on others are also inherently limited. Through this practice, students can become more empathetic readers and writers who might be less quick to dismiss texts that do not automatically agree with their current perspectives.

*Keywords: Queer theory, texts, classroom, teacher, LGBTQ, ESA*